

WOMEN'S ROLE IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

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Introduction:

India is a developing country having the second largest arable land in the world. About 60 percent population of India is depending on agriculture. Because of this only India can survive even during recession period. In India, Agriculture sector plays a vital role in Nation's economy. Employs more than 50% of our population and contributes significantly to India's GDP. Agriculture is the principal source of livelihood for about 48% of the population of the country. India is one of the world's largest producers as well as consumers of food products this sector plays an important role in contributing to the development of the rural economy. Keeping the welfare of the agriculture sector and farmers in mind, the government has been increasing the budget every year. The government has allocated Rs. 1,64,415 crore during the period of 2014 - 15 to 2017 -18 which is 57.58 % more as compared to last government .

Agriculture is the back bone of Indian economy. It defines the traditions of the family, relationships in society and gender roles in the country. In 21 century, there is a gradual realization of the significant role of women in agricultural development... Women play a vital role in building this economy. Over the years, there is a gradual realization of the key role of women in agricultural development and their vital contribution in the field of agriculture, food security, horticulture, processing, nutrition, sericulture, fisheries, and other allied sectors.

Rural women form the most important productive work force in economy of majority of the developing nations including India .Rural women often manage complex household and pursue multiple livelihood strategies .Women farmers in India, play a central role in all agricultural activities from planting- to – harvesting – to – post- harvest operations. As per Census 2011, nearly 98 million Indian women have agricultural jobs, but around 63 % of them (61.6 million) are dependent on the farm of others as agricultural laborer. Women's participation rate in the agricultural sectors is about 44 %. It is 47% in cotton cultivation, 47% in tea plantations 45% in

growing oil seeds and 39% in vegetable production. These crops require intensive work of unskilled nature. Women also participate in ancillary agricultural activities. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization, Indian women's contribution has a share of 22% in fisheries sector. Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including in the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro/ social forestry, fisheries etc. The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture, no doubt, varies greatly from region to region. Even within a region, their involvement varies widely among different ecological sub-zones, farming systems, castes, classes and stages in the family cycle. But regardless of these variations, there is hardly any activity in agricultural production, except ploughing in which women are not actively involved. Studies on women in agriculture conducted in India and other developing and under developed countries all point to the conclusion that women contribute far more to agricultural production than has generally been acknowledged. Recognition of their crucial role in agriculture should not obscure the fact that farm women continue to be concerned with their primary functions as wives, mothers and homemakers. Despite their importance to agricultural production, women face severe handicaps. They are in fact, the largest group of landless laborer's with little real security in case of break-up of the family owing to death or divorce; inheritance laws and customs discriminate against them land reform and settlement programs usually give sole title and hence the security needed for obtaining production credits to the husband. Agricultural development programs are usually planned by men and aimed at men. Mechanization, for example alleviates the burden of tasks that are traditionally men's responsibility, leaving women's burdens unrelieved or even increased. It may not be out of place to mention here that considering their dual responsibilities within and outside the home, it would be in the fitness of things that more and more in the village training is organized for rural farm women to suit their convenience with due realization that institutional training is important in its own place. In order that farm women get a fair deal at the hands of change agents, one of the remedial measures that needs to be undertaken is to induct a sizeable number of well trained women personnel in training and extension programs of agricultural development agencies at all levels and more so at the grass-root level. Agriculture is multidimensional such as unpaid subsistence laborer's farmers co-farmers, managers and entrepreneurs. They are also involved in allied sectors like food security, horticulture livestock

production sericulture and collection of non-timber forest produce. As domestic activities, it includes cooking, water collection fuel wood gathering, household upkeep and child rearing.

Rural Women form the most important productive work force in the economy of majority of the developing nations including India. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but they are essential to the wellbeing of rural households. Statistical data are available regarding their participation in the agricultural sector and allied activities but their impact on the home environment has been completely ignored.

Variations in women's participation in agricultural work depend on supply and demand factors linked to economic growth and agricultural modernization.

Farm women felt the impact on their children’s education. As they could provide them with better educational facilities as well as chances to get an education outside the village. Non-farm women only felt this impact to a medium extent; they could provide better educational facilities by buying books and stationery but there were far fewer chances to get their children educated outside the village. The impact of liberalization and globalization on women is important not only because they represent almost half of the total population, but also because they face constraints, which make them less beneficial from the liberalization. Once different impacts are ascertained well designed policy responses may aid women in taking advantage of greater openness to agriculture.

Swami Nathan, the famous agricultural scientist describes that it was woman who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. While men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fiber and fuel. Women have played and continue to play a key role in the conservation of basic life support systems such as land, water, flora and fauna. They have protected the health of the soil through organic recycling and promoted crop security through the maintenance of varietal diversity and genetic

resistance. Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. The rate of women in poultry farming at household level is the central in poultry industry. Even though rural women are not using modern management techniques, such as vaccination and improved feed, but their poultry enterprise is impressive. Due to poverty and lack of required level of proteins most of women have got a very poor health.



Multi - Dimensional Role of Women:

Agricultural Activities:Sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.

Domestic Activities:Cooking, child rearing, water collection, fuel wood gathering, household maintenance etc.

Allied Activities:Cattle management, fodder collection, milking etc.

Despite women's extensive and varied participation in agriculture, they continue to have less access than do men to modern agricultural inputs. As a result, their farm work is labor intensive and yields meager economic returns. The bulk of the development projects for rural women over

the 1976-85 period provided training in traditional female skills (e.g. sewing, cooking, and crafts), credit programs for microenterprises, and income-generation schemes to bring rural women into the market economy.

Agricultural extension efforts should help women improve food production while allowing them to shift more of their labor to export production. Similarly, changes in legal, financial, and educational systems must be undertaken in order to enhance women's social and economic contributions to rural development in the long term.

There is a need to examine carefully the implications of land tenure laws and regulations for women. And educational policies and funding must be changed to reflect the very high social and economic returns to women's primary education and literacy.

Challenges for Women in Agriculture Sector:

1. Gender Equality

The absence of gender equality between male and female farmers hinders not only the personal development of the women involved but the overall advancement and sustainability of the national economy.

2. Access to land and resources

Access to land has been at the center of most of the problems facing women in agriculture and although this asset is a basic requirement for farming, it is very difficult for women agriculturalists, particularly in rural areas to own or have access to vast lands really suitable for farming. Due to socio-cultural norms, land titles and tenures are usually vested in men and this bias against women makes it less likely for women in agriculture to farm vast lands, hold titles or secure tenure.

3. Access to funding

Women tend to face greater challenges when it comes to securing credit. They are generally less experienced with the ins and outs of borrowing from an institution, and without assistance and support they find it difficult to access much needed funding. Women receive seven percent of the

agricultural extension services and less than ten percent of the credit offered to small-scale farmers.

4. Literacy

Illiteracy is an additional limitation that hampers women farmers' ability to understand the technicalities and intricacies involved in modern-day farming, thus, their inability to compete with their male counterparts who have had more education than them. Worldwide, gender differences in education are significant and widespread as women have less access to education and training in agriculture due to the world's history of bias against girls getting educated.

The issue of illiteracy among women, which is a detriment to the development of the business of the individual woman farmer, ultimately affects the welfare of the family and economic growth at the national level.

5. Technological advancements

The use of agricultural technologies such as mechanical equipment and tools is particularly low amongst women farmers and this can be pointed to gender inequalities in access to new technology and its adoption, as well as the unavailability of female-friendly tools due to the frequent exclusion of women in major agricultural researches.

6 .Market Access

As a result of the gender-based division of labor in our socio-cultural setting, where women have to work and at the same time be responsible for childcare (where there are children) and the household, women farmers hardly make the time to work full-time on their farms or go into large-scale farming. Because of the greater time constraints that women face as compared to men, mobility and market access becomes a difficulty for women farmers as well. Low market access keeps rendering female farmers poorer than male farmers in that, their household responsibilities combined with their farming activities does not permit them to move easily between their farms, homes and the market place.

(1) Societal Perception

The weak representation of women farmers especially those in the rural areas among agricultural decision-making bodies and the perception that women agriculturalists are not ‘real’ farmers, is another huge obstacle that prevents the in-depth assessment and tackling of the challenges that women in agriculture have to deal with within the course of their work. In addition, societal perception of what a woman farmer can and cannot do makes it quite impossible for the nation and the women themselves to reap the full benefits of the hard work that they engage themselves in.

8. Lack of infrastructure

Access to transport and logistics would improve the mobility of women farmers and they could sell more of their farm produce in time. Empowering and investing in women, specifically in rural areas, will significantly increase productivity while reducing hunger and malnutrition.

To empower women farmers, the government has formulated “The National Policy on Farmers”. This policy recognizes women’s role in agriculture and gives importance to gender issues in agriculture. Other programmes and policies introduced to empower farm women are:

- **National Horticulture Mission**
- **Rural Go – down Scheme**
- **National Mission on Agriculture Extension and Technology**
- **Agric – clinics and Agric – Business Centers**
- **Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture**
- **National Mission on Oil seeds and Oil palm**
- **Integrated Scheme for Agricultural Marketing**
- **National Food Security Mission**
- **Agricultural Insurance**
- **Sub Mission on Agriculture Mechanization**
- **Central Institute for Women in Agriculture**
- **MahilaKisanSashaktikaranPariyojna**

New initiatives announced by Central Government:

- 30 percent of the allocated fund would be invested on women farmers to empower them.
- October 15th to be observed as “Female Farmers Day “to recognize their contribution.
- Setting up more women cooperatives.
- Training women cooperatives to manage funds and to run their cooperative in a professional way.
- Mandatory deployment of one female scientist in each of 668 KrishiVigyanKendras.

There have been many achievements in recent times in enhancing the status of women farmers. Despite these programmes and policies, women farmers still face hardships

The government schemes in the last few decades have done a lot in improving the status of women. It is helping women to get ownership and control over natural resources, in credit schemes and in income generating activities. The schemes are required to ensure the rightful position of women in the field of agriculture. More facilities should be provided to women working in various sectors of agriculture. Proper implementation of laws like Recognition of Forest Rights Acts, 2007, the Food Safety Acts and the Bio – diversity Act, will increase awareness and improve the general status of women farmers. Programmes training women in various sub sectors of agriculture should be introduced for women farmers. Women collectives like self – help groups need encouragement for sustainable agriculture practices.

Conclusion:

For sustainable agricultural development gender equity is a must. The objective of SDG goals is to double the productivity and income of small-scale farmers, in particular women by providing equal access to land, inputs knowledge, financial support, markets and opportunities. The aim of SDG goals is to undertake reforms so that women gain equal rights to economic resources. They also deserve equal access to ownership and control over land, financial service and natural resources. Women are doing great jobs in all the fields and if they get all facilities in agricultural field, they will definitely help in the growth of agriculture and contribute to the nation's development but before that government should try to reduce or completely eliminate all the limitations farm women are facing, there needs to be a real revolution within our socio-cultural settings and an enforcement of gender policies aimed at empowering women in agriculture.

Women agriculturalists need to be included in researches, policy-making and frequently trained to be at par with their male counterparts. By empowering women in the agric sector, the country gets to earn more than it is currently now.

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