

The Role of Rural Women Farmers in Economic Development

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Abstract:

Empowerment of women is a process which benefits women at individual, household, community and broader levels. This relationship between economic development and women's empowerment defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development in particular to health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation. women in rural areas face constraints in engaging in economic activities because of gender-based discrimination and social norms, disproportionate involvement in unpaid work, and unequal access to education, healthcare, property, and financial and other services. They are also disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of environmental disasters and climate change. Promoting and ensuring gender equality, and empowering rural women through decent work and productive employment, not only contributes to inclusive and sustainable economic growth, but also enhances the effectiveness of poverty reduction and food security initiatives, as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. In this paper we will discuss The Role of Rural Women Farmers in Economic Development.

Keywords: Rural Women, Farmers, Economic, Development, Financial, Agricultural Tradition, Contribution, Environment.



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Introduction:

India has an economy bound to its historical agricultural tradition. In the North, the Indus valley and Brahmaputra region are critical agricultural areas with water supplied by the Ganges and monsoon season. Agriculture is a way of life for the majority of India's population; based on 2011 World Bank data, only 17.5% of India's gross domestic product (GDP) is accounted for by agricultural production. Women are an important but often overlooked population involved in India's agricultural production—they represent the majority of the agricultural labor force in India. [1]

Women's participation in the agrarian labor force plays out in various ways, impacting their economic independence, their decision-making abilities, their agency and access to education and health services. Many women in farming communities suffer poverty and marginalization, and issues of gender inequality. Women in rural India are important to the progress of the rural economy. They play multiple roles as farmers, wage earners, and entrepreneurs. Women also care for the well-being of their family members and are responsible for providing food and care to the children and the elderly.

Rural woman farmer plays an important role on the economic development of India because 73.2% of rural women workers are farmers. Women farmers perform most of the big farming jobs. These woman farmers in

the rural area do work on land but they legally don't own the land. The woman in rural areas have multiple responsibilities like doing household chore, then taking care of their children and then also taking care of the land that is owned by their husband, father, father-in-law or any male relatives.

Role of women in agricultural sector can't be ignored as they consist of 33% agricultural labor force and 48% self-employed farmers. In developing countries like India, agricultural sector continues to employ and absorb female workforce but most of the times fails to give them the proper recognition of an employed or hired labor instead it is made a part of their household chores. [2]

Contribution of Women to Indian Agriculture:

Agricultural development is the most important and primary source of income for almost 70% of India's households. With the majority of India living in rural regions, the importance of agriculture cannot be undermined. Approximately 60% of the Indian population works in agriculture and contributes about 18% to India's GDP. Almost 80% of women are engaged and depend on agricultural development in rural India. Thus, women contribute to agriculture in ways that include:

- Women comprise 33% of the agriculture labor force and 48% of the self-employed farmers in India.
- With growing urban migration by men, the agriculture sector is being managed by women.
- Women contribute to agriculture through multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs, and laborers.
- About 60–80% of the food produced in India can be attributed to the efforts of rural women.
- Rural women are also engaged in allied fields including livestock rearing, horticulture, post-harvesting operations, agro/social forestry, fishing, etc.
- Most labor-intensive manual operations in agriculture such as cattle management, fodder collection, milking, threshing, winnowing, etc., are performed by women.
- The community management role played by rural women helps ensure the dissemination of information and extension at the community level. [3]

Rural women include the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Program under the initiative "Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women." It aims to empower rural women to claim their rights to land, leadership, opportunities and choices, and to participate in shaping laws, policies and programs. Evidence shows that this spurs productivity gains, enhanced growth and improved development prospects for current and future generations. The initiative also engages with governments to develop and implement laws and policies that promote equal rights, opportunities and participation so that rural women can benefit from trade and finance, market their goods and make a strong contribution to inclusive economic growth. [4]

Review of Literature:

Rural Indian women are extensively involved in agricultural activities. However, the nature and extent of their involvement differs with the variations in agro production systems. The mode of female participation in agricultural production varies with the landowning status of farm households. Their roles range from managers to landless laborer's. In overall farm production, women's average contribution is estimated at 55% to 66% of the total labor with percentages, much higher in certain regions. In the Indian Himalayas a pair of bullocks works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year on an once hectare farm, a figure that illustrates women's significant contribution to agricultural production. (Shiva FAO, 1991). [5] More encouragingly, in recent years special programs, initiatives and funds have been created in Ethiopia targeted at rural women in order to address their constraints and to enhance their contribution to agricultural

and rural development. The programs are often developed and run by the government, international donors and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In addition, women have often taken measures to help themselves in several ways. The following opportunities are among others which enhance the participation of women farmers in the rural and agricultural development process. However, these efforts could not bring absolute gender equality. As a result, the Global Gender Gap Report (2010) ranks Ethiopia as 121 among 134 countries in terms of the magnitude and gender-based disparities (UNDAF, 2011). [6]

Women play a significant role in the agricultural labor force and in agricultural activities. In addition to their active engagement in agriculture and livestock production, women are responsible for all household chores, mainly as a result the gender division of labor (Deribe, 2007). These roles are broken into three categories. Women's roles encompass work in all these categories, and this is referred to as women's triple role. Each of women's three roles viz. productive, reproductive and community roles are briefly described in the next subsections. [7]

Objectives:

- Rural women are torchbearers for social, economic and environment transformation for the 'New India'.
- The Role of Rural Women Farmers in Economic Development
- Empowering and mainstreaming rural women workforce in agriculture can bring paradigm shift towards economic growth.

Research Methodology:

The overall design of this study was exploratory. The research paper is an effort that is based on secondary data that was gathered from credible publications, the internet, articles, textbooks, and newspapers. The study's research design is primarily descriptive in nature.

Result and Discussion:

Empowerment of Women:

Bhopal sub-centre of National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture (NRCWA) conducted a survey to assess the involvement of women in agriculture and found that women devote 43.7% of their time in agriculture.

Ergonomical evaluation of manually operated two-row drum seeder, TNAU four row drum seeder and CRRI four row rice transplanter was carried out with women workers. It was found that the physiological load in terms of heart rate and pulse rate was higher than the acceptable limits of 110 and 40 beats/min, respectively. The working heart rate and pulse rate for operation of CIAE sickle, KKV Dapoli sickle, improved sickle and local sickles were within the acceptable limit. During September 2005 to October 2006, the SPU center of CIAE organized seven training programs for 115 rural women from nearby Bhopal district of Madhya Pradesh on various aspects of soybean processing and production soy milk, soy paneer, bakery items and soy snacks for use of soy foods in daily diet for nutrition and health benefits. Awareness camps and demonstrations were also held at different places like Seoni, Guna, Shajapur and Baramati. [8]

The lives that women in rural India lead in 2050 is likely to determine whether the country has achieved its full potential. As we work towards our economic goals, the social and economic status of rural women, especially farmers, will indicate whether the growth has been equitable. The agriculture sector engages 80% of economically active women in the country, higher than any other industry, putting women farmers at the center of India's growth story.



Figure 1: Women Farmers Busy Sowing Paddy (Source: hindustantimes.com)

Women have also been proven to be better at managing farms to mitigate effects of climate change. Addressing challenges faced by women farmers can have compounded benefits for families, communities and the economy. Despite this, their needs, desires, and aspirations are rarely prioritized by policymakers and agribusiness. Products and services tend to be designed for male farmers, leaving women's access to the market and essential resources such as inputs, credit, farm equipment and advisory remain restricted. This is compounded by overall low levels of financial and digital literacy among women. Men continue to drive the decisions on which seeds to plant, crops to grow, or farming practices to adopt. Across the supply chain level of different crops, women typically remain confined to labor-intensive and low-paying activities such as livestock rearing, seeding, weeding, or picking.

Women in Agriculture:

Women make essential contributions to agriculture and rural economic activities in all developing country regions. Their roles vary considerably among and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world where economic and social forces are transforming the agriculture sector.

The emergence of contract farming and modern supply chains for high-value agricultural products, for example, present different opportunities and challenges for women than they do for men. These differences derive from the different roles and responsibilities of women and the constraints that they face. Women work in agriculture as farmers on their own account, as unpaid workers on family farms and as paid or unpaid laborers on other farms and agricultural enterprises. They are involved in both crop and livestock production at subsistence and commercial levels. They produce food and cash crops and manage mixed agricultural operations often involving crops, livestock and fish farming. All of these women are considered part of the agricultural labor force. The Southern Asian average is dominated by India, where the share of women in the agricultural labour force has remained steady at just over 30 percent.

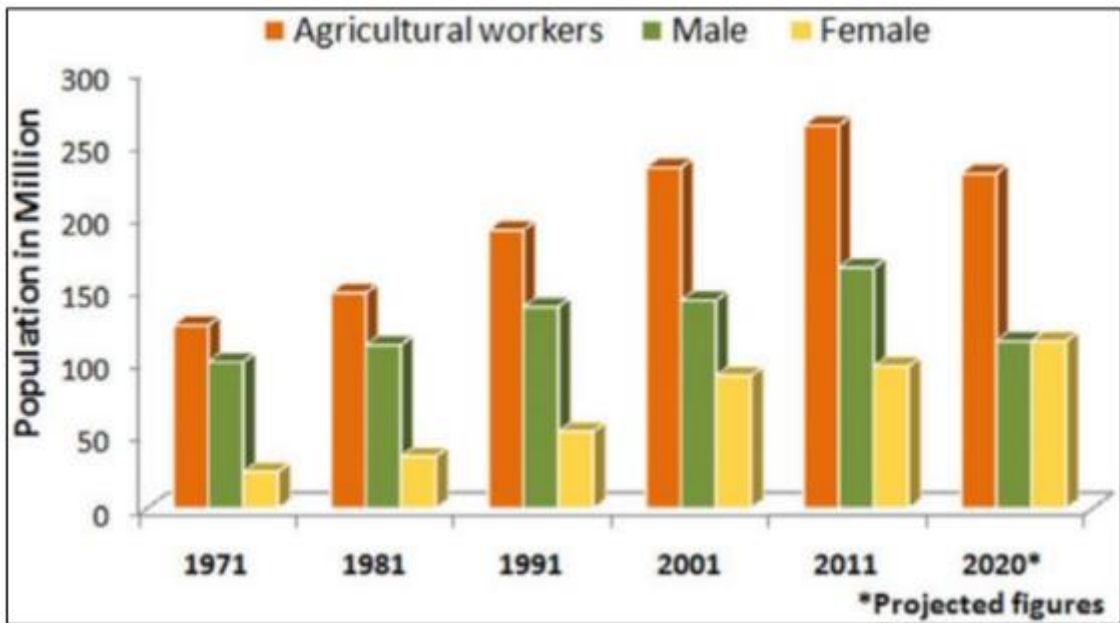


Figure 2: Population dynamics of women in Indian agriculture (Vision 2050, CIAE Bhopal.) [9]

Over 48% of India’s rural population comprises of the female gender. They play an essential role in the rural economy by working as farmers, daily wage workers, traditional knowledge disseminators, entrepreneurs etc.

They often also serve a significant role in managing household work, childcare, elderly care, taking care of ill ones and providing healthy food to the family members. About 80% of economically active women work in the agricultural sector, with 48% working as self-employed farmers and 33% as agricultural labour. Despite all this, women are often discriminated against and deprived of equal access to education, health, work, freedom, and lifestyle. Even after getting employed, women usually get paid much lesser wages than male workers. While 85% of rural women work in agriculture, only 13% have land ownership rights.

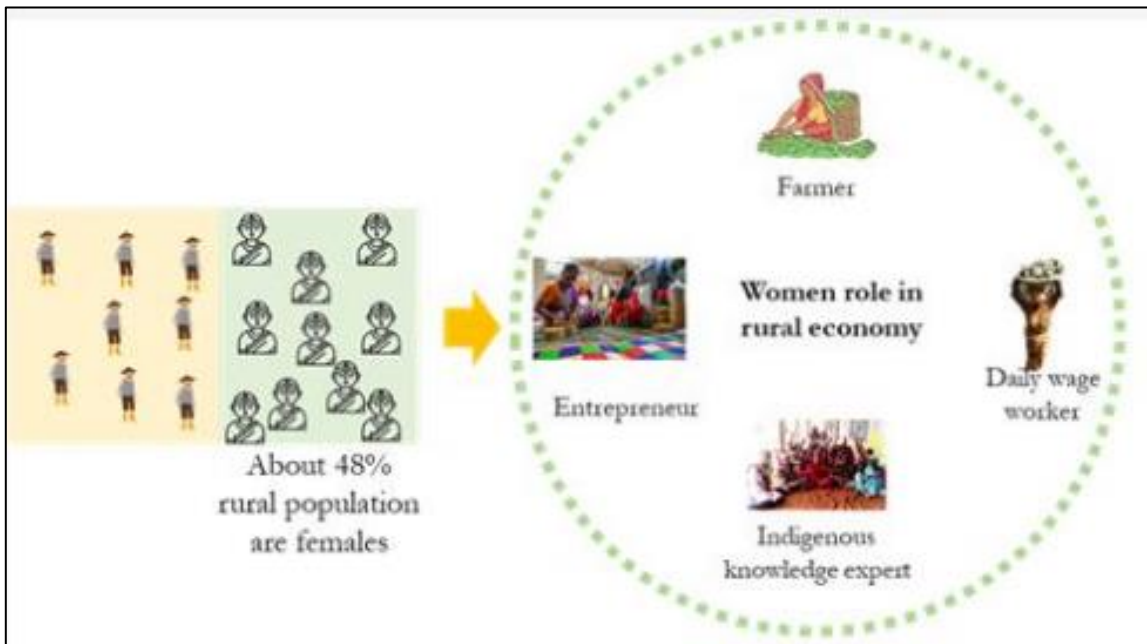


Figure 3: Different roles played by rural women and the need of women empowerment (Source: Google)

Majority of respondents (75.2%) was of 31 to 50 years age which indicated that responsibility was owned by middle age group people in a family (Table 1). The literacy rate amongst selected respondents was 44.2 per cent which was on higher side as compared to census 2001 for rural area of Bhopal district (36.5%). Farming was the main occupation of respondents (69.0%) followed by wage workers (28.8%) and service (2.3%).

Farm women's activities in farm:

In farm activities it was found that rural women involved in all most all activities starting from carrying dung to the field to marketing the produce (Table 3). The highest involvement was found in cleaning grains (91.3%) and least was in fertilizer broadcasting (2.5%) operations. It is analyzed from the table that out of 21 farm activities, five activities such as cleaning grain, grain drying, harvesting, storing grain and weeding were the major operations where landless respondents (81.5% to 52.1%) were mostly involved while ten farm operations such as weeding, harvesting, maize cob plucking, dehusking maize, groundnut harvesting, groundnut decortication, winnowing, cleaning grains, grain drying and storing grain for rest of the respondents. Plucking vegetables was also the activity performed by 25.6 to 35.3 per cent respondent except landless.

Table 1. Involvement of farm women in various farm activities.

Farm activities	Category-wise involvement of farm women in various farm activities, %					Total %
	Landless	Marginal	Small	Semi	Large	
Carrying dung to field	0.8	4.9	11.6	6.2	4.1	5.8
Fertilizer carrying	0.8	11.8	7.0	4.9	2.0	5.6
Fertilizer broadcasting	0.0	2.9	5.4	1.2	2.0	2.5
Seed treatment for sowing	0.0	13.7	21.7	9.9	6.1	11.0
Carrying seeds	0.0	14.7	11.6	7.4	4.1	7.9
Irrigation to field	0.0	5.9	4.7	2.5	2.0	3.1
Weeding	52.1	80.4	76.0	64.2	44.9	65.8
Preparation of solutions of chemical	0.8	9.8	7.0	9.9	4.1	6.3
Spraying chemical	1.7	12.7	7.8	8.6	4.1	7.1
Harvesting	79.8	95.1	96.1	96.3	69.4	89.2
Threshing	5.9	0.0	38.0	19.8	6.1	15.6
Maize cob plucking	6.7	74.5	82.9	80.2	83.7	61.9
Dehusking maize	5.9	74.5	82.9	82.7	83.7	62.1
Groundnut harvesting	4.2	67.6	79.8	74.1	81.6	57.7
Groundnut decortication	4.2	67.6	79.1	75.3	75.5	57.1
Winnowing	19.3	76.5	82.9	90.1	85.7	67.3
Cleaning grains	81.5	92.2	96.1	96.3	91.8	91.3
Grain drying	79.8	93.1	93.8	96.3	87.8	90.0
Storing grain	70.6	95.1	89.9	93.8	89.8	86.9
Plucking vegetables	5.0	35.3	25.6	27.2	34.7	23.8
Marketing	2.5	24.5	17.8	14.8	8.2	14.0

It was found that cleaning grain was such activity where most of the farm women (78.8%) performed work independently without any assistance from male workers. Lowest independent involvement (0.2 to 0.8) was

in preparation of solution of chemicals, carrying seeds, fertilizer carrying, threshing, seed treatment, fertilizer broadcasting and carrying dung to field. Winnowing fan was used for cleaning the grains by 17.9 per cent of the respondents.

It is analyzed from the table that cleaning grain, grain drying, weeding and harvesting were again the major operations where landless respondents (79.8 % to 41.2%) were mostly involved independently while rest respondents (83.7% to 24.8%) were mostly involved in nine major farm operations such as cleaning grain, grain drying, weeding, dehusking maize, maize cob plucking, harvesting, groundnut decortication, digging groundnut and winnowing. [10]

Conclusion:

Agriculture is a main source of growth for the Ethiopia's economy. Its development is crucial for economic development of the country in general through increasing food security and income. Rural women constitute a greater portion of the population economically involved in agriculture and they make a significant contribution for livestock and agricultural development of the country. Despite their considerable involvement and contribution, women's role in the sector is undervalued and unrecognized. Therefore, particular attention has to be given to the roles of women because they undertake major responsibilities in agricultural production in addition to performing household chores and community works. Rural women in general are constrained by lack of capital and access to institutional credit, lack of technical skills and access to extension, workload, less access to irrigation and modern inputs and limited access to land in comparison with the extent of their contribution.

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