

ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

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Now-a-days, developing awareness and dedication of the global community to accomplish more sustainable and broadened agrarian growth by focusing on the consequences associated with gender through national, regional and universal initiatives and partnerships. An urgent requirement of reorienting the agricultural research agenda is emerging out to conquer the existing gaps and also to face the constraints of sustainable development and livelihood of resource-poor smallholders, more specifically women farmers. Nevertheless, in this exigency, in-depth evaluation of challenges accompanied with proper activities for solutions is demanded. Convenient technologies should be transmitted to farm women for increasing agricultural productivity and empowerment. Additionally, diverse practical steps should be engaged to support rural women so that they can also be considered as ‘productive resources’ and citizens who have an equal claim with men on the protections, opportunities and services provided by the governments as well as the international community. There are several reasons behind the underperformance of agricultural sector in many developing countries, and among all of these causes, the dearth of resources and opportunities granted for women is very much significant which is required by them for the most productive utilization of their time. Although being farmers, labourers as well as entrepreneurs, women face acute challenges almost everywhere than men in accessing productive resources, markets and services. This non-sense ‘gender gap’ is hindering their ability, capacity, productivity and reducing their valuable contributions to the agrarian section and also to the broad-based achievement of economic and social development goals. Mitigation of this gap can help to produce considerable advantages for our nation by improving agricultural productivity, reducing poverty, hunger and malnutrition, including the promotion of financial growth. Agricultural policy-makers, donors and development practitioners demand information and analysis for contemplating the diversification of the benefactions of women along with the constraints confronted by them in

order to make gender-aware decisions about this sector and also have commitments to guarantee that women are efficient to participate fully in and benefit from the process of agricultural development. Notwithstanding, the advancement of gender equality facilitates the diminution of extravagant poverty and hunger, and it would be beneficial for better agricultural development.

Work participation scenario

- According to the Census, 2011 it was reported that out of total female workers, 55% were agricultural labourers and 24% were cultivators.
- Only 12.8% of the operational holdings were owned by women.
- 25.7% of the marginal and small operational holdings are concentrated by women.
- Women farmers represent more than a quarter of the world's population.
- Women comprise, on an average, 43% of the agricultural workforce in developing countries, ranging from 20% in Latin America to 50% in Eastern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Worldwide, about 42% of women workers were engaged in agriculture in 2010, down from 53.5% in 1980. In developing countries, agriculture supported about 52.7% of women workers in 2010.
- In South Asia and India, over 60% of women workers are engaged in agriculture (FAO, 2010-11).
- As per 2011 Census data, no improvement was noticed in the female work participation rate (WPR), which stood at 25.5%, while the male WPR improved to 53.21%.
- The share of women in total agricultural workers was reported 39% in 2001, but it declined to about 37% in the year 2011.

Women in agriculture and allied sectors

The operations regarding agriculture and its allied sectors carried out by women are discussed in details as follows:

1. Agriculture

More specifically, rural women are employed in many agrarian activities in three major ways depending upon the socio-economic condition of their family as well as the regional issues. They are engaged as:

- Paid or unpaid labourers on other farms and agricultural enterprises
- Farmers on their own account, as unpaid workers on family farms
- Managers of certain aspects of agricultural production by means of labour supervision and participation in post-harvest operations also.

The types of numerous labour-intensive agricultural activities taken up by rural women include:

- Sowing
- Nursery management
- Transplanting
- Hoeing
- Grass cutting and weeding
- Picking, cotton stick collection and separation of seeds from fibre
- Irrigation
- Fertilizer application
- Plant protection
- Harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.
- Crop and livestock production at subsistence and commercial levels
- Produce food and cash crops and manage mixed agricultural operations often involving crops, livestock and fish farming.

2. Livestock

Livestock is an elementary livelihood activity for fulfilling household food demands as well as supplements farm incomes also, and it is documented that rural women can earn additional income from the sale of milk and animals. An estimated two-thirds of poor livestock keepers, totalling approximately 400 million people, are women (Thornton *et al.*, 2002). It is evident that predominantly women play a dominant role in livestock production and perform management activities such as

- Cleaning of animal and sheds

- Watering of cattle
- Milking the animals
- Milk processing, preparation of ghee, etc.
- Fodder collection
- Preparing dung cakes
- Collection farmyard manure

3. Poultry

Poultry farming is one of the major sources of the rural economy, and the rate of women participation at the household level is central in the poultry industry.

4. Fisheries and aquaculture

Information provided to FAO from 86 countries indicated that in 2008, 5.4 million women worked as fishers and fish farmers in the primary sector that represented 12% of the total.

They are more commonly occupied in

- Subsistence and commercial fishing from small boats and canoes in coastal or inland waters.
- Processing and marketing stages, in both artisanal and industrial fisheries
- Fish processing as entrepreneurs and provide labour before, during and after the catch

5. Forestry

Women contribute to both the formal and informal forestry sectors in many remarkable ways.

They play active roles in

- Agroforestry
- Watershed management
- Tree improvement, and
- Forest protection and conservation
- Maintenance of nurseries to plantations, and from logging to wood processing

Feminisation of agriculture

Economic Survey conducted during 2017-18 revealed that with the rising migration of rural people to urban areas, the feminisation of agricultural sector started to flourish with the escalating number of women engaged in numerous responsibilities such as cultivators, entrepreneurs, and labourers also. Worldwide, empirical evidence showed that women play a conclusive function in ensuring food security and conserving local agro-biodiversity. Rural women are trustworthy for integrated management and utilization of diversified natural resources for meeting domiciliary requirements on a regular basis which impel women peasants to have differential and amplified access to important assets *viz.* land, water, seeds, credit, markets, technology and training warranting critical analysis in the context of our country. Moreover, the authorization of women cultivators can be the basic key to augment agricultural productivity with a paramount role at all grounds from production, pre-harvest, post-harvest processing, packaging to marketing and other sectors of the agricultural value chain. It is quite commanding to accept an ‘inclusive transformative agricultural policy’ aiming at gender-specific interventions to raise production levels of small and marginal landholdings, integrate women as active agents in rural transformation, and engage men and women in extension services with gender expertise.

Conclusion

Women have been cooperating gigantically in favour of all-inclusive agricultural growth and development through the means of their engagement in crop production, horticulture, animal husbandry, poultry, aquaculture, natural resource management and so on. Although the proportion of women workers in agriculture has declined, yet they constitute a significant workforce and economically active population in agriculture throughout the globe. Their involvement differs across the regions, socio-cultural and agro-production systems also. Moreover, the persisting gender gap in access to and control of resources remains an important concern which has not only kept women in a vicious circle of low productivity but also has thrown up questions about inclusive and sustainable growth of this sector. Therefore, the need of the hour is to bridge the gender gap and empower women with new knowledge and technology, and it would be quite challenging, particularly in the context of socio-economic and climate-related changes.

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