

Review Article

Feminization of Indian Agriculture, Key of Doubling the Agricultural Income

Sunita Kushwah^{1*}, Shailwala Dei² and Srishti Kushwaha³

¹(Horticulture), Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Banka (Bihar)-813102, India

²BAU, Sabour Bhagalpur (Bihar), India

³Department of Agriculture Economics, DRPAU, Pusa (Bihar), India

*Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of increasing feminization of agriculture in many part of the world has drawn policy attention. The increased number of women and agricultural production was brought by male rural out migration, the growing number of households headed by women and the development labor-intensive cash crops. One of the long-standing issues and bottlenecks for women is having equal economic importance men are enjoying. Rural women face a distinct disadvantage, since they are the ones who sacrifice their opportunity for education and skill development to manage land and agriculture. Women are largely excluded from training, extension and irrigation management. All of these lead to change in the traditional gender division of farm work: women taking up at lower wages the tasks formerly did only by men, such as land preparation, cultivation of crops, spraying pesticides, harvesting, post-harvesting and marketing of the produce. This paper explained complex interrelationship between women agricultural producers and their lack of rights to land and related factors of production.

Keywords

Indian Agriculture,
Doubling
Agricultural
Income

Introduction

Women are the backbone of the rural economy and women are the invisible farmers, often ignored in discussion, while they remain involved in both farming and marketing activities, often directly. Yet, they receive a fraction of the land credit, inputs, agricultural training and information compared to men. Not empowering them bears an adverse impact on the agricultural sector. Gender equality is a social desirability that must be put into social practice to reduce gender discrimination. Technological empowerment, unmediated control and ownership of land, enhancing of agricultural management skills and knowledge of women in agriculture are ways by which agricultural production could

be improved thus, overcoming poverty and income inequality. (Satyavathi, *et al.*, 2010). If we consider few parameters for the encouragement of women's role in agriculture, the doubling of income will be achieved. Now there is an urgent need to think upon in perspective of women role in agriculture. The major facts which are directly effects the women presence as under:

Women Ownership in Agriculture

Despite significant presence of women in agriculture, figures from various data sources present, that their ownership of land in rural households ranges just between 6-11 per cent. Data from the latest Agricultural Census of 2010 indicates, that women's holdings account for 12.79 per cent of all holdings, comprising

about 10.36 per cent of the total operated area. Similar findings reported by Deere, (2009). Rural women are mainly engaged in agricultural activities in three different ways depending on the socio-economic status of their family and regional factors. They work as:

(i) Cultivator doing labour on their own land.

Rural women are mainly engaged in agricultural activities in three different ways depending on the socio-economic status of their family and regional factors.

They work as:

Cultivator doing labour on their own land. Managers of certain aspects of agricultural production by way of labour supervision and participation in post-harvest operations.

Paid Labourers.

In India, the typical work of the woman agricultural labourer or cultivator is limited to less skilled jobs, such as sowing, transplanting, weeding and harvesting.

Empowering Women for Income Enhancement

Rural women form the most productive work force in the economy of the majority of the nations, including India. Agricultural sector is the single largest production. Agriculture including various sub-sectors employs 80 per cent of all economically active women; they comprise 33 per cent of the agricultural labour force and 48 per cent of self-employed farmers. About 18 per cent of the farm families in India, according to National Sample Survey Organisations (NSSO) Reports, are headed by women. Beyond the conventional market-oriented narrower definition of 'productive workers', almost all women in rural India can be considered as 'farmers' in some sense, working as agricultural labourers, unpaid workers in the family farm enterprises or combination of the

two. The Census 2011 data on 'Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers' shows, that around 65.1 per cent of women workers depend on agriculture, either as cultivators or agricultural labourers, as opposed to 49.8 per cent of male workers.

Major Constraints impeding women's contribution in Agriculture

Gender discrimination

Rooted in law and custom, in pervasive and impedes socio-economic development. Rural women are much more over-burdened than men owing to their multiple involvements. It is found that women in agriculture have revealed, that on an average, women work for 15-16 hours a day. Studies further reflect that farm activities, which are time and labour intensive, monotonous, respective and more drudgery prone, are generally delegated to women.

Development Bias

Despite the contribution of women in the production process, persistent bias of development planners in treating them primarily as consumers of social services rather than producers, kept them away from the development programmes in agriculture and allied sectors.

Wherever the new agricultural technology led to multiple cropping, the work load of women has increased. Even where improved techniques have been found for the women's activities, there is not sufficient access to training in such techniques.

Gender Bias

Women suffer from a statistical persons, as a result of which, their contribution is not recognized. They often have heavier workloads than men and bear virtually sole responsibility for family welfare and household management. However, they have either no or at best limited control over

productive resources. This is even rooted in gender biases in labour markets and wage rates and has even resulted in their inadequate access to information about rights, opportunities, and support programmes etc. Increasing feminization of agriculture and the agricultural workforce, with little recognition of their role in land and livestock management, has meant that women have largely remained invisible to the government in terms of agricultural policies, schemes, programmes and budgets as well as formal support system such as credit, extension, insurance and marketing services.

Limited Access to Resources

Many of the constraints that rural women confront with are similar to those all resource-poor farmers confront, such as lack of access to land, credit, training, extension and marketing facilities.

But, for social and economic reasons, women's constraints are more pronounced and, in general, development interventions that seek to remove constraints for poor farmers do not reach women. Rural financial institutions are also often hesitant to accept women clients because they are unable to meet collateral requirements and are inexperienced borrowers.

Inadequate access to Markets

Women engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishery tend to produce small quantities and have poor access to organized marketing and cooperatives. Therefore, women sell mainly to private traders and have low bargaining power. Institutions which promote women's group access to market need to be strengthened. Successful examples are of SEWA, Gramin Bank, SHG Federations etc.

Lack of technology refinement for women

Women only benefit from agricultural support programmes if the information, technology

and methods imparted are relevant to their production activities. However, agricultural research is generally much less oriented towards adapting technologies to women's physical status or towards addressing their tasks. Women's low productivity stems mainly from lack of appropriate technologies suited to their work.

Policy and Programs for feminization in Agriculture

The Direct Benefit Transfer

It will effectively deny access to agricultural inputs and extension services for women farmers working on their own family lands, as sharecroppers and women's collaboratives, who lease land.

It brooks no delay in introducing various policy measures for empowering women in farming & allied areas for improving their access to land, such as 'joint pattas' for both homestead and agricultural land; providing credit access through speedy issue of Kisan Credit Cards; creating multiple livelihood opportunities through crop-livestock farming systems, agro-processing, etc., thereby providing an enabling environment to women to contribute to their best ability in improving overall productivity-production trigger and their own family's income.

Approaches to mainstreaming gender concerns

An egalitarian approach to gender based concerns is necessary. Some of these matters are being addressed by earmarking 30 per cent of funds for women under various major schemes/programmes and development interventions.

Introducing 'pro-women initiatives' to help women derive the benefits of all beneficiary-oriented components of different programmes/schemes and missions; and Focusing on formation of women Self Help Groups (SHGs), Women Federations and Farm

Women Producer Organisations /Companies; capacity building interventions; linking them to micro credit; enhancing their access to information and ensuring their representation in decision making bodies at various levels.

Budgetary allocations for Women in Agriculture

The growing presence of women in the agriculture sector over the years, has not been matched with equally substantial increase in the allocations for women farmers. This is only a good beginning and now needs to be refined and allocations made in consonance with the women's share under each scheme.

Women oriented Mass Media and ICT support

ICT has been influencing all spheres of human lives including the process of information dissemination in agriculture sector. While, the ICT led extension systems are capable of changing farmers' lives by improving access to information and sharing knowledge through click of a button, they are far more important and essential for women farmers who are overburdened and hard pressed for time.

Women and Research

Along with an in-depth understanding of women's involvement in agriculture, suitability of available technological options for them is an equally important issue.

In order to reduce drudgery of work and improve work efficiency of women's worth in agriculture, the technology designing has to keep their specific issues in mind As such, research on gender issues in agriculture and allied sectors including technology refinement in favour of women has to be a continuous and an ongoing activity.

At present, the AICRP on Home Science is being implemented through its ten Centres located in different State Agricultural Universities of the country, their focus

currently being on-

Food & Nutrition security in selected farming system

Drudgery assessment and mitigation

Mitigating occupational health hazards

Capacity building of agrarian families

Empowerment of women

One of the recent developments that may prove to be a setback to farm women related education and research is the decision of the ICAR to rename the colleges of Home Science/Rural Home Science, set up under the SAUs as 'College of Community Development'. This will dilute the sharpness of attention that the farm women need, in respect of their multiple associations with rural agricultural society.

The rural society in the country today is getting differentiated, with increasing activities in employment and income generation. Hence, Community Development may not represent farm women in particular, which is what the education in Home Science or its variant names is/are suppose to focus on.

Empowering women - Suggestive actions

Following strategies/initiatives considered important for empowering women in agriculture need to be given a big push:

Enumerate/register various categories of women farmers: Land Revenue and Rural Development Department may work in tandem to identify and enumerate/register various categories of women farmers from the revenue village upwards in a time bound manner backed by suitable guidelines issued for this purpose from the concerned ministries including the Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development at the central level. A norm based approach to 'enlisting a farmer – whether men or women, even when

they do not own land, but are actually engaged in farming or allied activities needs to be developed, for the limited purpose of gaining access to agriculture related entitlements. Further, the list can be dynamic, so that inclusions and exclusions can be made on a year to year basis. For ensuring flow of optimum overall support and maximum services to Farm Women in all villages of all States.

The Cooperatives have for long been seen as a social institution providing partnership, solidarity and resources to women farmers as well as in tackling and fighting gender inequalities. 'Women-only cooperatives' including dairy, banks, stores, food vendors, have not only been critical in empowering and educating women, but have also done quite well in providing a whole range of services to their members. Organizing women SHGs and federating them to form 'all women Cooperatives' is another need of the hour.

Provide direction to the Agriculture Extension System to leverage its knowledge and proximity to farmers for greater empowerment of rural women. This is essential, in view of the absence of a strong panchayat level extension system in the country.

Family farming with multiple approaches based on crop, animal husbandry, agro forestry and mixed integrated farming can boost incomes by facilitating earnings from all sources like main crop, inter crop, border crop and income from Dairy animal as well as backyard poultry of desi birds.

Strengthening of NGRCA (CHECK) and intensifying its activities such as providing advisory and advocacy services to States, bringing out literature and print publications like the ones recently brought out by it, titled 'Handbook for Women Farmers' carrying

women specific provisions in agriculture sector' in regional languages; compendium of agriculture tools and technologies and undertaking macro and micro level studies and action research in critical thrust areas related to women in agriculture is also very essential in tapping and exploiting the resource base of women farmers in enhancing the income of farmers.

References

- Barrientos, Stephanie, Dolan, C. and Tallontire, A. (2003). A Gendered Value Chain Approach to Codes of Conduct in African Horticulture. *World Development*, 31(9): 1511-1526.
- Deere, C. D. (2009). The Gendered Impacts of Liberalization. The Feminization of Agriculture? The Impact of Economic Restructuring in Rural Latin America. *United Nations Institute for Social Development*, pp 99-127.
- Satyavathi, C. T.; Bharadwaj, Ch.; Brahmanand, P.S. (2010). "Role of Farm Women In Agriculture: Lessons Learned." SAGE Gender, Technology, and Development.
- Singh, R.; Sengupta, R. (2009). "EU FTA and the Likely Impact on Indian Women Executive Summary." Centre for Trade and Development and Heinrich Boell Foundation.
- Stone, M. P. and Peter D. (2005). Commodities and Globalization. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield. Deere, Carmen Diana. The Feminization of Agriculture? Economic Restructuring in Rural Latin America (Occasional Paper 1). Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Whitehead, A. (2009.) The Gendered Impacts of Liberalization. The Gendered Impacts of Liberalization Policies on African Agricultural Economies and Rural Livelihoods. *United Nations Institute for Social Development*, pp 37-62.