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WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields. The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture varies greatly from region to region. But regardless of these variations, women are actively involved in various agricultural activities.

As per Census 2011, out of total female main workers, 55 per cent were agricultural labourers and 24 per cent were cultivators. However, only 12.8 per cent of the operational holdings were owned by women, which reflect the gender disparity in ownership of landholdings in agriculture. Moreover, there is concentration of operational holdings (25.7 per cent) by women in the marginal and small holdings categories.

Rural women perform numerous labour intensive jobs such as weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, picking, cotton stick collection, separation of seeds from fibre, keeping of livestock and its other associated activities like milking, milk processing, preparation of ghee, etc. Details of activities taken up by women in Agriculture and its allied activities are as follows.

Agriculture

Mainly rural women are engaged in agricultural activities in three different ways depending on the socio-economic status of their family and regional factors. They work as:

- Paid Labourers.
- Cultivator doing labour on their own land.
- Managers of certain aspects of agricultural production by way of labour supervision and the participation in post harvest operations.

The types of agricultural activities taken up by women include the following :

- Sowing
- Nursery management
- Transplanting
- Weeding
- Irrigation
- Fertilizer application
- Plant protection
- Harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.

Livestock

Livestock is the primary livelihood activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm incomes. It is a common practice in the rural areas to give an animal as part of a women's dowry. Studies have revealed rural women earn extra income from the sale of milk and animals. Mostly women are engaged in cattle management activities such as

- Cleaning of animal and sheds
- Watering of cattle
- Milking the animals

- Fodder collection
- Preparing dung cakes
- Collection farm yard manure

Except grazing, all other livestock management activities are predominantly performed by women. Men, however, share the responsibility of taking care of sick animals. It is evident that the women are playing a dominant role in the livestock production and management activities.

Feminisation of Agriculture

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 labourers. Globally, there is empirical evidence that women have a decisive role in ensuring food security and preserving local agro-biodiversity.

Rural women are responsible for the integrated management and use of diverse natural resources to meet the daily household needs. This requires that women farmers should have enhanced access to resources like land, water, credit, technology and training which warrants critical analysis in the context of India. In addition, the entitlements of women farmers will be the key to improve agriculture productivity. The differential access of women to resources like land, credit, water, seeds and markets needs to be addressed.

With women predominant at all levels- production, pre-harvest, post-harvest processing, packaging, marketing – of the agricultural value chain, to increase productivity in agriculture, it is imperative to adopt gender specific interventions. An 'inclusive transformative agricultural policy' should aim at gender-specific intervention to raise productivity of small farm holdings, integrate

women as active agents in rural transformation, and engage men and women in extension services with gender expertise.

Work participation scenario:

On an average, 43 per cent of the agricultural work force in developing countries, ranging from 20 per cent in Latin America to 50 per cent in Eastern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, women have less access than men to agriculture related assets, inputs and services. Women work in agriculture as farmers on their own account, as unpaid workers on family farms and as paid or unpaid labourers 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 labour 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. This masks changes in other countries where the female share of the agricultural labour force appears to have increased dramatically, such as Pakistan where it has almost tripled since 1980, to 30 percent, and Bangladesh where women now exceed 50 percent of the agricultural labour force.

Conclusion

Women have been contributing enormously to agricultural growth and development through their involvement in crop production, horticulture, animal husbandry, fisheries, natural resource management etc. Though the proportion of women workers in

agriculture has declined, yet they constitute a significant workforce in agriculture. Globally, they constitute large percent of economically active population in agriculture. Region-wise figures show that agriculture supports a very high proportion of economically active women, particularly in Asia and Africa and in India.

persisting gender gap in access to and control of resources remains an important concern which has not only kept women in a vicious circle of low productivity but also has thrown up questions about inclusive and sustainable growth of the sector. The need of the hour is on how to bridge the gender gap and empower women with new knowledge and technology is a great challenge, particularly in the context of socio-economic and climate related changes.

References : <https://vikaspedia.in/agriculture/women-and-agriculture/role-of-women-in-agriculture-and-allied-fields-1>