

**CASHING IN** Dairy farmer Kokilaben Patel using the micro ATM with the help of bank mitra Kalpesh Patel



**3.6**  
MILLION  
WOMEN INVOLVED  
IN GUJARAT'S DAIRY  
SECTOR, DOING  
BUSINESS WORTH  
₹60,000 CR. YEARLY

**1,732**  
MICRO ATMs  
DEPLOYED IN  
PANCHMAHAL,  
BANASKANTHA  
DISTRICTS,  
TAKING BANKING  
TO THE DOORSTEP



**“We have trained women farmers to carry out banking activities and they now contribute to the overall finances of the household. This is nothing short of a silent revolution”**

**B.K. Singhal, CGM, Nabard**

activities and they now contribute to the overall finances of the household. This is nothing short of a silent revolution,” says B.K. Singhal, chief general manager, Nabard (National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development).

The ‘Cooperation among Cooperatives’ project has been operating as a pilot in Banaskantha and Panchmahal, covering five districts. Over the past year, bank accounts and deposits of dairy farmers who supply milk to the local dairies—Panchmahal District Cooperative Milk Producers Union Ltd (Panchamrut) and Banas Dairy, both associated with the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF)—have been moved to two DCCBs, the Panchmahal District Co-operative Bank and the Banaskantha Central District Cooperative Bank.

The project is anchored by Nabard, which provided financial support of Rs 3.7 crore for the deployment of 1,732 micro ATMs, and helped hold 824 digital literacy camps, particularly for women members of milk societies and Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) in these districts. During the pilot project, 1,031 additional milk societies and 187,000 new milk producers were onboarded. Between January and October 2024, the DCCBs have opened 1.14 million new accounts while total deposits went up by Rs 4,491 crore. There have been 3.06 million more digital transactions through micro ATMs by the primary dairy co-op societies (PDCS) and the PACS; 87,000 new RuPay Kisan

credit cards were also issued through the empowered PACS. In the past year, 5,754 PACS have been sanctioned for computerisation.

The palpable shift in the centre of financial activity also has political ramifications. The leadership at these cooperative societies is a multi-layered elected body, a model envisioned by the ‘father of the milk revolution’, the late Verghese Kurien, to keep out political representatives. Initially, the Congress started extending support and wooing the elected leaders of cooperative societies to endorse them politically. The politics of cooperatives completely shifted to the BJP after 2001; it now controls 95 per cent of the 81,307 cooperative societies in Gujarat. Panchamrut Dairy chairman Jetha Bharwad is the BJP legislator from Sehra in the district; the chairman of Banas Dairy, Shankar Chaudhary, is the Tharad MLA and speaker in the Gujarat assembly.

**T**here is some criticism that this will allow the central ministry and the party in power access to almost every rural household’s purse. The state could wield immense financial control in the villages and enhance the political heft of cooperative leaders. Amit Dholakia, head of the department of political science at MS University, Baroda, says there will be some impact in favour of the ruling party, but adds that it’s still a good initiative as the synergy strengthens the cooperative bodies. His solution: a neutral regulatory body to monitor the activities of societies. “A robust and independent regulatory body will bring more discipline and accountability to these societies and also help them connect with each other better,” he says. The underlying intricacies of the schemes, though, are not a concern for people like Divuben Charan, a dairy farmer from the Vavadi Khurd village in Panchmahal. The 30-year-old says the family is saving more, she has more to spend on their two children’s education and, of late, even on herself. Divuben says she has invested in some jewellery, smiling shyly. ■

GUJARAT COOPERATIVES

# THE ATM THAT EMPOWERS

By Jumana Shah

**K**okilaben Patel has seen Kalpesh Patel operate the micro ATM many times but she’s still fascinated by the steps that leads to him handing her Rs 3,000. A resident of Mahuliya village, Godhra taluka in Panchmahal district in Gujarat, the dairy farmer never went to school, but in the past year has emerged as a family matriarch of sorts after she learnt basic banking through the micro ATM she accesses at home. The 50-year-old manages the household finances now, and her prudence helped in the purchase of the family’s tractor. Kokila is among the thousands of women members of the Multipurpose Primary Agricultural Credit Cooperative Societies (MPACS) at the village level who have been given debit/credit cards

to operate micro ATMs of the district cooperative central banks (DCCBs) of the Panchmahal and Banaskantha districts. Micro ATMs are similar to point-of-sale mobile devices that connect to the bank server via a GPRS. They provide basic services like cash deposit, withdrawal, fund transfer and balance inquiry. A local trained ‘bank mitra’ provides all aid. This September, Union minister for home and cooperation Amit Shah launched White Revolution 2.0 which aims to transform the dairy cooperative sector and empower women through the ambitious ‘Cooperation among Cooperatives’ initiative. “In Gujarat, 3.6 million women are involved in the dairy sector and they do business worth Rs 60,000 crore annually. White Revolution 2.0 will em-

power them. When the bank cheques arrive in their names, they will be very happy,” he said at an event here.

Micro ATMs in villages ensure that farmers do not have to travel 5-15 km for banking activities, which means they save time and travel costs, withdraw lesser amounts on a need-to basis, and end up saving more. “Most importantly, due to the travel involved, banking was almost exclusively done by the menfolk. Micro ATMs are available 24x7 at their doorstep and societies are not bound by conventional bank working hours. We have trained women farmers to carry out banking

**THE PIN NUMBER**

- ‘Cooperation among Cooperatives’ aims to bring all bank accounts of co-op societies to co-op banks
- It’ll help co-op members, engage women, boost financial prudence via local access to micro ATMs
- But concerns over state playing financial overlord in villages, co-op leaders influencing voters