



WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE: BREAKING BARRIERS THROUGH EXTENSION SUPPORT

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Introduction:

Across India's vast agricultural landscape, women are a constant yet often invisible force. From planting paddy in Kerala's backwaters to tending goats in Rajasthan's deserts, women farmers form the silent backbone of India's food system. Yet their contributions are undervalued, and their access to resources is severely limited.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), if women had the same access to productive resources as men, their farm yields could increase by 20–30%, potentially reducing hunger for up to 150 million people globally. This is where agricultural extension becomes vital a tool not just for productivity, but for gender empowerment.

Women's Role in Agriculture: An Overview

Contribution to workforce: Women comprise nearly 33% of cultivators and over 47% of agricultural labourers in India.

Tasks performed:

- Sowing, transplanting, weeding
- Harvesting and post-harvest processing
- Livestock care, poultry, and dairy
- Seed saving and preservation
- Value addition and marketing

Yet, they often do this without land ownership or decision-making rights

Barriers Faced by Women in Agriculture

Type of Barrier	Examples
Social	Gender norms, restricted mobility

Economic	Lack of access to credit, land, subsidies
Technical	Limited training and technology access
Institutional	Male-dominated extension workforce
Educational	Low literacy levels and digital divide

The Role of Extension Services in Women's Empowerment

Agricultural Extension plays a pivotal role in transforming women's lives by bridging the knowledge gap and enabling access to resources.

A. Capacity Building & Training

- Hands-on training in new technologies, improved crop techniques, and livestock care.
- Emphasis on low-cost and climate-resilient practices like natural farming, vermicomposting, or millet processing.

B. Gender-Sensitive Extension Approaches

- Appointing female extension officers to increase outreach.
- Organizing women-only farmer field schools.
- Scheduling training sessions to suit women's daily routines.

C. Access to ICT & Digital Tools

- Mobile apps like Kisan Suvidha, YouTube channels, WhatsApp advisory groups.

- Radio and agriculture podcasts in local dialects.
- Community radio programs featuring women farmers' success stories.

Women-Led Institutions & Collective Empowerment

Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

- Promote savings, micro-credit, entrepreneurship.
- Training in marketing, food processing, packaging.

Farmers Producer Organizations (FPOs)

- Women-only FPOs for collective production and direct market access.
- Reduce dependence on middlemen.

Community Resource Persons (CRPs)

- Trained rural women who become grassroots change agents.

Example: Kudumbashree in Kerala empowers women through farming, dairy, and micro-enterprises supported by extension training and credit linkages.

Women in Allied Sectors: Dairy, Poultry, Sericulture & Horticulture

- **Dairy:** Women manage 70% of livestock activities.
- **Poultry:** Backyard poultry is a steady income source.
- **Horticulture:** Kitchen gardening and herbal cultivation offer nutrition + income.
- **Sericulture:** Widely adopted by women in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu with technical support.

Policy & Government Support for Women Farmers

- **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP):** Promotes sustainable agriculture and livelihood through women's groups.
- **DAY-NRLM:** Supports skill-building and credit access for SHGs.
- **Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs):** Increasing focus on gender

mainstreaming and entrepreneurship training.

- **PM Kisan Samman Nidhi & eNAM:** Women are now being included in direct benefit transfers and market access.

Success Stories: Women Breaking the Mold

- **Jharkhand's tribal women** learned SRI (System of Rice Intensification) through NGOs and now produce more rice with less water.
- **Tamil Nadu's millet women** form collectives to produce value-added snacks sold in local markets.
- **Odisha's mushroom entrepreneurs,** trained by extension teams, earn regular income by selling oyster mushrooms to hotels and shops.

Innovative Extension Models That Work for Women

Model	Description
Farmer-to-Farmer Learning	Experienced women teach others through demos and mentoring
Participatory Video Approach	Rural women make videos of best practices for peer learning
Village Knowledge Centres	ICT-based centres run by women to access Agri-information
Digital Literacy Campaigns	Help bridge the gender-digital gap

Suggestions for Strengthening Women-Focused Extension

- Recruit more female extension officers
- Design women-specific training modules
- Include women's names in land records
- Promote women's participation in FPOs
- Ensure childcare during training programs

- Regular gender-sensitivity training for extension staff
- Use vernacular content and community leaders for outreach

Call to Action

Governments, institutions, NGOs, and individuals must join hands to:

- Prioritize women in policy and program design
- Use gender data to drive decisions
- Promote women-led innovations
- Celebrate and scale success stories

Conclusion

Women have long been the silent pillars of Indian agriculture—working tirelessly in fields, managing livestock, and sustaining households. Yet, they remain under-recognized and under-supported. Agricultural extension, when redesigned through a gender-inclusive lens, has the power to unlock this vast, untapped potential. By providing women with access to knowledge, technology, credit, markets, and leadership opportunities, extension services can help transform them from marginal labourers to empowered decision-makers, entrepreneurs, and innovators. The success of any agricultural reform or rural development initiative will be incomplete without placing women at the centre. Empowering women in agriculture is not only about justice—it is about productivity, food security, and rural resilience. It is time to move from token participation to transformative inclusion. Let us invest in women farmers—not just for their benefit, but for the prosperity of the entire nation.