

## Women as Future Farmers

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### ABSTRACT

*Women cultivators and agriculture laborers perform about 70% of all the agriculture activities, yet their valuable contribution is ignored and they are not acknowledged as farmers. Women play a crucial role in all farm-related activities from land preparation to marketing. They contribute a higher proportion of labor in agricultural sector than men. However, they are not active in decision making. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report reveals in most parts of the world, including India, that women are way behind men in ownership of farm land. The FAO figures show that women own perhaps one-quarter of the world's land. In Italy, women own 31.9 percent of the land; in Thailand, 33 percent; in the United Kingdom, only an estimated 19 percent and in India only 9.21%. In India traditionally women have been mentioned as the provider or food. But socially, women's role has mostly perceived as the one who serves, rather than one who grows the food, as the business of growing food has been recognized as a male domain for centuries. But the shift in cultural attitudes towards women is yet to happen. Investing in women farmers can be the key to the future of food security. A study by the International Food Policy Research Institute found that across 63 countries, women's education led to more productive farming and resulted in a 43 percent decline in malnutrition. This shows a direct linkage between women's education and food security. As a result of our gendered agrarian system globally women farmers received only 2 to 10 percent of extension services worldwide. If women had better access to farm land, fertilizer and agricultural training, technology, financial services, education and markets women could increase agricultural production and reduce the number of hungry people worldwide. This study discusses the empowerment of women through agriculture. It stresses on various techniques of motivating women to take farming as profession. It also comes up with future strategies to make women a more active part of important farm decisions both at the household and legislature level.*

**Keywords :** Participation of women, Gender, Constraints

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### **OBJECTIVES**

- (i) Role and participation of women in agriculture
- (ii) Gender based differences faced by women in agriculture
- (iii) Women's constraints in agriculture
- (iv) Empowering women for agricultural development

### **Role and participation of women in agriculture**

The present status of women in Indian agriculture is due to the lack of attention paid to women as farmers, producers and farm workers, both wage and non-wage. It's not too late to integrate the lessons we've learned and avoid the pitfalls of the past. To move forward, however, the world community must make a significant shift in its thinking about women, agriculture and the global marketplace to see women as key economic agents of change in rural communities who in their own right contribute to local, national and global food production and economic growth.

Agriculture is their primary source of employment for most of the women living in rural areas of our country. Rural women produce half of the world's food and, in developing countries, between 60 percent and 80 percent of food crops. They produce both food and cash crops and have multiple and diverse roles. They work on their own plots

and those of others; they work as unpaid or paid workers, employers and employees, and as wage-laborers. Women also are more likely than men to spend their income on the well-being of their families, including more nutritious foods, school fees for children and health care. As major buyers of family food and meal-makers, women ensure adequate food security. As primary providers of nutrition to the young children, women are the major decision-makers in ensuring nutrition to the next generation.

The mode of female participation in agricultural production varies with the land-owning status of farm households. Very little land is owned by women but they participate in almost all the agriculture related activities. Their roles range from managers to landless labourers. Studies earlier conducted shows that in overall farm production, women's average contribution is estimated more than half of the total labour with percentages much higher in certain regions. In the Indian Himalayas a pair of bullocks works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year on a one-hectare farm, a figure which illustrates women's significant contribution to agricultural production (Singh in Shiva, 1988).

Women provide half of the labour force in rice cultivation in India. In the plantation sector women are the crucial labourers. Depending on the region and crops, women's contributions vary but they provide pivotal labour from planting to harvesting and post-harvest operations.

### **Crop production**

In certain areas in India women play a key role as seed selectors and in seedling production. Their knowledge on seeds and seed storage contribute to the viability of the agricultural diversity and production. As weeders, women contribute to crop management. Women prepare and apply green and farmyard manure. As integrated pest management practices are introduced, it could be expected that women's work will increase due to more labour-intensive activities.

### **Livestock**

In India, livestock plays a multi-faceted role in providing draught power for the farm, manure for crops, and energy for cooking and food for household consumption as well as the market. In animal husbandry women have a multiple role; their activities vary widely ranging from care of animals, grazing, fodder collection, cleaning of animal sheds to processing milk and livestock products. In livestock management, indoor jobs like milking, feeding, cleaning, etc. are done by women in 90% of families.

Women accounted for 93% of total employment in dairy production (World Bank, 1991). Women perform the various tasks like collecting fodder, collecting and processing dung and composting. Women also prepare cooking fuel by mixing dung with twigs and crop residues. Though women play a significant role in livestock management and production, women's control over livestock and its products is negligible. The vast majority of the dairy cooperative membership is assumed by men, leaving only 14% to women (MOA, 1991).

### **Rural production**

Women in rural India generate income in various ways. Women are highly involved in processing, particularly in small-scale enterprises. This includes basket, broom, rope making, tasar silk cocoon rearing, lac cultivation, oil extraction, bamboo works, etc.

### **Gender based differences faced by women in agriculture**

- 1 Land: Land title and tenure tend to be vested in men, either by legal condition or by socio-cultural norms. Land reform and resettlement have tended to reinforce this bias against tenure for women. Land shortage is common among women. Women farmers have smaller and more dispersed plots than men and are less likely to hold title, secure tenure, or the same rights to use, improve, or dispose of land.
- 2 Extension: Women farmers have less contact with extension services than men, especially where male-female contact is culturally restricted. Extension is often provided by men agents to men farmers and is transferred inefficiently or not at all from husband to wife.
- 3 Technology: Women generally use lower levels of technology because of difficulties in access, cultural restrictions on use, or regard for women's crops and livestock as low research priorities.
- 4 Finance: Women have less access to formal financial services because of high transaction costs, limited education and mobility, social and cultural barriers, the nature of their businesses, and collateral requirements, such as land title, they can't meet.
- 5 Time: Women face far greater time constraints than men. They may spend less time on farm work but work longer total hours on productive and household work and paid and unpaid work, due to gender-based division of labor in child care and household responsibilities.

- 6 Mobility: Women are less mobile than men, both because of their child care and household responsibilities and because of sociocultural norms that limit their mobility.
- 7 Education and training: Women are less educated in many parts of our country. Illiteracy hampers their access to and ability to understand technical information. Worldwide, women have less access to education and training in agriculture

### **Women's constraints in agriculture**

Women face significant barriers in agriculture, especially inequalities in access to and control over crucial resources and inputs such as land, labor, fertilizer and finance. Women also face barriers to membership in rural organizations and cooperatives, agricultural inputs and technology such as improved seedlings, training and extension, and marketing services.

Some other constraints are as following

- 1 Women account for approximately three out of four agricultural laborers and nine out of 10 food-producing laborers, yet they own only a fraction of the land.
- 2 Unavailability of fertilizer, tools and other inputs.
- 3 Women producers are not taken as seriously as men producers.
- 4 Isolation from other women and men farmers.
- 5 Need for child care.
- 6 Lack of family support for role in managing farm.
- 7 Lack of education and computer knowledge.
- 8 Lack of Web/email access.
- 9 Insufficient educational and Technical Training Need.
- 10 Lack of female extension workers.

### **Empowering women for agricultural development**

Efforts to enable women to contribute more effectively to agricultural development, we must recognize women as farmers and agents of economic change. Following recommendations are required to reach such a state.

- 1 Implement gender-responsive approaches to improve productivity in subsistence farming: As government commit additional resources to agriculture in response to the current food crisis, they should ensure that increased investments are made in women farmers and that interventions are appropriately designed to be

gender-responsive.

- 2 Improve knowledge about women in commercial agriculture: women are not currently fully involved at particular points in commercial agriculture, help and support is required to strengthen their roles, make them more competitive and enable them to obtain better returns.
- 3 Engender policies and practices of agribusiness: Agribusinesses need to be made aware of the gender dimensions of agriculture and of the need for gender-responsible engagement with women, both as self-employed farmers and wage-workers. Specific recommendations include: Contract directly with women farmers i.e. Agribusinesses and other companies should contract directly with women farmers so that women can directly accrue payment for their own labor instead of having to negotiate through their spouses. At a minimum, women and men should have joint contracts. In this case, women's share of earnings should be specified in the contract so their claim is clear and can be legally enforced.
- 4 Provide women direct access to resources and services: It is not enough to contract directly with women. They must be offered access to the whole package of services, technologies and training, market linkages provided by companies or development assistance programs. These resources and services must be gender-relevant and responsive, informed by the best and most up-to-date knowledge and information about agricultural development.
- 5 Strengthen women's roles in mixed-gender farmer groups: Women must have equal access to membership and its full rights and obligations, and with full voice and influence. This will require deliberate actions to change or support group norms and rules to permit women to become members in their own right and to participate fully in group activities and assume leadership roles.
- 6 Improve wages, benefits and occupational mobility for women: As shown above, women's low earnings are linked to employment in low-skilled tasks. Breaking out of gender-segregated low-skill and low-paying positions

will require opportunities to be trained in higher-skilled tasks. On-the-job training may be a cost-effective solution but it will require employers to be aware of gender-related needs and to consciously adopt policies that address them.

## **CONCLUSION**

If women had better access to farm land, fertilizer and agricultural training, technology, financial services, education and markets women could increase agricultural production and reduce the number of hungry people worldwide.

Women farmers' access to extension services must lead to concrete improvements for rural women themselves, as well as enhance the productivity of the agricultural sector and national food security through increasing marketed output.

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