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## Women Empowerment in Agriculture Sector in India

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture in India is playing a key role in the development of Indian Economy. The main players of the agriculture sector is women in India. It is imperative and noteworthy that more than 65% of the people are women in farming sector next to manufacturing sector in Pan India level. In olden days, Agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. But the sector is underperforming in many countries in part because women, who are often a crucial human resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity. Since ancient times women have been playing a crucial role in family as well as in farming but their contribution has not been identified fully and acknowledged

### Women Empowerment in Agriculture

Empowerment process is strengthened through educational interventions, transfer of technologies, feasibility trials and knowledge sharing. The Directorate of Rural Women in Agriculture (DRWA), other ICAR institutes and KVKs have concentrated their researches, inter alia, to relieve women of the drudgery by providing time and labour saving tools. Besides, vocational trainings are being conducted to impart skills necessary to undertake different avocations. KVKs have trained more than two lakh farm women, girls and women extension workers. The strategies used by AICRP on Home Science have encouraged women to play key role in micro level planning, designing community infrastructure for information dissemination and mobilization of community resources (human and material) to gain benefits from the projects. Empirical evidence suggests that women have moved from beneficiaries to active partners in shaping empowerment. In the present scenario of globalization, liberalization and privatization of agricultural sector, the sustainable development and empowerment of farm women is considered as a key factor for development of any country (Sharma, 2012).

Rural women are the major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Her work ranges from crop production, livestock production to cottage industry. From household and family maintenance activities, to transporting water, fuel and fodder.

Despite such a huge involvement, her role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic, and political indicators. Women's wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and women's engagement in multiple home-based economic activities leads to under remuneration for their work. Women spend long hours fetching water, doing laundry, preparing food, and carrying out agricultural duties. Not only are these tasks physically hard and demanding, they also rob girls of the opportunity to study. The nature and sphere of women's productivity in the labor market is largely determined by socio-cultural and economic factors. Women do not enter the labor market on equal terms when compared to men. Their occupational choices are also limited due to social and cultural constraints, gender bias in the labor market, and lack of supportive facilities such as child care, transport, and accommodation in the formal sector of the labor market. Women's labor power is considered inferior because of employer's predetermined notion of women's primary role as homemakers. As a result of discrimination against female labor, women are concentrated in the secondary sector of labor market. Their work is low paid, low status, casual, and lacks potential upward mobility

Rural women are torchbearers for social, economic and environment transformation for the 'New India'. In India, Agriculture employs about 80 percent of rural women. Empowering and mainstreaming rural women workforce in agriculture can bring paradigm shift towards economic growth. It will enhance food and nutrition security and alleviate poverty and hunger. It's a winwin strategy for achieving Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

India is celebrating and commemorating the progressive 75 years of India after independence with 'Azaadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' and promulgating mission of warranting women as "Empowered women- Empowered Nation". India is an agrarian economy with about 54.6 percent of total workforce engaged in agricultural and allied sector activities (Census 2011). Women are extensively engaged in the activities pertaining to agriculture and allied sector. The workforce participation rate for rural females is significantly higher at 41.8 percent against urban women participation rate of 35.31 percent (MoSPI, 2017).

In India, reforms are underlined for holistic development of women, enabling socio-economic and health security. Since Independence, several government flagship schemes and programmes are initiated to improve rural women stature in society by creating livelihood opportunities and engagements in paid employments. Various schemes, such as the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Program (PMEGP), National Livelihoods Mission, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana I (PMMVY), etc. has made significant contributions in creating gender parity and socio-economic empowerment of women in India. Now, rural women have availing access to education, productive resources, capacity building, skill development, healthcare facilities and diversified livelihood opportunities through government beneficiary schemes

### **The status of Women in Agriculture**

- 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. The situation is worse in Bihar with only 7% women having land rights, though women play an important role in various agricultural activities.

- Economic Survey 2017-18 says that with 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 laborers.
- Bihar’s agriculture sector is highly feminized, with 50.1% of the total workforce engaged in farming activities being women (**‘Women in the informal economy of Bihar’ – ADRI**)
- 70% of all women engaged in cultivation are from households witnessing migration. (**Report released in 2014 by IHD, New Delhi**)
- About 60-80% food are produced by rural women.

Although the dependence on agriculture has reduced over the years, still it accounts for more than one-third of rural income and is the fundamental aspect of the rural economy. With two-third of the population living in villages' rural economy had become the inherent strength during the pandemic. By boosting the economy of rural India investment, consumption, government expenditure and exports will be multiplied. Currently, the rural economy is distressed. Rising Inflation and low real wages both result in sluggish spending. To ensure inclusive economic growth, the government needs to urgently focus on transforming the village economy to pull the maximum number of people out of subsistence farming and give them a much more remunerative role. The upcoming budget should be focused on rural income growth and our target should be at least 100% growth in every household income in near future.

### **Farmer Producer Organization**

The recent thrust by the government on aggregation through Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) is an impactful mechanism for addressing some of these fundamental challenges of lack of agency, price inequalities and women’s participation in production and market systems. Legally registered as a collective of farmers, and often built around self-help groups (SHGs), FPOs are formed by collectivizing a set of farmers with an objective of enhancing their incomes and providing better economies of scale. Over the years, FPOs have shown the potential to create value across different post-harvest phases, including harvesting, primary processing, storage, secondary processing, and market linkages. There has also been increasing evidence that FPOs have been effective in driving enhanced market access, bargaining power, collective agency and decreased transaction costs for women farmers. In Bihar, for example, the JEEVIKA programme - has mobilised over 200,000 women small-farmers into commodity-based FPOs. These FPOs have achieved significantly higher turnover and successfully marketed grains, fruits and vegetables. Farmer level returns, in some cases, have gone up by 20-30%. The success of the FPO model per se, and the success stories of women owned and managed FPOs are beginning to emerge as a very positive trend. Recognizing the critical role of women in agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare declared 15 October of every year as Women Farmer’s Day, but gender-specific intervention to give women their entitlement still remains on paper.

### **Recommendations**

- To enhance the extent of participation, knowledge level should be improved so there is a need to conduct camps, workshops, demonstrations and training

programmes at village, block and district levels for the members of the whole family and intensified educational efforts by local extension agents must be made.

- The entry of rural women particularly in agri-based enterprises should be encouraged and motivated and also Government should take steps to develop women entrepreneur networks to deliver lectures on processing, procurement, management and marketing among the rural women.
- To empower women, case studies/ stories of successful women can be highlighted and publicized by effective use of Information and Communication Technologies.
- Policy should be framed to train rural women particularly engaged in agri-based enterprises and bring them into mainstream of the society.
- Agri-based enterprises should be promoted in the rural area for motivating rural women to engage themselves in different agri-based enterprises with the right assistance and strengthening their capacities besides adding to the family income and national productivity.

## II. CONCLUSION

The latest All India Report of Agriculture Census (2015-16) shows that the total number of operational holdings in the country increased from 138.35 million in 2010-11 to 146.45 million in 2015-16, showing an increase of 5.86 per cent. Male operational holdings (excluding institutional) constituted 86.0 per cent while female holdings were 14.0 per cent in 2015-16 against 87.2 per cent and 12.8 per cent respectively in 2010-11. This data indicates the rising participation of females in the management and/or operation of agricultural holdings in the country

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