

## WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

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The international development community has recognized that the agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor. But the agriculture sector in many developing countries is underperforming, in part because women, who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as farmers, laborers and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources. Efforts by national government and the international community to achieve their goals for agricultural development, economic growth and food security will be strengthened and accelerated if they build on the contributions that women make and take steps to alleviate these constraints.

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economy in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the worlds, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. 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.

Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist describes that, it was a women who first domesticated crop plant and there by initiated the art and science of farming. While, men out hunting in search of food, women started gathering of seed from the native flora and began cultivated those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fiber and fuel. Women had played and continue to play a key role in the conservation of basic life support system such as land, water, flora and fauna. They have protected the health

of soil through organic recycling and promoted crop security through the maintenance of varietal diversity and genetic resistance.

The women play crucial role in agricultural development and allied field including in the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, postharvest operations, agro/socio 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 amongst different ecological sub-zones, farming systems, castes, classes and stages in the family cycle. But regardless of this variation, there is hardly any activity in agricultural production, except ploughing in which women are not actively involved.

The women are the backbone of agricultural workforce and a vital part of Indian economy. While rural women have been equal partners in agricultural development, their role and participation have been more pronounced in the lower economic strata of the rural society. Paradoxically the contribution of women have not been quantified, recorded and recognized, with the result they have been neglected from the main stream of development, may it be research, education or extension. Despite their importance to agricultural production, women face everhandicaps.

It is not an exaggeration, that women in India are the backbone of food security. Women are playing a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including crop production, livestock production, horticulture, postharvest operation, agro/social forestry, fisheries etc. There is a greater involvement of women under various agricultural operations along with house arrangement out of the total 329 million hectares geographical area of the country, net shown area is 142 million hectare. It is estimated that women are responsible for 70 per cent of actual farm work and constitute up to 60 per cent of the farming population. But it is most unfortunate that the role of women in agriculture has not highlighted. By and large they have remained invisible workers. Keeping the above background in mind an attempt was made to analyze the participation of women in farming operations.

Therefore, a great need has been felt with considerations of substantiality and equity for developing agricultural research and development programmes which will reflect the role of women as farmers, thus, enabling the women to raise their standard of

living and contributing their skills in nation building process. Hence, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has established a network of Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), which was rest upon a solid base of transfer of technology from laboratory to farmers field with respect to agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, floriculture, beekeeping, mushroom cultivation, boiler farming and allied subjects to the farmers, farm women, rural youth, school dropouts and extension functionaries to increase their knowledge, enhance their skill and change their attitude in concerned sectors.

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 productions systems. There are 16 ongoing research projects in the area of gender study on agriculture and household economy, management of coastal agro-ecosystem, extension methods for farm women, standardization of women specific field practices, occupational health hazards, reducing drudgery of women in agricultural operations, improvement of farming systems suited to farm women, eco-friendly pest management technologies for vegetables among farm women, evaluation of interactive learning modules, technological needs in empowering women in rural aquaculture and improvement in storage practices of seed and grain.

#### **Multi-Dimensional role of women:**

**Agriculture:** Sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storage etc.

**Domestic:** Cooking, childrearing, water collection, fuel food gathering, household maintenance etc.

**Allied Activities:** Cattle management, fodder collection, milking, goatrearing, poultry farming, sericulture, sheep rearing, bee keeping etc.

#### **Women in crop production**

Women's participation in crop production has increased as a result of male migration to urban areas to seek employment. Women are active in all aspects of crop production, except ploughing in which women are not actively involved. Women are involved in sowing, weeding, plant protection, maintenance, harvesting, food preparation, storage, preservation, treatment and marketing of yield.

### **Women in Dairy Sector**

Rural women, who constitute nearly 77 percent of the total female population of the country, play an important role in agriculture and animal husbandry besides the household responsibilities.

### **Women in Poultry Production**

Poultry production is an occupation that supports the livelihoods of many women, especially the tribal and rural poor in India. Poultry act as financial reserves incrisis situations, and thus reduce vulnerability. The majority of the rural poor still depend on agricultural labour, which does not offer a year round earning opportunity and livestock rearing supplements their income. Poultry is a source of low cost, high quality food for the family and small cash for women through sale of birds and eggs. Most of the procurement and sale of birds and eggs are done within the village and in local weekly markets.

### **Drudgery Reduction**

Women in agriculture community's work for longer hours compared to men and due to their heavy work load, women often find it difficult to attend training and other extension programmes. Releasing time from these heavy workloads is essential in order to get meaningful participation of women in agricultural technologies. There is a need to understand the daily and seasonal workloads of women farmers and accordingly suggest her drudgery reducing improved tools and techniques. Promotes owing tools like paddy threshers, winnowers, sprayers, weeder, harvesting tools, cleaner, grader, parboiling units, maize shellers, dal making machines etc.

Training is extending and developing individual's capabilities for better performance in their work. It involves the transfer of new knowledge, skills behavior and attitude to develop and maintain trainee's competencies to perform specific roles at their work place. In the context of rural women's training is indeed required especially in case when any formal education is absent. Training programs regarding their practical problems can enhance their efficiency and competency.

Women play an important role in the social and economic welfare of the family. Rural farm women have to play many roles in their daily life such as wife, mother, farm producer, livestock raiser etc. Women contribution to agricultural activities and allied

occupation was recognized roughly 50-60 percent. However the status of farm women is much lower than that of male counterpart largely, because of the customary male dominance in the society, inherent shyness of the farmwomen, lack of opportunities and very poor accessibility to modern technologies.

**Allied occupation can serve four major developments activities:**

1. Poverty reduction
2. Empowerment of women
3. Employment generation
4. Enterprise development itself

