

Women leadership in agriculture: Issues and Reforms

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Introduction

Agriculture sector as an entire has developed and emerged immensely with the concoction of science and technology. But this latest emergence is incapable of plummeting the ignorance of women labour as an integral part of this industry. As in developing countries like India, agriculture continues to absorb and employ female work might but fails to give them recognition of employed labour. The female labour force in budding nations still faces the oppressive status of being majorly liable for family and household maintenance. In addition to that their contribution of being a agriculture labour is concealed under the status of family labour who work in farm in addition to her regular household chores. These problems of the rural women are further accentuated by the suffering of illiteracy, unemployment under development and poverty. Despite of the major productive women labour force in agriculture their needs and problems are somewhat ignored by the rural development initiatives. The multitasking potentiality of female labour bought significant propositions for agricultural productivity, rural production, economic vitality, household food security, family health, family economic security and welfare.

History

Swaminathan, the eminent agricultural scientist describes that it was woman who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming .History shows that women have been at the centre of grass roots activities influencing shaping and growing farm organizations .They made enormous contributions to the survival of family farm agriculture and growth and developmental of rural institutions and communities scholarship has largely neglected women roles in agricultural history. Woman's political participation in



agriculture industry has roots in woman trading goods particularly in local market .By the 1910's women financially contributed to their families by bartering goods produce and selling cash crops including poultry, dairy and garden products in local regional as well as national market. Some of the earliest participation of women is farm organizations were during the "Populist Movement " in late nineteenth century. They basically do was to offer official position to women allowing them to participate and mobilize to support farmer's concern about the financial crisis in agriculture. Two organisations in particular "American Agri Women [AWW] and Women Involved in Farm Economics [WIFE] are involved to support women in agriculture.

Issues -Agriculture sector is no exception when it comes to gender discrimination. Women look after every aspect of farming but are not considered farmers. They sweat and perform all the agricultural operations *viz.*, planting, sowing, weeding, harvesting, storing, etc. but decision making rests with the males only. Given the importance of women in agriculture, provision of education must be a priority. Adoption of sustainable agricultural practices requires investment decision or planning of farming business. An educated women farmer is capable of taking critical decisions regarding innovations in agriculture. There are several issues associated with the lack of women recognition and appreciation after equal participation in the agricultural field and some are mentioned here.

Gender Gap

Women's contribution in agriculture is not given due recognition and the role of women is measured just of a "help" and therefore they are not allowed to participate in any decision making. There are differences in the resources available to men and women. Female farmers are equally efficient as their male counterparts but owing to their less access to resources, they produce less. Promoting gender equality in agriculture can improve agricultural productivity and reduce extreme hunger and poverty.

Social Constraints

Taboos dictate more and hence in addition to agricultural activities women workers are responsible for as homemaker for cooking, carrying water, farming and fetching firewood which leads to limit their exposure to economic opportunities. Women have to work longer



hours on several unpaid and low paying jobs as also spend considerable time on and travel longer distances for foraging free goods like food, fuel, fodder and drinking water.

Land Ownership Issues

Women's possibilities in agriculture are hindered by lot of rules and regulations which restrict their opportunities for more productive employment and income. Still women have no land rights and therefore unlike male workers, women work on small land holdings, have less access to resources, and are less educated so less aware with regards to their rights. Despite growing dependence on agriculture, rural women are unable to access the benefits incurred from the land. The exclusion of women from the benefits of land ownership and the associate resources leads to further loss to society.

Financial Dependence

For the same amount of work done, females are generally less paid and exploited on multiple grounds. Differences in male and female employment and wage patterns may have number of causes like; women in many countries have less education and work experience than men. According to National Commission for Women it is suggested that women have no ownership rights over either crop or livestock, and income from all activities (except income from small poultry) usually belongs to men.

Current Scenario

Agriculture is the vertical backbone of the country and women are regarded as the backbone of the rural vista. According to last census near about 75 percent of the Indian female populations are from rural background, who belonged to the small and marginal farmers and landless agricultural labourers. The research efforts at the ICAR institutes have been tried to relieve her of the drudgery by providing time and labour saving tools. Vocational trainings are also being conducted, to impart skills to undertake different avocations. In extension activities the women is now the centre point and activities are being planned keeping her in view. Her enlightenment will change the face of rural India. Several programmes started at the National Centre for Women in Agriculture and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK), are the right steps in this direction. There are a list of female social farmers who are bringing their step ahead in the field, taking up the responsibilities to reframe the whole society which leads

women empowerment in agricultural panorama. There is one such example from Chhattisgarh, recently it was noticed that Smt. Phoolbasan Bai Yadav. She is an Indian social worker and founder of non-governmental organisation "Maa Bamleshwari Janhit Karya Samiti" well known for her efforts for bringing the socially backward women of Chhattisgarh state in the agricultural and allied sectors and making them self dependent and empowered. She was honoured by Government of India in 2012 with fourth highest civilian award "Padma Shri ".She also acts as mentor to Vision India Foundation. The National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture (NRCWA) has been functioning at Bhubaneswar, Orissa for developing methodologies, for identification of gender implications in farming systems approach and to develop women specific technologies under different production systems. All India Coordinated Research Projects (AICRP) on home science for women's empowerment an important component of empowerment in third world countries comprises rural women who play multiple crucial roles in all spheres of development activities.

Reforms

Rural women are the major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Her work ranges from crop production, livestock production to cottage industry. From household and family maintenance activities, to transporting water, fuel and fodder. Despite such an enormous involvement, her role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic, and political indicators. Women's wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and women's engagement in multiple home-based economic activities leads to under remuneration for their work

Priority must be given to women in accessing credit on soft terms from banks and other financial institutions for setting up their business, for buying properties, and for house building. Measures should be taken to enhance women's literacy rates. A separate education policy for women may serve the purpose. Women must be involved in decision-making bodies that have the potential to introduce structural changes. This action will bring some changes in the gender relations in the society. Women must be aware regarding their existing rights, access to judicial relief and redress, removing discrimination through legal reforms, and providing legal aid, assistance and counselling. Women are treated as sub-servant or



personal property. In this regard government must formulate policies to enhance their skills and their work should be counted in economic indicators.

