

Gender inequality in Agriculture and Food systems: An Indian Evidence Study

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ABSTRACT

India produces one-fourth of the world's agricultural output and has a nearly equal gender distribution, but there is a sizable gender gap in the country when it comes to decision-making, access to credit, wage gaps, farm activities, marketing, extension services, food consumption, and food production & productivity. Seven years have passed since the Sustainable Development Goals were established by the UN in 2015 to advance prosperity while preserving the environment. The SDG-5's goal of attaining gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls has experienced several obstacles over the years. Inequalities between men and women have long plagued India's food and agricultural systems. To understand gender inequality in India's agriculture and food systems and to offer practical solutions to close the gender gap that already exists, this study employed the systematic review methodology to investigate the relevant literature. In order to effectively close this gap in the future, it was determined that more qualitative and mixed method research must be conducted across the country in a number of areas, including decision-making, credit access, wage disparities, farm activities, marketing, extension services, food consumption, and food production & productivity. A lot of work needs to be done to bridge the gender gap and empower farm women, according to the data. In order to minimize the gender gap in India's food and agricultural systems, a number of methods are offered.

Keywords: Gender Gap, Systematic Review, Agriculture, Food System, Women Farmers

Introduction

Gender inequality is a major issue in India. Gender inequality can be defined as allowing people different opportunities due to perceived differences based solely on issues of gender or simply we can say it as a social phenomenon in which

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men and women farmers are not treated equally. Women farmers and girls have been discriminated against for too long – it's time to change that. Farm women make up almost half of the agricultural workforce in countries like India and it is typically large. For example, 80% of all economically active women farmers in India are involved in India; they comprise 33% of the agriculture labour force and 48% of the self-employed farmers. Yet women farmers in agriculture face a variety of obstacles and constraints than their male counterparts. In highly unequal countries, the majority of the farming population, particularly women farmers, lacks the economic resources and capacity to invest in appropriate agricultural technologies, as well as the knowledge to implement improved agricultural practices. Because of the disparity in access, women farmers face an increasing knowledge gap. Women farmers also have difficulty in access to land ownership, extension services, and finance. Agricultural credit, for instance, is critical for farmers to manage the seasonality of agricultural income and expenditures, and to invest in technologies and long-term farm improvements. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2022, India ranks at 135 out of 146 countries in terms of gender equality. This is a serious concern and needs to be addressed urgently. In India, good news is that there are many initiatives and programs that are working to promote gender equality and empowerment. One such initiative is the "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana," which works to save and educate girls. This has been a terrific step as it has increased female literacy and India now ranks 121st in the global Gender report. Moreover when we talk of gender Equality there arises a more related term i.e Gender Equity. Again how are they, both terms different from each other? According to gender equality, a person's opportunities, rights, and duties are not based on the sex they are given at birth. While the term "gender equity" refers to the need to constantly make both genders' needs for equity, solutions, and measures available. Although gender equality is the ultimate aim, it can only be reached by promoting gender equity. The objective of the study was to analyze the evidences of gender inequality in agriculture and food system in India.

Lessons from past

In India, women make up more than two-thirds of the workforce in agricultural production. [1] Women's activity is mainly focused in labor-intensive jobs including weeding, harvesting, and processing after harvest. [2] But still, there are significant regional differences in the earnings and labour involvement of women in agriculture. India's northern states are significantly poorer than its southern states. [3] In India the family unit, in particular via culture and society, has a great impact on the work participation of women. [4] Although women make up a significant portion of the agricultural labour force, they frequently have

low nutritional health. According to research, there is also a connection between the nutritional state of mother and her children, their household's autonomy and power in decision-making and female empowerment. [5,6] In SHGs, women not only actively participate in and make decisions about agricultural techniques, but they also have a significant impact on decisions about food intake that are required for them and their families to live healthy and profitable lives. [7] To acquire solid evidence for creating effective interventions, more research is required on all areas of gender disparity in agriculture and food systems. The majority of policy-makers consider several types of evidence. They must take into account a variety of factors in addition to the scientific rigour of the evidence, such as cost-benefit analysis, political expediency, context, resources, and aims.[8]

Methodology

An explicit desktop review of secondary literature served as the foundation for this study. Throughout, a systematic review approach was used to find the literatures and analyze them. From 23 databases, utilizing predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, studies were identified over the course of three stages. Finally, the study included 26 identified literatures from 5,492 literatures that included qualitative, quantitative and mixed method studies on gender inequality in decision making, farm activities, marketing, credit access, extension services, wage gap in agriculture, food production & productivity and gender inequality in food consumption in Indian food systems since 2015.

Head	Inclusion Criteria 1	Exclusion Criteria 1
Geography	India	Other than India
Time period	Published from 2015 onwards	Published before 2015
Language	English	Other than English
Type of Studies	Peer -reviewed- conforming to quality and relevance criteria	Blogs, newspapers, articles, web pages, newsletters, press release

Exclusion Criteria 2
The study period of the published literature before 2015.
The literature must satisfy the objectives of the study.
Documents without clear methodology and sample selection criteria
Documents without clear Study Period.
Review articles, Policy brief, Conference proceedings

Table 1 & 2 are the inclusion and exclusion criteria determined for selection of the study.

Lessons learnt and way forward

Since the formation of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, of which SDG-5, “Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering all Women and Girls, have faced numerous challenges over the years. The number of studies identified across the 8 chosen sub-themes has been represented in Figure 1. However, there are only a few studies available on the chosen areas in India, which is evidence of the lack of adequate studies on these areas and efforts to address these inequalities. It was strange to see that there was no study on impact of women on farm productivity since more than a decade and the other themes had only a handful number of researches done in since 2015. Until and unless robust evidence is gathered in support of the diverse gender challenges, the gender gap cannot be closed.

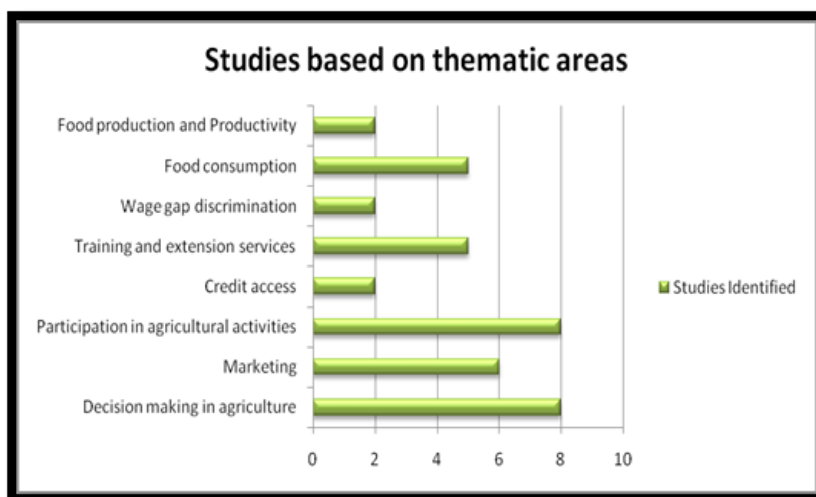


Figure 1: Number of the studies identified under various themes

The various identified literatures were then grouped based on the year of publications to see the growth of the studies focused on the gender issues in agriculture & food systems and are graphically been represented in figure 3. The trend seen in the graph is very concerning as India being the 7th largest country, 5th biggest economy and 2nd most populated country could only produce handful amount of researches on, Gender inequality, one of the most important areas of concern. It only gender equality which can help us in stepping towards hunger free nation.

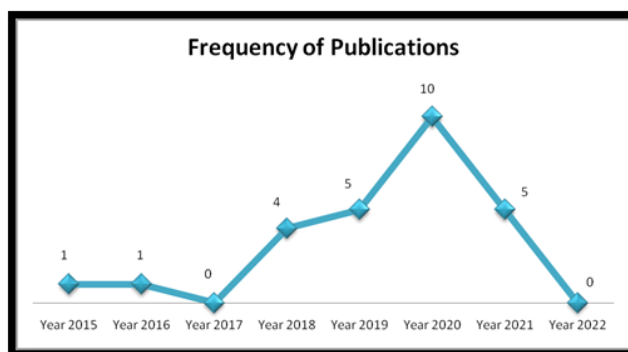


Figure 2: Year wise publication of the identified literatures

The studies were also classified based on the 3 basic types of research designs i.e. qualitative method, quantitative method & mixed are shown in figure 4. The data in the figure suggests that majority of the studies followed quantitative method (88%) then mixed method (8%) and finally qualitative research methodology (4%). But considering the subject of the topic i.e. gender, there is a need for more mixed method and qualitative methodology so as to provide a detailed, contextualized insights of qualitative data and the generalizable, externally valid insights of quantitative data through a deeper understanding of complexity and especially that of human behavior.



Figure 3: Number of the studies according to the Research designs

The studies were organized based on the institutions / organizations that carried out the research across, various States of India. Encouraging research in a large and diverse country like India will aid in the development of the country as a knowledge hub on the global stage, therefore it is expected that all concerned institutions/ organizations realize its importance and contribute to address the gap through taking up more research studies on the topic.

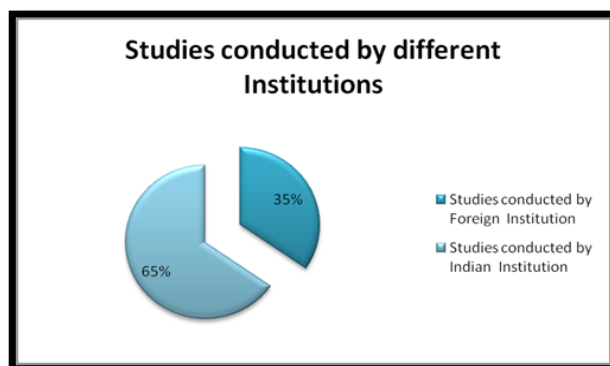


Figure 4: Number of the studies by different institutions

The literatures were then identified according to the States across India where the studies were conducted on the selected sub- themes. Majority (46%) of the research were conducted in Odisha. One of the major reasons being the location of ICAR- Central Institute of Women in Agriculture, who is mostly focused to work for women in agriculture. But since it's a subject of national interest and gender dimensions vary widely across States, regions and cultures, there is a need to have many more such studies across the country. This shall provide sufficient data to understand the gender gap at national level. The number of researches conducted in almost 7 years of time is very low (26 on the selected sub-themes). If more research isn't done to pinpoint gender-related issues nationwide, the gender gap will continue to increase. To advance the country, it is important to recognize and address the strong legacies of gender segregation at every level and in every field.

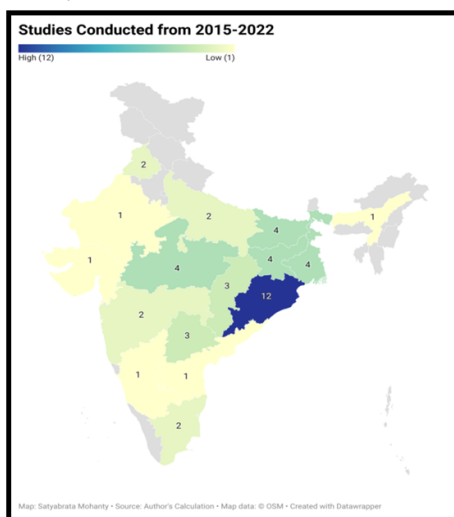


Figure 5: Number of the studies across the states

Agriculture employs 80% of all economically active women in India; they make up 33% of the labour force in agriculture and 48% of self-employed farmers. [9] Women's increased contribution in agriculture and allied sectors, is slowly being recognized in the recent years, but at a very low scale. Empowering and mainstreaming rural women workers in agriculture can cause a structural shift in favour of economic expansion. As reported women working in agriculture has increased as compared to the male over the time and also the GDP per capita. [10] With the existing gender gap with regard to decision making, access to resources, credit and wage inequality, the female workforce in agriculture have contributed significantly to the GDP. If we ensure women-oriented reforms, access to resources, technology, education, health facilities, ownership rights and skill development then it will certainly improve agriculture productivity and help in building an empowered nation, providing nutritional and food security to India; while also reducing poverty and hunger. There is a need to address women's issues in agriculture from a gender perspective in order to overcome the constraints and become the torch-bearers for India's next dawn of agriculture. To make this possible, all concerned stakeholders must focus and work on gender issues, which will aid in the collection of reliable data.

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