

LEAD PAPER-1

**STATUS OF INDIAN FARM WOMEN: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN
21st CENTURY**

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The dream of socio-economic empowerment of women will not be complete without empowering those who are living at India's last periphery. The ones whose day starts before sunrise and continues after sunset. These are the women farmers of India, whose voices often go unheard owing to their gender, and who struggle to establish their identity at the grassroot level due to patriarchal traditions and gender socialization. Women's work in agriculture is in addition to her role as a wife, a daughter-in-law and as a mother. However, gender based discrimination continues in multiple ways: women are not recognized as farmers in Indian policies thereby denying them of institutional supports of the bank, insurance, cooperatives, and government departments.

Gender inequality is one of the oldest and the most pervasive forms of inequality that shapes our economies, societies and communities. It denies women their voices, devalues their work and results in power imbalances between women and men from the household to the national and global levels.

Women play a crucial role in all farm-related activities from land preparation to marketing. They contribute a higher proportion of labor in agricultural sector than men. However, they are not active in decision making. It stresses the need for a new agricultural research and extension agenda which integrates gender analysis into the process of technology generation and dissemination. It also comes up with future strategies to make women a more active part of important farm decisions both at the household and legislature level.

- Agriculture sector employs 80% of all economically active women in India; they comprise 33% of the agriculture labor force and 48% of the self-employed farmers.
- In India, 85% of rural women are engaged in agriculture, yet only about 13% own land, though women play an important role in various agricultural activities.
- Economic Survey 2017-18 says that with the growing rural to urban migration by men, there is 'feminisation' of agriculture sector, with increasing number of women in multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs and labourers.
- About 60-80% food are produced by rural women.

Women remain as a backbone of agricultural workforce and represent 43% of the global agricultural labor force. They devote 45 - 50% of their time to agricultural activities, 79% of women continue to be engaged in agriculture and allied activities as against only 63% of men (Courtesy: Gender Reference Manual, 2016, ICAR-CIWA). While considering participation in agriculture, in rural areas 89.5% of the total female employed, is engaged in agriculture and allied sector and about 70% of farm work is performed by women.

Indian Women spend 354 minutes a day, compared to 36 minutes a day by men, on household activities including cooking and child care (Budlender, 2011). In developing countries, nearly 75 - 80 percent of women are involved in agriculture. They face gender issues in land ownership, access to credit, market, technology, seed, water, information, education and other services.

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Gradually, the male farmers are migrating to earn from non-farming activities. In this situation, women have to look after household as well as farming activities. Of the 36 States and UTs of India, 15 have shown declining trend and 21 have shown increasing trend in female work participation rate in agricultural domain. Specially, the States from eastern and north-eastern India like Nagaland (44.74%), Sikkim (39.57%), Manipur (38.56%), Mizoram (36.20%), Arunachal Pradesh (35.44%) have shown significant increase in female work participation rate in agricultural domain (Dash and Sarkar, 2016). So, the future agriculture is going to be in the hands of farm women. But, our Indian society till now has not recognized farm women as 'farmers' rather 'wives' of the farmers. Their contributions are not recognized and so they are left out in the development programmes. According to Jemimah et al. (2013), in India, 38.3% of women farmers had access to agricultural inputs followed by extension services (23.3%), credit facilities (17.3%) and output markets (14.3%). All these have led to a decrease in the agricultural productivity.

Agriculture also remains an important area of work for women, particularly in developing regions. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, women are less likely than men to have access to secure, good quality land or to the inputs they need to earn an income through farming. In Latin America, although women and men have equal legal rights to land ownership in most countries, deep-rooted cultural and institutional barriers mean that in practice women own less land than men, and the land women do own is of the poorest quality. Women also carry out unpaid agricultural work, for example contributing to subsistence farming for their families and communities. Nearly a quarter of all women globally are defined by the ILO as 'unpaid contributing family workers'. Women do at least twice as much unpaid care work as men – sometimes 10 times as much, often on top of their paid work. This includes tasks such as cooking, cleaning and looking after children and other family members, including people who are sick or elderly.

Gender stereotypes, which traditionally see men as 'breadwinners' and women as caregivers, mean that even where women are increasingly responsible for earning an income, unpaid care and domestic work still falls largely to them. Women's disproportionate responsibility for this work squeezes the amount of time that they have to go to school and earn a living. For many women, this inequality restricts those choices women can make to earn an income, participate in public life and to spend on essential, rest and leisure. Inequality in responsibility for unpaid care work means that on an average, women work longer days than men when paid and unpaid work is counted together. This inequality accumulates, resulting in the fact that globally, a young woman today will work on an average the equivalent of four extra years over her lifetime than a man – an extra month of work for every year of a woman's life. Globally more than 400 million women engage in farm work, although they lack equal rights in land ownership in more than 90 countries. Women worldwide engage in non-mechanised farm occupations that include sowing, winnowing, harvesting, and other forms of labour-intensive processes such as rice transplantation.

The Agriculture Census (2010-11) shows that out of an estimated 118.7 million cultivators, 30.3% were females. Similarly, out of an estimated 144.3 million agricultural labourers, 42.6% were females. In terms of ownership of operational holdings, the latest Agriculture Census (2015-16) is startling. Out of a total 146 million operational holdings, the percentage share of female operational holders is 13.87% (20.25 million); a lack of ownership of land does not allow women farmers to approach banks for institutional loans as banks usually consider land as collateral; women farmers have hardly any representation in society and are nowhere discernible in farmers' organisations or in occasional protests.

According to Oxfam (2013), around 80 per cent of farm work is undertaken by women in India. However, they own only 13 per cent of the land. Recent statistics released by the University of Maryland and the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER, 2018) state that women constitute over 42 per cent of the agricultural labour force in India, but own less than two per cent of farmland.

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Women in agriculture are affected by issues of recognition and in the absence of land rights, female agricultural labourers, farm widows and tenant farmers are left bereft of recognition as farmers, and the consequent entitlements. The root of the problem begins at the official lack of recognition of the female agricultural worker, and the resultant exclusion from rights and entitlements, such as institutional credit, pension, irrigation sources, etc.

The importance of women in agriculture has been increasing. The share of rural females in agriculture was around 83 per cent in 2004-05 as compared to 67% among rural men, showing the importance of women in agriculture in rural areas. Percentage of women among marginal farmers (38.7%) is higher than that for large farmers (34.5%) in 2004-05. These proportions have increased over time. Agriculture is becoming increasingly feminized as men are migrating to rural non-farm sector. They work in “land preparation, seed selection and seed production, sowing, in applying manure, fertilizer and pesticides, weeding, transplanting, threshing, winnowing and harvesting etc. as well as in animal husbandry and dairying, fish processing, collection of non-timber forest produces (NTFPs), backyard poultry, and collection of fuel wood, fodder and other products for family needs” (GOI, 2007). Despite their importance, women are continually denied their property rights and access to other productive resources.

Challenges of farm women

Women farmers in India face various challenges ranging from personal, social, economic and psychological that greatly hampers effectiveness and agricultural production.

1. **Access to and Control over Resources-** In spite of playing a pivotal role in food production, women face several constraints like being landless with no assets in women’s name. Even if they have land they are constrained for money and other resources (inputs and technical know-how) required for cultivation. It is found that if they had enjoyed the same access to productive resources as men, women could boost yield by 20-30 percent; raising the overall agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4.0 per cent. This gain in production could lessen the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17 percent, besides increasing women’s income (FAO, 2011).
2. **Wage Discrimination-** It has been observed that women are paid 30-40% less wage than their male counterparts, for comparable work, on an average, and hence are not able to satisfy their basic necessities. A recent report by International Labor Organization (ILO) has found that on an average, women are paid 34 per cent less than men. A data published in Down to Earth, on 18 September 2018, by Kiran Pandey, reveals that women farmers earn 22 per cent less than their male counterparts.

Activity-wise wage rate of agricultural labor (Rs. /day)

Activity	Men	Women
Ploughing / Tilling	263.98	182.81
Sowing, Weeding and Transplanting	218.45	175.45
Picking	208.19	174.52
Winnowing, Threshing and Harvesting	212.11	178.11

Source: NSSO, Nov 2013

All India annual average daily wage rate (In Rs.)

Year	Men	Women
2006-07	82	62
2007-08	91	70
2008-09	108	82
2010-11	124	95
2011-12	149	115
2012-13	183	134
2013-14	214	158
2014-15	229	178
2015-16	268	200
2016-17	281	218

Source: Directorate of Economics & Statistics

Note 1. All India annual average is calculated for 20 major States.

2. Average agricultural wage is taken as average of five operations: i) Ploughing (ii) sowing (iii) Weeding (iv) Reaping & Harvesting (v) Transplanting

- 3. Seasonal employment-** Women bear the brunt of hardships arising out of seasonal unemployment/underemployment more than their counterparts. They are over-represented in part-time work as compared to men. Most of them do not get employment for long duration and their employment is unstable.
- 4. Extension Service-** Women's contribution remain invisible to the extension functionaries, researchers and the policy makers. Hence, limited research and extension support is available on technologies appropriate for women's multiple tasks. Most of the time, group discussions and meetings are usually held in villages involving men only. Further, the venue and timing of the meetings are inconvenient for women to attend. Sometimes in training, duration, content and methodology are not appropriate for women. Extension workers aim their services and efforts at men primarily.
- 5. Credit-**Women have less access to credit facilities as they have low percentage of land ownership (nearly 11%) to show as collateral. Credit for both consumption and investment purposes. Lack of education, mobility constraint, bank norms and few social network also affects women in accessing the right person in the bank to avail credit facilities.
- 6. Capacity building-** Capacity building enables farm women to attain self-reliance and sustainability of profitable micro enterprise to generate additional income for their families. But, it has been experienced that women are always bypassed by the extension workers while imparting trainings. Mostly they prefer male participants for training programs due to which women are neglected , many a times, affecting their progress and success.
- 7. Exposure-**Though farm women have made their presence felt in all agricultural spheres, still, many a times, the socio-cultural norms does not promote them to have any kind of outside exposures through field visits, mass media, information, farm publications, technology, stakeholders, organizations, etc.

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8. **Socio-cultural**-Though the cultural restrictions on women are lessening, still they are not as free as men. Their triple roles cause tension and conflict due to the existing dominant social structure. Rural women almost everywhere face more constraints than men in participating in producer organizations because they lack time and have limited mobility due to the cultural norms, domestic and reproductive household tasks (FAO, 2011). Likewise, women's role in agriculture changes according to their socio-cultural status. It is found that women's share of work in agriculture is the greatest among small farmers. When holdings are large, women may withdraw to work in the field or perform supervising task. The landless women spend much time for wage earning in agriculture than women with land. When men earn cash from the sale of the crops, they either re-invest it for more agricultural productivity or use it on personal things. Their income does not improve the quality of food accessible to their families. But when women farmers earn cash, even though relatively less, it is likely to be spent on the family food. Traditional gender roles in many cultures associate men with public sphere, while women's role tends to be seen as within the domestic sphere.
9. **Market access**- Women have limited access to marketing facilities and services due to which they could not expand their income generating activities. Although women are contributing as traders, hawkers and street vendors, still the gender issues in marketing are not being addressed effectively.
10. **Education**- Globally, nearly 98 million girls do not go to schools. Due to illiteracy, women are forced to work as unskilled laborers. It is more pronounced in rural areas. A cost benefit analysis carried out by the World Bank indicated that if women received the same amount of education as men, farm yields would rise by 7 to 22 percent, while increasing women's primary schooling alone could increase agricultural output by 24 percent. It also enables women to earn higher wages. A recent International Labor Organization (ILO) report states that each additional year in school raised a women's earnings by about 15 percent as compared with 11 percent for a man.
11. **Policies**- Since women's work is invisible & their contribution is not recognized as paid work, they are treated as "consumers" rather than "producers". Hence development policies are unbalanced, not favoring women largely. No society can develop successfully without providing equitable opportunities for male and female to shape their livelihoods. Therefore, the core objective of the government policy should be to integrate gender equality, to address gender issues in policy formulation processes, in strategic planning, project design and implementation and monitoring & evaluation. On the other hand, it can reduce gender disparities in access to and control over benefits and resources.
12. **Over burden**-Women play triple responsibilities like agricultural production, reproduction and nurturing. Research on women's time utilization pattern revealed that on an average women work for 15-16 hours a day, out of which 7-8 hours in peak and 5-6 hours in lean season are spent in farm work. They are mostly involved in manual, labor intensive, monotonous, repetitive, hazardous and drudgery prone work. For women agriculture labourers, time and working hours are very important as they also have to take care of other household works, animal care etc. The value of unremunerated work was estimated at approximately \$16 billion, out of which \$11 billion represents the invisible contribution of women alone.
13. **Drudgery**-The daily work schedule of rural women is very demanding and drudgery prone. The high drudgery risk activities for farm women are: transplanting, weeding, rice parboiling, harvesting crops, carrying head loads of farm produce, cleaning cattle shed, fetching water for cattle & family and cooking in smoke producing *chullahs*. They produce more than 50% of all the foods but use inadequately designed and poorly made hand tools.
14. **Shift towards cash crops**-Shifting towards cash crops is a shift from subsistence food production. It is the pattern of household wherein women labor force is diverted from

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subsistence crops towards cash crops, under the pressure of male family members. When women are expected to provide labor for cash crops, they have less time available for subsistence agriculture. The women seem to lose their decision-making ability. The income from cash crops usually comes under the immediate control of men, who are less likely to spend on the family welfare, compared to women, due to different expenditure patterns. Introduction of cash crops have a negative impact on household food and nutrition security which affects quality of food supplies and the nutritional status of children.

15. **Impact of climate change:** Climate change is a major challenge for agriculture, food security and rural livelihoods for millions of people including the poor in India. Adverse impact will be more on women farmers. Climate change is expected to have adverse impact on the living conditions of farm women, fisherwomen and forest-dependent rural women and tribal women who are already vulnerable and food insecure. Women farmers, particularly those living in already fragile environments, face an immediate and ever-growing risk of increased crop failure, loss of livestock, and reduced availability of marine, aquaculture and forest products. They would have adverse effects on food security and livelihoods. In order to have climate change sensitive and pro-poor policies, there is a need to focus on women farmers. Agriculture adaptation and mitigation could provide benefits for these farmers. The coping strategies would be useful to have long term adaptation strategies. There is a significant potential to sequester soil carbon if appropriate policy reforms are implemented. The importance of collective action in climate change adaptation and mitigation is recognized. Research and practice have shown that collective action institutions are very important for technology transfer in agriculture and natural resource management among farm women and resource dependent communities.
16. **Water problems:** Water is a great challenge for farm women, as nearly 2-3 hours daily is spent on fetching water for domestic purpose. It also cause ergonomic and health issues to the women.
17. **Risk and vulnerability:** There is enough evidence to suggest that the poor and the poorest of the poor households are vulnerable to a range of risks affecting individuals, households or whole communities which can have a devastating effect on their livelihoods and well-being. They have higher exposure to a variety of risks at individual or household level. Some of them are (a) occupational health hazards: injury, accidents, disability; (b) physical fatigue/ergonomic: due to long hours of physical, monotonous, repetitive, manual work (c)harvest risks, life cycle risks, social risk and special risks . In addition, they have community risks such as droughts, floods, cyclones, structural adjustment policies etc. Women farmers are vulnerable to all such risks. India has many social protection programmes. The present major schemes for the poor in India fall into four broad categories: (i) food transfer like public distribution system (PDS) and supplementary nutrition (ii) self-employment/ entrepreneur (iii) wage employment and (iv) social security programmes for unorganized workers (MNREGA). The effectiveness of these programmes have to be improved so rural women can also benefit from these programmes. Crop insurance programmes and future markets have to be strengthened to reduce risks in price and yields.

At this juncture, gender mainstreaming and equality become essential to empower women with equal access to and control over productive resources, services, technologies, credit and information, for more production in agriculture. Further, the stakeholders at all levels should be sensitized towards gender to enable them for development of gender sensitive policies, projects and programs.

How farm women's economic empowerment can help the world?

Farm women's economic empowerment could reduce poverty for the family, the community and the nation at large. In order to achieve it, we need to first fix the current broken economic model

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which is undermining gender equality and causing extreme economic inequality. To achieve women's economic empowerment, we need a human economy that works for women and men alike.

To end extreme poverty will take much more than just money. But gender inequality in the economy costs women in developing countries \$9 trillion a year – a sum which would not only benefit women but would unleash new spending power across communities and provide a massive boost to the economy as a whole. However, progress in making women equal to men in the economy is painfully slow, and women are still more likely than men to live in poverty.

The World Economic Forum has warned that instead of improving in 2016, gender inequality in the economy reverted to where it stood in 2008. With the current rate of progress, it will take 170 years for women and men to be employed at the same rates, paid the same for equal work and have the same levels of seniority. Clearly, a structural change is needed. Rising inequality has slowed down reductions in poverty, and the majority of the world's poor continue to be women. To achieve women's economic empowerment, we need to make the economy work for women. There has also been a failure to recognize that economic policy impacts women and girls differently to men and boys.

However, evidence shows that although gender equality supports economic growth, not all economic growth supports gender equality. In the face of growing economic inequality, where it is the poorest women who most suffer its harmful effects, the need to accelerate progress is all the more pressing.

International commitments to women's economic empowerment

Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development sets global goals for governments to end poverty and achieve sustainability by 2030. Women's economic empowerment is recognized throughout the framework as essential to achieving this. Goal 5 commits governments to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Other relevant targets included in the framework are: By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance; Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate; By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value; Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment, Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality.

UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment

The UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, formed by then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and has put forward recommendations for how the commitments made in Agenda 2030 to women's economic empowerment can be realized. The Panel has outlined a framework for action comprising seven drivers of women's economic empowerment:

1. Tackling adverse norms and promoting positive role models.
2. Ensuring legal protection and reforming discriminatory laws and regulations.
3. Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid work and care.
4. Building assets – digital, financial and property.
5. Changing business

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culture and practice. 6. Improving public sector practices in employment and procurement. 7. Strengthening visibility, collective voice and representation. Working from the principle of 'leave no one behind', the Panel has recommended that efforts should start with women living in poverty and those facing multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion. This includes a specific focus on women in the informal sector and women working in agriculture as those most likely to lack equal economic opportunities. The Panel has also recognized the importance of macroeconomic policies in creating the enabling environment for women's economic empowerment.

Strategies in response to the challenges of farm women

The strategies, approaches and methodologies to address gender issues in agriculture are as follows:

- Provision of credit without collateral under the microfinance initiative of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development should be encouraged. Better access to credit, technology, and provision of entrepreneurship abilities will further boost women's confidence and help them gain recognition as farmers; The possibility of collective farming can be encouraged to make women self-reliant. Training and skills imparted to women as has been done by some Self-Help Groups and cooperative-based dairy activities (Saras in Rajasthan and Amul in Gujarat). These can be explored further through farmer producer organisations. Moreover, government flagship schemes such as the National Food Security Mission, Sub-mission on Seed and Planting Material and the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana must include women-centric strategies and dedicated expenditure; making gender friendly farm tools and machinery etc.
- The future assignments of land should be in the name of women.
- Ergonomic data on farmwomen needs to be gathered for different operations, for designing women friendly farm equipments and to evaluate suitability of these equipments to them by following participatory research approach.
- The link between extension and research needs to be strengthened. This will also facilitate in ensuring that local knowledge and practices are incorporated into the research design.
- Recruitment or mobilization of more female extension personnel to identify the needs of women farmers more effectively.
- The male extension agents need to be sensitized about the needs and problems, priorities and opportunities of women to ensure that technological packages meet their requirements.
- Capacity building of women farmers through adequate skill trainings should be done to increase their work efficiency.
- Training methods, content, trainer, message, language, time duration, place (venue), etc. of the training must be adapted to the needs of women farmers.
- Equitable relationship between men and women in terms of sharing work and family responsibilities.
- Gender sensitization among general public, private agencies, policy makers, planners for gender mainstreaming through identification of gender issues.
- Participatory gender sensitive policy formulation; review of existing policy and planning documents, development of gender checklists and guidelines.

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- Organization of workshops/seminars to provide exposure to gender concepts and insights into gender concerns.
- Recognition of the value of women's knowledge, skills and practices and their roles, responsibilities and contribution in different socio-economic groups.
- Documentation of gender disaggregated data to support the policy makers for formulation of women-pro policies.
- Integration of gender approach in all educational curriculum.
- Provision of incentives for staff.
- Establishment of internal and external gender networks.
- Creation of gender sensitive rural social climate.
- Establishment of gender cells/units at different organizations for handling gender issues.
- Publicity of gender concepts and explaining gender terminologies through mass media.

Protecting women's rights in land, enhancing infrastructure support to women farmers, and giving legal support on existing laws, will facilitate recognition for women as farmers and enable them to access credit, inputs, and marketing outlets.

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