



# AN ANALYSIS ON ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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**Abstract--** In general the contributing factors that influences women's role in agriculture depends upon the women's dependence on their husband. The other one is illiteracy, ignorance, low socio economic status and traditional religious and cultural dominance and low political participation in the community. The women is 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. 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 resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity. Agriculture sector as a whole has developed and emerged immensely with the infusion of science and technology. But this latest emergence is not capable of plummeting the ignorance of women labour as an integral part of this industry. In developing countries like India, agriculture continues to absorb and employ female work force but fails to give them recognition of employed or hired labour. Women constituted 38% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. It is also estimated that 45.3% of the agricultural labour force consists of women. The contribution of women to agricultural and food production is significant but it is impossible to verify empirically the share produced by women. Women's participation in rural labour markets varies considerably across regions, but invariably women are over represented in unpaid, seasonal and part time work, and the available evidence suggests that women are often paid less than men, for the same work.

**Key Words:** *Women, Gender, Agriculture, Labour force, Rural Development.*

## INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the back bone of many developing countries. Women account for more than half of the work force by participating in different activities, either directly or indirectly. The gender division of labor varies from one society and culture to another, and within each culture external circumstances influence the level of activity. However, except in few most developed countries, women's efforts are not yet realized by society. Rural development in India cannot be imagined without the active participation of women. Women are, of course form an integral part of farming Household. They are involved in over half of the farm activities in many developing countries, bear most of responsibilities for household food security and contribute to household well being through their income generating activities.

India is one of the poor countries in the world with high illiterate rates. Illiteracy affects women to a higher extent due to heavy household workloads, cultural influence, and lack of Know how. However, it is impossible to think of development while neglecting the women work force, as women represent the major force for rural changes, largely as an untapped resource that could boost rural development and lead to higher growth rates and increased food production. Around 85% of the populations live in rural areas where social services such as education and health are poor and rural women's participation in different economic activities such as agricultural work in the community is low. Though there is lack of gender data in the country some studies show that women in rural areas work over 15 hours a day but they receive little economic benefit in return. They also have less access to education than men do. Moreover, very few women assume leadership and decision making position at all levels in the country. Given this reality the development polices, programs and projects fail to address the situation of women.

In many cases, there is social bias that supports the men's role by ignoring the females' in a given society. Rural women particularly in the developing countries exercise hardship by undertaking triple roles, that is, productive role, reproductive role and community participation role in their day to day life. They also live in an environment where less or no social services, lack of infrastructural facilities and with no exposure to information and technologies. On the other hand, India is the home where different nations, nationalities and ethnic groups live, who perform and follow their own culture, traditions, values and norms. Under these circumstances women have to



follow the norms and values of the societies regarding their position in political, economic and socio cultural spheres. In addition to this marginalization, women are victims of harmful traditional Practices; in general women tend to be involved in a wide range of activities and enterprises. They are engaged in productive activities in crop and livestock management. On the other hand, they have high responsibility in domestic affair. As a consequence, the women were not allowed to do certain types of jobs. The function of child bearing or the social function of maternity need not deprive women from opportunities for engagement in economic development. The recognition of the role of women in social and economic activities has been legalized the objective of protecting and empowering women as workers, and protecting the dignity of motherhood.

For development to take root in our country women's role should be recognized and they have to be given their share over all the properties. These days' government and non government organizations are trying to help women get recognition from society which they are part of what is more surprising is that most women themselves do not realize that they are prevented from owning what they deserve recognition and appreciation. The study area has the same problem as it gives less attention to women role in their everyday activities.

#### WOMEN'S AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

In most societies men's roles in agricultural activities is understood to be directed and clear. However women's role in agriculture is not clearly recognized. Hence a clear picture of women's participation in agriculture is needed. Although this is increasing that, women's are involved in the world agriculture until recently have been difficult to gain a clear picture of where, and under what circumstance women particular in the farm work. Although the micro studies documenting the importance of women's roles have arisen steadily, national statistics have to undercount women's agricultural labour, due to their definition of agricultural activities in their intervening producer.

Women play important roles to help their family in particular and their community in general in sewing their food demand in the world. But the most surprising thing is that the community has not significantly understood the effort that they exert in the last several years. Women are involved in agricultural and rural development representing more than half of the labor required to produce food consumed in developing countries. One problem here is reaching at common understanding as to how female farmers are perceived in society, observations indicate that a female farmer is commonly perceived as a co-farmer as marginal players in agricultural development particularly by those individuals with significant influence is research, extension and development positions.

Women are often farming without benefit of the improved inputs and services and required for a more productive and remunerative agriculture. The paradox is most obvious in the country shifting where it is estimated the female do 60-80% of all agricultural work. Yet some females are rarely systematically targeted for training, extension, research technology or improved access to resource and thereby to increase productivity in the agricultural sector will need be better directed to the female population goals for growth are to be achieved.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimate agricultural censuses' data for the 82 developing countries shows, women's proportion in the agricultural labour force to be 42% for Africa, the regional average was 46% for North Africa for middle east 31% and for micro data set is not a complete description of women's agricultural work. Nevertheless, some description of women's agricultural work can also be made as inference. In addition to the substantial number of women documented national agricultural labor force data, many women and girls work as unpaid female laborers. Many are primary involved in production of family food supply and domestic work, many work intensively in the fields only during the peak labour seasons. Rural women play multiple roles in agricultural systems, they may be brothers for those who have no brothers, housekeepers, wage labour, agricultural processes, market women and as well as agricultural producers. Most rural women make constant trade off in allocating labour time and productive resources among their roles and obligation. Most farming systems display mixed pattern of women's agricultural responsibilities in the production cycle where one sex is primarily responsible for livestock, vegetables and tree crops and care for their dwellings.



## WOMEN'S ACCESS TO KEY ECONOMIC RESOURCES

In India, the first shifting cultivation where she was the main tool for plowing the land. The contribution of women was much greater than men. In this system women were the dominant figures of the practice of farming whereas men's roles were only confined to clearing the land. Women prepare the soil, sowing, weeding, harvesting, threshing and transporting farm products. In undertaking different economic activities more than men, rural women in developing countries have less property right, have no role in the economic input and they have remained economically insecure. Rural women have played significant role in livestock production in developing countries and they are active participants in the livestock management such as supply of fodder, milking, protecting animals. Land and property right for women require urgent attention by policy makers and land reform practitioners in India during the last three decades. The increased focus on a global realization of women empowerment in India generally gets little attention.

Women have equal right with men with respect to use, transfer, and control of property. They also receive equal treatment in the inheritance of property right. There are several articles, included in the government constitution and also legal provision that should be exercised and implemented at different levels of government organization, private sector and civil society. However, the ground reality does not match with the blueprint of the policy in the traditionally and culturally blessed society about women's Right. State in particular, the accessibility of women to key economic resources such as land and other economic and income generating activities remain far behind. Even though, the government tried to empower women by promoting the right of women on owning properties and the right to make decision on the economic and income generating activities equal to men, at local level, social courts and community elders had not been aware to bring the necessary change in attitude towards the reality. Similarly, the local level political leaders and other officials do not have enough information and have less knowledge to implement and interpret laws that have been promulgated by the government. But Women's were not utilizing these opportunities because of their illiteracy and each of exposure to information to resist men's dominance, social bias and traditional norms.

At National level, the government of India under the Ministry of Agriculture and development formulated a policy of rural land administration and utilization, with the objective to increase economic growth through increasing of production in order to ensure food Security and poverty reduction. To implement this policy the government launches the program of rural land registration and certification that can treat both men and women equally. But practically the implementation of land registration and certification in the study area is low as the number of women who were registered and certified for ownership of rural land was negligible. The low participation may be due to traditional and cultural values of the society, low educational level of local leaders in effective implementation of policy, inadequate training, and lack of enough information about the policy that promote women empowerment, etc.

The place of women in the society is complex that involves many interrelated problems which made women's livelihood difficult in relation to men. The role played by women both in the productive and reproductive sphere is very high. However, the position given to women in the society it is very little. The contribution of women in the improvement of the socio economy, the well being of human life is more significant than has been traditionally acknowledged. This means that women productive and reproductive role were not getting sufficient consideration and less attention were given to their role in sustainable development of human well being. The contribution of women in reducing poverty and hunger in India is more important than that of men. In developing countries like India there are traditional perceptions and ill attitudes among the society toward the women's right on Properties. These perceptions were deep rooted in the society and greatly affect the women's role in the economy. A deep rooted negative perception of the society towards the empowerment of women, directly or indirectly, has been reflected in the government sector in employment and remuneration schemes. Considering Agriculture, which is the backbone of economy in the developing countries like India, the contribution of women in the agricultural practices from plowing of farm land up to transporting of products to homestead is extremely important. Besides, the



contribution of Indian women in general by assisting of their husband in many economical activities is very high. However, all those roles they play had not been recognized, because traditionally the society provides them low status.

#### **WOMEN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

When women are economically and socially empowered, they become a potent force for change. In rural areas of the developing world, women play a key role in running households and make major contributions to agricultural production. But the inequalities that exist between women and men make it difficult for women to fulfill their potential. Women rarely have access to the resources that would make their work more productive and ease their heavy workload. Ultimately, it is not just women who are held back, but also their families, their communities and local economies. Rural women have many roles, and they have responsibilities and knowledge that differ from those of men. As farmers, they plant, weed and harvest food crops and tend livestock. As caretakers, they look after children and relatives, prepare meals and manage the home. Many women earn extra income by working as wage labourers, producing and selling vegetables, or engaging in small scale trading and enterprises. Added to these multiple tasks, they spend long hours fetching water and collecting firewood. In developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, women typically work 12 more hours per week than men.

In poor and marginal areas and areas affected by climate change, where men have been forced to migrate in search of work, women often have the sole responsibility for farming and raising the children. Despite their many responsibilities, women have significantly less access to the resources and services they need to increase their productivity and their income and ease their burden of household duties. Women are held back by lack of education, unequal property rights and limited control over resources. Labour intensive and time consuming activities further hinder women's ability to improve their income-earning potential. In order for poor communities to prosper and grow, women's needs and rights must be addressed. At a time when smallholder agriculture is changing rapidly as a result of commercialization, globalization, climate change, new technologies and migration patterns, it is important to recognize the key role women play in agriculture. They need support to help them adapt to these changes and to seize emerging opportunities. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) supported projects demonstrate that investing in women can generate significant improvements in productivity and food security. Entire communities benefit socially and economically when women have access to land, water, education, training, financial services and strong organizations. World Bank studies show that, in many countries of sub Saharan Africa, food production could increase by 10 to 20 per cent if women faced fewer constraints. The empowerment of women and equal opportunities for both sexes are fundamental in reducing poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

Land is basic resource for agriculture production in India. Agriculture accounts for almost 41% of the GDP, 80% of exports and 80% of the labour force. Eighty five percent of the India population is rural and agricultural based. Major agricultural development issues underlie on the existing land tenure system. Women are affected by many issues relate to land and agriculture. Women's right to land is affected by land scarcity. Women are marginalized from accessing land whenever land is scarce. Rural women do not have equitable access to land and agricultural resources. They have low involvement in development activities and have low decision making power. Their labour contribution to the agricultural sector is invisible because of the gender division of labour in communities. Farming system and cultural taboos on women ploughing and showing had affected women's right on land. These households mostly end up in poverty because of lack of adult male labour which, the farming system requires.

#### **IFAD SUPPORTS WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE**

IFAD has long recognized the importance of improving the well-being and prosperity of women and fostering equality between the sexes. IFAD supported programmes and projects help women access resources and participate in decision-making, and work to ensure that women and men benefit more equally from development initiatives.



There is no single formula: men's and women's roles and relationships differ according to context. Understanding and addressing these differences is an ongoing endeavour. In more than 30 years of working in rural development, we have seen that women can be a powerful force in fighting poverty. To that end, we work to defend their land rights; improve their access to water, education, training and credit; and strengthen their leadership roles. In 2010, at the third global Farmers' Forum, we hosted a landmark meeting on rural women's leadership, bringing together women-farmer leaders from every continent. Improving women's ability to make a profit is an essential step towards bettering their overall status. Greater autonomy and self esteem go hand in hand with economic and social empowerment. Women have found that working together, in groups and networks, is a highly effective way of gaining access to the assets and services they need to expand their opportunities. IFAD plays an equally important role in policy dialogue. We advocate for more investment in rural women and underline the importance of prioritizing women's needs within national agricultural programmes. This is the overall point of the 2010-2011 editions of *The State of Food and Agriculture*, subtitled *Women in Agriculture: Closing the gender gap* a publication of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, with contributions from IFAD and the World Food Programme. The report points out that promoting gender equality and empowering women in agriculture are fundamental to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, as well as the goal of gender equality.

### INFLUENCING FACTORS WOMEN'S ROLE IN AGRICULTURE

#### *Basic Factors Influencing Women's Role on Agricultural Development*

In Indian social context, there is a male domination over the women. Patriarchal system of gender relations was observed, where the male enjoys economic, political, and normative and ideological privileges over the female. By oppression we mean the domination of the other by force, and exploitation is taking advantage for one self, of some body's right unjustly. The contributing factors that influences women's role in agriculture depends upon the women's dependence on their husband, illiteracy, ignorance, low social status and traditional religious and cultural dominance, political and economic status. On the degree of influence, 79.09% of respondents claimed that all factors equally contribute to the domination. However, 16.7% responded the social status and 4.23% religious domination. However, in focus group discussion the group attributed women's role in agriculture depends on the attitude of women themselves, due to lack of self esteem, less awareness of women's status in society and illiteracy.

#### *Social Status of Women*

According to the Cultural and Information office, the position of women in society is notably poor. Traditional society in the rural area is hierarchical and dominated by men, as evidenced by marriage customs. Husband and wives depend on each other for economic, social, and ritual activities. This interdependency gives strong relationship between husband and wives. The wives are expected to assume subordinate position to the wishes and needs of their husbands. So, the husband has full control over all the properties of the family. Division of labor between husband and wife is very important to understand the relationship and the interdependence they have. To begin with, all important rituals and positions are held by the husband as a head of the family. The husband has full right of administering the family and is considered as the only head of the family. Therefore, wives and his respected children should obey him. In addition to this the husband is expected to cultivate the crop and supply his family with all necessities.

In all human society, people enjoy their own culture, custom, tradition and belief, etc. These social structures empower men and women differently. These differences in the empowerment provide different opportunity and privileges for women and men. In many societies those who were subjected to different discrimination and tight violations were the women. As men control all the resources, the men are the decision makers in all economic, political and social issues while the women just become the receptor of all issues guided by men.



### *Economic Status of Women*

Women's contribution to agriculture, whether it be subsistence farming or commercial agriculture, when measured in terms of the number of tasks performed, time spent and the extent

of women's contribution is aptly highlighted by a micro study indicated that out of 24 hours, 14.30 hours women day was used for household activities, on the other hand the men spend, out of 24 hours 9.30 hours passed on work in a day. However, according to the survey data showed that women's spend out of 24 hours 18 hours on work related to agricultural and non agricultural activities. Out of which 8 hours spent in agricultural activities and 10 hours spent in domestic chores, such as cleaning the barn and the house, milking cows and feeding them, prepare breakfast and boiling coffee, fetching water and collecting fire wood, cooking lunch then visit the market and sell or buy, come home and prepare dinner, feed their family.

Unpaid households' chores such as preparing food, cleaning the house, taking care of children or collecting fire wood are not considered being economic activities. Similarly, unpaid community and voluntary services are classified as non-common activities. These show that focusing on women in all development agenda is the best means to achieve pro poor economic growth. The report indicated that unless women are educated to get employment opportunity, access to resources, right to property ownership, equal political and social participation as that of men, it is not possible to reduce poverty in India. Rural women are over loaded and over burdened by domestic and productive works that reduce their income earning capacity. Women work for longer hours than men. An average of their work per a day is 50% longer than men.

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### *Cafeteria for Women in Agriculture*

Mainstreaming gender is an important component of the Policy Framework for Agricultural Extension (PFAE) developed by the Ministry of Agriculture (Government of India). The Centre developed a cafeteria for the Ministry of Agriculture for offering it to states to guide the development of new programmes for women in agriculture. New Programmes for women in agriculture should be developed based on the following key principles identified in the cafeteria.

- New programmes that are proposed should expand their definition of agriculture beyond crop production and should be based on site specific needs assessments.
- New projects that are proposed should build on groups, networks, organizational capacity and resources already in place and functioning from existing project initiatives and should take on and build on lessons from existing projects.
- Apart from extending agricultural technologies on production and post harvest to women farmers, new programmes should concentrate their efforts in providing crucial back up services and support (backward and forward linkages) to help women groups to successfully adopt new techniques, crops and enterprises to increase their incomes and employment opportunities.
- New programmes should be planned with adequate resources for mobilizing women, forming groups, improving capacity and capability in technical, organizational and commercial (business or micro enterprises) sectors and support systems (credit, raw material and markets).
- These should be prepared jointly in consultations with other organizations (public, private and voluntary) that can potentially complement and supplement the efforts of the state Department of Agriculture.



## CONCLUSION

The Government of India has provided an opportunity to rural women to live with dignity and honor and equal footing with the rural man. Earlier, the contribution of the rural women was invisible to the people with patriarchal mindsets. For making their lives successful and meaningful, Indian rural women have also to put in 100 percent initiative. The international development community has recognized that agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor. But the agricultural sector in many developing countries is underperforming, in part because women, who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere, face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources. Efforts by national governments and the international community to achieve their goals for agricultural development, economic growth and food security will be strengthened and accelerated if they build on the contributions that women make and take steps to alleviate these constraints. Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector.

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