

Feminisation in Agriculture: Challenges and Steps to Overcome

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‘Feminization of agriculture’ refers to increasing participation of women in agricultural activities. Agriculture, contributing around 16% of the GDP, is increasingly becoming a female activity. Agriculture sector employs 80% of all economically active women; they comprise 33% of the agricultural labour force and 48% of self-employed farmers.

As per the 10th Agriculture Census (2015-16), the percentage of female operational holdings in the country have increased from about 13% percent during 2010-11 to around 14% during 2015-16. About 18% of the farm families in India, according to NSSO Reports are headed by women. According to the Economic Survey 2017-18, a rise in migration of men from rural to urban areas has resulted in feminization of agriculture.

Challenges Faced by Women Farmers

- **Gender Disparity in Land Ownership:** Increase in the women workforce in the agricultural sector has not translated into decision-making powers over vital issues like property and marriage. The 2017-18 NSSO data reveals that more than 70% of rural women are engaged in agricultural work. Yet, only 13.9% of women own land holdings, according to the agricultural census of 2015-16.
- **Inadequate Access to Credit:** Lack of property ownership keeps landless women and female agricultural labourers on the fringes since insurance, credit, irrigation and other entitlements by government schemes are denied in the absence of land security.
- **Wage Disparity:** Women are provided with little to no wages, as their work is often being considered as an extension of household work. Such low-paying jobs and social constraints keep women confined in insecure and oppressive labour relations.
- **Impact of farmer suicides:** The suicides by male cultivators caused the majority of female family members, especially the widows, to take up the responsibility of



managing the household. Due to this reason, experts are deeming feminization of agriculture as the feminisation of agrarian distress.

- **Impact of Mechanisation:** The mechanisation of agriculture has led to the confinement of women to traditional, low-paying jobs like winnowing, harvesting, sowing seeds and rearing livestock.
- Lack of access to resources and modern inputs (most farm machinery is difficult for women to operate)
- Increased work burden (on-farm and off-farm productive activities) with lower compensation

Steps Taken by Government

❖ Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)

Implemented by Ministry of Rural Development, it is a programme exclusively for women farmers. It is a sub-component of Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission. It aims to empower women by enhancing their participation in agriculture and to create sustainable livelihood opportunities for them. Upto 60% (90% for North Eastern States) of the funding support for such projects is provided by the government.

- ❖ At least 30% of the budget allocation has been earmarked for women beneficiaries in all ongoing schemes/programmes and development activities.
- ❖ Government has increased its focus on women self-help group (SHG) to connect them to micro-credit through capacity building activities and to provide information and ensuring their representation in different decision-making bodies.
- ❖ Recognizing the critical role of women in agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has declared 15th October of every year as Women Farmer's Day.
- ❖ Provision of credit without collateral under the microfinance initiative of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development should be encouraged.
- ❖ Manufacturers should be incentivised to produce tools and machineries suited to women's needs.
- ❖ Krishi Vigyan Kendras in every district can be assigned an additional task to educate and train women farmers about innovative technology along with extension services.