Empowerment of Women Farmers for Agricultural Development

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Abstract: The women constitute almost half of the workforce engaged in agriculture. The rural women participate in a broad range of agricultural activities such as production, processing preservation and utilization of food. They play a key role in the entire food system starting from the selection of seeds, sowing, manuring, drying, storing and feeding the family from the harvested product. Even though women contribute 60 to 80% of the labour in agriculture and animal husbandry, their involvement in selection of suitable crops and adoption of innovative and good management practices, is very low. The major reasons may be lack of authority in decision making in agricultural land production, gender discrimination in the land, lack of awareness about the new technologies in agriculture and the poor access to female extension professionals for consultation about their farm lands. Empowerment of women in developing India will lead the nation to a breaking issue of humanist thinking for globalization.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Agriculture, Management, Labour, Farm work.

1. Introduction

India being a fast-growing country, still remains as one of the country with farmers below poverty line in the world. It is prone to weather-related shocks and experiences high levels of food insecurity, particularly among rural populations and smallholder farmers. Agriculture is the main occupation in India giving employment to about 58 percent of the people[1]. The contribution of agriculture and allied sector in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country has reached about 14 percent in 2011 – 2012. Women play a critical role in agricultural growth in India, but they face persistent obstacles and economic constraints limiting further inclusion in agriculture. Women’s empowerment is a socio-political concept that involves cognitive, psychological, economic and political dimensions.

2. Literature review

According to 1991 census the male cultivators has increased in the country by 11.67 percent from 76 in 1981 to 85.6 million in 1991. The female cultivators however have increased at much faster of 45.23 percent from 14.8 million in 1981 to 36.45 percent. About 60 percent of agriculture operations like sowing of seeds, transplantation of sapling, winnowing, storage of grain, etc., are handled exclusively by women, while on other jobs they share the work with men. Apart from participation in actual cultivation, women participate in various form of processing and marketing of agricultural produce.

Rural Indian women are extensively involved in agricultural activity. 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 household. Their roles range from manager to landless labourers. In overall farm production, women’s average contribution is estimated at 55 percent to 66 percent of the total labour with percentages, much higher in certain regions [2].

Female make up about 30 percent of the farm work force and often play an active role in the daily activities. They are involved in heavy physical work on the farm and perform many of the same tasks as males [3]. The farm activities such as weeding (97.84%), uprooting and transplanting the seedlings (96.40%) and harvesting of cereals (93.52%) also provided employment to the farm women labourers to maximum extent [6].

The average time devoted by women in agricultural operation is 8 to 9 hours per day in peak season and 4 to 5 hours in slack season. Except ploughing, cart driving, and arranging inputs and marketing farm produce, women help in carrying out all other farm operations like compost making, sowing, weeding, application of fertilizer and manure, application of irrigation, protection from birds, harvesting, threshing, manuring, winnowing, drying, stacking and carrying were well documented[3]. Seventy percent of the Indian women are engaged in agriculture work either in their own field or as hired labourers. The farm women perform almost each and every agriculture activity right from land preparation to harvesting and storage of the agriculture activities without any productions from sun, soil or shower with the traditional tools [5].
The women in India are the major work force in agriculture and perform almost all the agricultural activities. Different observations by different authors have revealed that women’s participation in agriculture and allied activities range from 60 to 70 percent in farm activities, however the percentage of women cultivators have reduced considerably.

**Discrimination against women**

Agricultural technology has helped to pull millions of people out of poverty, but a gender-sensitive approach is required to address some of the inequalities women face like time and labour constraints, including childcare, domestic violence and rape, lack of physical security during common tasks that require unsafe travel, like firewood and water gathering, land ownership laws and the tendency to let men control financial decisions. USAID reports that women are more likely than men to improve the health and nutrition of their families, and communities with women serving as strong leaders may fare better in events of climate disaster[7]. Providing equal access to land, markets and technologies can ensure safety and increase production.

Although women make up at least 43 percent of the agricultural labour force worldwide, they typically lack access to education, extension services, land and credit. And this gender inequality comes at a huge cost, not just for women, but society as a whole. Discrimination against women can undermine economic development by limiting food security for families and preventing women and girls from achieving greater opportunities in education. In addition, many agricultural research and development programs ignore the needs and hopes of women farmers.

**Farm women problems**

The women doing farm activity faces various problems which acts as the obstacles for her to empower the farm activities. In a farm land there are various farm tools and technologies which are not much known by the women farmers. When there is no much knowledge about the new technologies in agriculture, the women faces problem in doing farm work and have to depend on other external individual for support. The proper guide lines and support from the extension officers and KVK officials would support the women farmers to empower them in agriculture. Research from the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization shows that if women had the same access to non-land resources as male farmers, they could lift 100-150 million people out of hunger. Thus, it is very important than awareness about the farm technologies should be disseminated to the farm women.

**Role of ICAR**

ICAR takes the lead through the KVKs across the country, by launching the Idea of “Women empowerment in Agricultural Development”. These women farmers form the village level Extension wing of KVK and work closely with ATMA. ICAR considers launching it on a pilot scale in a few states during the year and observe its impact. This process itself of selection of women farmers and awarding them will create greater awareness among the local officials and general public about the importance of empowering women.

3. Conclusion

Women are the backbone of agricultural workforce but worldwide her hard work has mostly been unpaid. She does the most tedious and back-breaking tasks in agriculture, animal husbandry and homes. Due to various problems that are being faced by the women farmers, they are not able to contribute more to the agriculture of our country. The major obstacles start at their homes in the form of gender inequality, not able to decide by themselves in farm activities and lack of awareness about the latest technologies of agriculture [8]. When a women empowers herself in agriculture, the nation starts developing faster and more widely. In extension activities the women is now the centre point and activities. This empowerment initiates a global level support for humanists thinking. Her enlightenment will change the face of rural India.

4. References


