

Pivotal Role of Indian Women in Agriculture to Socio Economic Development

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Introduction

India, a country known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, has always recognized the importance of agriculture in its socio-economic development. As the backbone of the Indian economy, agriculture has been a significant contributor to the nation's progress. In the modern age of industrialization, women are playing vital role in uplifting the living standards of their households. Karl Marx also pointed out this dilemma that women are less paid in farming that could not appreciate women participation in agriculture department any more. In developed countries women have major contribution in the promotion of industrialization while on the other hand, in developing countries women participation rate in agriculture sector have major contribution in raising the per capita income and foster economic growth. Due to joint family system in urban area and limited livelihood opportunities only, male members were unable to fulfil the financial needs of whole family. So, women participation in agricultural activities were inevitable although women labours got less income than male for doing the same farming activity. Women facing certain problems while performing agricultural activities such as bad attitude of owner, problem of getting wages in time, and problem of working in harsh conditions of weather. This article highlights the pivotal role of Indian women in agriculture and its impact on the country's socio-economic development and also suggests that by providing education female status can be improved and they will be able to finance their families by finding respectable and better earning opportunities.

Keywords: Agriculture; Development; Education; Income; Women

Rural Women Workforce in Agriculture Sector

In rural communities, agriculture and allied sector is the primary source of livelihood that includes 80 percent of all economically active women, out of which 33 percent constitute



agricultural labour force and 48 percent are self-employed farmers. Rural women are engaged at all levels of agricultural value chain; i.e., production- pre-harvest, post-harvest processing, packaging, marketing to increase productivity in agriculture. As per Pingali et al. (2019), the ratio of women to men working in agricultural sector has increased over the time and made greater amount of contribution to GDP per capita. They are the momentous demographic group for sustainable food system (FAO, 2011). It is projected that women-oriented reforms, ensuring equal access to resources, skill development and opportunities in agriculture would increase agricultural output in developing countries between 2.5 and 4 percent (FAO,2011). In recent announcement under Aatma Nirbhar-Bharat, earmarking funds were allocated to mainstream the women engaged in agriculture development and equal provision of rural services.

Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture

As per the Prime Minister's vision of Aatma-Nirbhar Bharat, the Government of India has prioritised agenda of 'Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture' to provide access to resources/ schemes to rural women engaged in agriculture and allied sector. Special beneficiary-oriented schemes are laid by Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare to mainstream the participation of rural women. These special schemes provide for States and other implementing agencies to incur at least 30 percent expenditure on women farmer. For skill development and capacity building amongst women farmer, various skill-training are being imparted under schemes of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare and Ministry of Rural Development. These include Support to State Extension Programmes for Extension Reforms (ATMA Scheme) under Sub-Mission on Agriculture Extension (SMAE). Skill training courses in agriculture and allied areas (of minimum 200 hours duration) are also being conducted for women farmers through National Training Institutes, State Agricultural Management and Extension Training (SAMETIs), Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) and State Agricultural Universities (SAUs), across the country (Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, 2021). With increased feminisation and pro-women initiatives, the percentage of female operational holdings in the country has increased from 12.78 percent during 2010-11 to 13.78 percent during 2015-16 (Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, 2019). Several farm women's food security groups, undertaking macro/micro level studies in critical thrust area related to women in agriculture, delivery of Gender Sensitisation Module on Gender Learning through training programmes at National/Region/State Level, compilation and



documentation of gender friendly tools/technologies, Farm Women Friendly Handbook and compilation of best practices/ success stories of the women farmers, etc are undertaken by Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers welfare (Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, 2021).

Empowering Women Farmers:

Skill and Capacity Building Several Inter-ministerial initiatives of Government of India have helped women farmers in receiving access to resources to enhance their livelihood, social and economic gains. The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare and Ministry of Rural Development through various schemes have encouraged participation of rural women farmer. The Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) scheme was launched by Ministry of Rural Development to impart skill development and capacity building programmes for rural women. This scheme was introduced as a sub component of DAY-NRLM (Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana — National Rural Livelihoods Mission) and implemented through State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) across India. Under DAY-NRLM scheme, trainings on use of latest agriculture, allied techniques, agro-ecological best practices are being imparted to women farmers through the community resource persons and extension agencies. Specific women farmer training programmes on topics like household food security by kitchen gardening and nutrition gardening; design and development of low/minimum cost diet; designing and development for high nutrient efficiency diet; Processing and cooking; Gender mainstreaming through SHGs; Storage loss minimisation techniques; Value addition; Women empowerment; Location specific drudgery reduction technologies; Rural Crafts; and Women and child care are organised through extension bodies (Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, 2021). These training programmes have opened avenues for new livelihood opportunities for rural women. Parallel research projects on introduction of new interventions in streamlining women engagement in farming sector, technology testing and refinement, gender sensitive extension approaches, and reduction etc. are led by ICAR Central Institute for Women in Agriculture, Bhubneshwar for enhancing participation of women in agriculture. Over the years, rural women participation in training sessions has been increased to many folds. Also, gender-specific interventions and its adoption are encouraged through these trainings and awareness camps. About 58,295 Krishi Sakhi were trained by 735 State Level Resource Persons under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-



NRLM) and 1.23 lakh women farmers participated in special women farming training conducted by KVK (Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, 2021a). Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) implemented by Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship provides several short duration skill training programmes viz. Short-Term Training (STT) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), etc. for rural youth and women to earn their livelihood. Government schemes viz. The Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) is a placement linked skill development program for wage employment for rural youth. Also, Farmers Producer organisation (FPO) and women self-help groups (SHG's) played significant role in dissemination of these programmes amongst rural women. The Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) developed by Ministry of Women and Child Development has empowered rural women through community participation and raising awareness on girl education, maternal care and health etc. Biotech-Krishi Innovation Science Application Network (Biotech-KISAN) Programme was initiated by The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) provide scientific solutions to farmers in north east region to link available innovative agriculture technologies to the farm with the small and marginal farmers, especially women farmers of the region (Ministry of Science and Technology, 2021).

Financial Empowerment

India has taken a significant initiative in extending banking outreach to rural areas. The financial inclusion and accessibility to banking through Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) has boosted confidence and prospects of rural women participation in economic activities. Jan Dhan campaign has ensured access to financial services, viz, banking/ savings and deposit accounts, remittance, credit, insurance, pension in an affordable manner to rural women. These financial accessibility measures have ensured transparent mode of transaction and timely access to financial services through direct benefits transfer (DBT) facility provided under various Government of India schemes. Over 7 years of the implementation of this scheme, 43.04 Crore accounts has been opened in the country. Further, this constitute 55.47 percent (23.87 crore) women account holders and 66.69 percent (28.70 crore) are Jan Dhan accounts in rural and semi-urban areas (Ministry of Finance, 2021). This financial inclusion has helped rural population to fight the crisis during COVID-19 pandemic outbreak with uninterrupted access to financial aid. Other initiatives like Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY), Stand-Up India Scheme, Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme



(PMEGP) are the additional supporting steps towards financial empowerment and entrepreneurship development of rural women. Over 9 crore women have benefitted jointly from Mudra and Stand-Up India (Ashish Kumar, 2019).

Towards Millennium Development Goals@2030

India's performance has improved from 0.665 in 2018 to 0.668 in 2020 (Global Gender Gap Index Report 2020). Initiatives for mainstreaming women participation in economic activities could work as catalyst in achieving goals as set under United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Promotion of gender equality and access to Government schemes/programmes will encourage women participation in agriculture sector. This will help in alleviating extreme poverty and hunger and support in improving the country's economy. Further, adequate investment in pro-rural women schemes and more community level participation will expedite the empowerment in a mission mode for better future prospects. Skill development and access to education, health care and digital ecosystem can play a significant role in lives of rural women. Proper training and capacity building on new agricultural technologies can help women farmer.

Conclusion

Rural women are major stakeholders in growth of agricultural sector for the New India. Acknowledging and mainstreaming of rural women via ensured access to resources, technology, education, health facilities, ownership rights and skill development will improve agriculture productivity and help in building an empowered nation. The pivotal role of Indian women in agriculture is undeniable, as they contribute to the growth and development of the sector while significantly impacting the nation's socio-economic development. Their involvement in various aspects of agriculture, from cultivation to marketing, ensures food security and financial independence for millions of households. Furthermore, their dedication to preserving traditional seeds and maintaining ecological balance is crucial for the resilience of Indian agriculture. To harness the full potential of Indian women in agriculture, it is essential to address the existing challenges they face. This includes addressing gender disparities in access to resources, education, and decision-making processes. By empowering women in agriculture and providing them with the necessary support, India can accelerate its socio-economic progress and create a more equitable society. In conclusion, the pivotal role of Indian women in agriculture is a testament to their resilience, hard work, and dedication. Their



contributions to the sector and the nation's socio-economic development cannot be overstated. As we strive for a better future, it is crucial to acknowledge and celebrate the invaluable role of Indian women in agriculture and work towards creating an enabling environment for their continued growth and success.

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