



THE INDISPENSABLE ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN AGRICULTURE

Ankita Sahu¹, Shivani Bhardwaj², Neha Dwivedi¹ and Aditya Singh¹

¹Assistant Professor, ²M.Sc. Scholar, Department of Agricultural Economics, RVSKVV-College of Agriculture, Indore (M.P.)

Introduction

Women are the leading advocates for the 'New India's social, economic, and environmental development, with a staggering 80.00 per cent of rural women engaged in agriculture and allied sectors, forming the principal source of income for most economically active rural women. In fact, 33.00 per cent are directly employed in agriculture, and 48.00 per cent are independent farmers. This significant participation means that rural women workers' empowerment and mainstreaming could enact a paradigm change favoring economic growth. Their increased role will dramatically improve food and nutrition security, directly reducing hunger and poverty, thus creating a crucial win-win strategy for achieving Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Globally, women constitute 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, yet their work is often undervalued and unrecognized. The key challenge is that women farmers are currently less productive than men due to systemic inequalities, specifically less access to vital productive resources like land ownership, water, quality seeds, essential training, and financial credit. However, studies show that if women were granted equal access to these resources as men, they could increase farm yields by an impressive 20-30 per cent. This increase in overall agricultural output would have a profound global impact, potentially reducing the number of hungry people in the world by up to 150 million people, underscoring the vital link between gender equality and global food security.

Women in Agriculture

Women play vital roles in agriculture and rural economies across developing countries. Burundi has highest share of women employment in agriculture in the world followed by Mozambique, Burkina Faso.

The Indian scenario

The Annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Report 2022-23 clearly demonstrates the dominant role of women in the agricultural sector, a phenomenon frequently referred to as the "feminisation of agriculture." The data indicates that 64.3 per cent of the entire female workforce is engaged in agriculture, making it the highest concentration across all sectors. This involvement is especially pronounced in rural India, where 76.2 per cent of the female working population relies on agriculture for their livelihood.

In sharp contrast, the participation rate of urban female workers in agriculture stands at a much lower 11.7 per cent, underscoring the vital, yet often unrecognised, contribution of women to food production and the rural economy. In India Bihar has highest share of female Agricultural Labour followed by Andhra Pradesh and Odisha

Social Barrier faced by women

Farmer – Despite their central role, female farmers are burdened by patriarchal norms that restrict their decision-making and impose a double workload of farming and domestic tasks. They are also uniquely vulnerable to climate change impacts (like droughts and

floods) due to resource limitations and reliance on rain-fed agriculture, severely challenging their household food security.

Economic Barrier faced by women

The economic barrier for women in the workforce, especially in agriculture, is the pervasive lack of land ownership, which reinforces their economic and social vulnerability despite their crucial role in food security.

Wage Inequality

Agricultural wages in India are a major cost, determined primarily by demand and supply, but are significantly affected by labour market imperfections like limited mobility and lack of information. These imperfections, combined with regional factors like labour availability, work intensity, and cost of living, lead to wide inter-state variations in wage rates. Ultimately, the wage structure reflects a complex interplay between market dynamics and structural constraints in the rural economy.

Technological Access

Gender inclusivity in agritech is limited by dual challenges: Demand-side barriers like lack of land ownership, digital literacy, and financial access hinder women's adoption, while Supply-side barriers include technology providers' lack of gender-sensitive designs and inadequate outreach. Addressing both is crucial for maximizing agritech's inclusive potential.

Credit Finance

Women in agriculture face more acute financial barriers (due to limited assets and invisible income) leading to lower yields and lower crop prices from distressed selling, despite institutions increasingly recognizing them as a profitable market. To effectively serve them, financial institutions must focus on market research, offer the right products, and use a gender-lens implementation strategy.

Policy and Economic Interventions

Policy interventions should focus on gender-specific training to enhance technical and leadership skills, alongside promoting drudgery-reduction technologies to improve women's health and productivity. Economically, interventions must secure women's legal rights to land and resources while expanding financial inclusion through targeted credit and subsidy schemes. Simultaneously, efforts should remove social and logistical barriers to market access, strengthening women's cooperatives for better price realization.

Key schemes and Programs

The Indian government has established several targeted schemes to empower women in agriculture. Key initiatives include the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP), a sub-scheme of DAY-NRLM launched in 2010-11 to boost women's productivity and resource control, and the recent Namo Drone Didi (2023) scheme, which provides subsidized drone technology and training to women-led Self Help Groups (SHGs). These are complemented by schemes like the National Mission on Agricultural Extension and Technology (NMAET) for knowledge and technology dissemination, the National Food Security Mission and National Infrastructure Fund for resource access, and the Agri-Startup Support initiative to encourage female entrepreneurship in the sector.

Conclusion

Women are indispensable to agriculture across roles, yet they face systemic barriers in access to essential resources like land, credit, technology, and fair wages. Economic analysis suggests that closing these gender gaps in productivity, wages, and resource access would be transformative. This action could significantly increase agricultural yields and consequently

raise global agricultural output, benefiting food security worldwide.

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