

Agro-based enterprises

A way forward to women empowerment

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Women's contribution to agriculture is significant as they are the major food producers across the world. Though they perform more than 80% of the agricultural activities, their role and contribution in agriculture remain unrecognized and overlooked. Women farmers are identified as an imperative link in the development of agriculture and allied sectors (livestock production, fishing, horticulture, agroforestry, post-harvesting operations, etc.). Women farmers could increase farm yield by 20-30%, which could raise agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4%, if they had the same access to productive resources and training as men. Women constitute about 33% of cultivators and about 47% of agricultural labourers (MANAGE 2021). For adding more power to the agriculture sector, recognizing women and strengthening their status from farm to home is the need of the hour. Women empowerment through agro-based enterprise is an emerging solution for establishment of their powerful status and overall development of the society.

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INDIAN rural women are considered as backbone of agriculture and for rural India, agricultural sector is only source of livelihood security and socio-economic upliftment. This sector is the largest contributor to India's GDP, economic development and mainly depend on the women farmer as they play the role of more than 75% of full time labour at the farm according to international humanitarian group OXFAM. The role of Indian women farmer can be elaborated as 85% of their population engaged in agricultural activities, 47% women involved in tree plantation and cotton cultivation, 45% involved in growing oilseeds, 39% in cultivating vegetables and most importantly approximately 60-80% of food produced by them. Indian women play a significant role in agriculture and allied sector since ages which does not need any validation.

Women in agriculture and allied sector

Indian rural women play a significant and crucial role in the agriculture and allied sector. The nature and the extent of work performed by the women farmer vary from region to region. According to Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR 2020), the participation of women is 75% in the production of major crops, 79% in horticulture, 51% in post-harvest work and 95% in animal husbandry and fisheries. Women participation

in India gradually increased from 19.67 to 29.56% from 1981-2021 in agriculture and allied sector activities. Because of the migration of male farmers towards cities for alternative source of income generation, the agriculture sector is primarily taken care of by the female counterpart leading to disproportionate concentration of women in agriculture. This phenomenon was termed as 'feminization of agriculture' by Economic Survey, 2017-18. Generally their work can be categorized as labour intensive (paid labour), cultivator and farm manager (supervisor) depending on the socio-economic status of their family. The work performed by them ranges from sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, nursery management, harvesting, storage, marketing etc. In case of dairy, all the work related to raising of dairy animals eg. feeding, watering, milking, cleaning of animal and sheds, preparation of dung cake, collection of farmyard manure, fodder collection etc. generally performed by them. In case of poultry farming, women participation at household level is central. It is one of the major sources of rural economy. The inestimable role played by women in fisheries is generally underestimated. According to research papers, in the total population of active fishers, 30% are fisherwomen. The contributions of the fisherwomen enter every aspect of pre-and post-harvest handling,

preservation, processing, marketing and provide a vital link between producers and consumers. They are also actively involved in the fish auction, buying fish and later take it to the market for sale.

Role in food and livelihood security

Globally, there is pragmatic evidence that women have a decisive position in ensuring food security, livelihood 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. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his message during celebration of International Day of Rural Women said that 'rural women are farmers and farm workers, horticulturists and market sellers, entrepreneurs and community leaders. Rural women are the backbone of sustainable livelihoods and provide food security for their families and communities.' Livestock is the primary livelihood activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm incomes. Studies have revealed rural women earn extra income from the sale of milk and animals and utilize the money for household works. The rural women rear livestock as an insurance against economic uncertainty. There is practice of rearing small ruminants by rural women and selling them during festive season to earn money. Every woman in the family chooses her goat/ sheep and nurtures them till the market age. Thus woman in rural India not only nurture their family but also provide financial assistance contributing to overall economic development of the country.

Social role

The India rural women are often assigned responsibility to care for family members, stocking supplies and maintaining the household under many unfavourable conditions. Usually it is the women who must stay at home and feed all the family members, the children, old and sick in times of scarcity apart from working in agriculture field and keeping livestock. Women may find themselves burdened with greater responsibilities and work centered on the household. Moreover women involved in marketing suffer the double burden of being women in a traditional and highly prescriptive society and of being engaged in a form of employment.

Women in agribusiness

Agribusiness is the complete value chain in agriculture and allied sector, which involve chain of activities from the raw materials and necessary resources to produce desirable goods and services, distributors and retailers that get products to end consumers. After playing so many roles, the rural women have expanded their wings in agribusiness value chain to improve their livelihood and others by discovering new avenue of income generation. Rural women are involved at all levels of production, pre-harvest, post-harvest processing, packaging, marketing of the agricultural value chain,

to increase productivity in agriculture. Globally women are overcoming various challenges to establish profitable agribusiness. However, access to necessary credits, resources, high-value organized markets and incubation to sufficient agribusiness trainings are essential requirements for women entrepreneurs to break through the 'glass ceiling' and expand their agribusinesses to compete on international markets. In order to sensitize women with latest techniques in agricultural sectors and to adopt business of agribased products, trainings are being imparted to women farmers under schemes of Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Ministry of Rural Development.

Challenges of women empowerment

Women working in agriculture and allied sector face many barriers such as lower access to resources, social and labour rights, lower influence and visibility. They hardly enjoy land ownership rights directly in their names. According to agricultural statistics, 73.2% of rural women work in agriculture sector but only 12% of them own agriculture land. This shows the huge disparity in land holding in comparison to their male counterpart. Limited access to arable land further limits livelihood options and worsens monetary pressure on women, especially in women-led households. Women perform multiple task related to unmechanized agriculture which add more burden on them due to lack of equipment and appropriate technology as most of the time they are unaware about the improved technology. Little contribution in decision making process, either inside home or on the field made them unrecognizable. Few women own agricultural productive resources such as land, animals and machinery but their percentage is always less. Due to financial limitations, poor women farmers are unable to purchase innovative, climate resilient technology to improve productivity. Women farmers in agriculture and allied sector often suffer from high illiteracy rate. Women earn fewer wages, especially in joint, informal and private sector. Lack of market intelligence, weak bargaining power with the buyers and inadequate information put women farmers under miserable situation. The gender inequality in rural India further aggravates the pathetic conditions of women. All these issues in the way of women empowerment should be checked step by step with sustainable solution approach.

Empowering the powerhouse (women) of rural India

Empowering rural women with agricultural skills and resources will considerably augment their productivity, while ultimately contributing to economic growth and income generation. Providing rural women with the knowledge to produce better quality crops, with higher yields and judicious use of precious resources will also help them to become more empowered, enabling them to uplift their socio-economic status, community growth and feeding growing population. Capacity building for improving entrepreneurial skills and training on practical use of agricultural technology may

help in improving their self-esteem. Access to academic education, protection against gender discrimination, provision of equal rights in every accessible dimension, raising public awareness regarding their importance in farming, agriculture, food and livelihood security are the some actions that can be taken to empower the women.

Role of agro-based enterprise towards women empowerment

Smt. Pratibha Trivedi is a 46-year-old woman farmer from Village - Saraiya, District - Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh. Today, as an independent farmer, she is able to feed her family with nutritious food and provide employment opportunity for women farmers in her village through small agro-enterprise. She never let her morale down even though she was not physically strong. Post graduate in Hindi and having little knowledge about agricultural sector, with the help of KVK, Sitapur II, she adopted the innovations of agriculture and allied sector on her small land to support her family. Now she has made her identity as a successful woman farmer and entrepreneur.

Prior to this, Mrs. Pratibha Trivedi was a traditional farmer who owned an acre of land, adopting old traditional farming methods and growing local vegetables like beans, pumpkin, tomato, gourd etc. to support her family. Due to less knowledge on new agricultural techniques and practices, her hard work was not yielding enough results. Krishi Vigyan Kendra-

II, Sitapur interacted with Smt. Pratibha Trivedi in 2016 and motivated her to take up agriculture as agribusiness work, under which she received training on charcoal briquettes from agricultural waste, vermicompost production, lamps and pots making from cow dung and nutrition garden. After the training, she has started her own business and improved her livelihood and income. She has also received many Awards at District Agriculture Departments, Non-Government Organizations, NRLM, Krishi Vigyan Kendra etc.

Outscaling of success

Her journey has inspired many women wanting to uplift their economic status. The other women of the village were greatly influenced by the work and success of Pratibha Trivedi and expressed their desire to work with her. So she formed a group after talking to all the women who wanted to work together and the group was named as '*Sheetal Mahila Svayam Sahayta Samuh*'. The training of all the women in the group was done by Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Sitapur- II. Now the identity of Smt. Pratibha Trivedi and her group has emerged as an example for the women in entire district. Stalls are put up by their group in the exhibitions, fairs etc. as and when organized in the district. There is a lot of demand for the products made by this group during festive season like lamp made from cow dung during Diwali and also similar products. Also the charcoal briquette made by them is in great demand in the local market.



Vermicompost production



Cow dung lamps



Agro-waste charcoal briquette production





Cow dung pots making

Table 1. Economics of agribusiness adopted by Mrs. Pratibha Devi

Unit	Production (Qt/No.)	Rate (₹)	Gross income (₹)	Expenditure (₹)/kg	Net income (₹)
Vermicompost production	40 qt	700/qt	28000	12000 (@ ₹ 300/kg)	16000
Agro waste charcoal briquette	10 qt	280/Kg	280000	150000 (@ ₹ 15/kg)	130000
Cow dung lamps	7 qt	350/Kg	245000	105000 (@ ₹ 15/kg)	140000
Cow dung pots	1200	25/piece	30000	12000 (@ ₹ 10/pc)	18000
Grow bags 15"×15" (Pack of 10)	300 (Packet)	950/pack	285000	150000 (@ ₹ 500/pack)	135000
Total			860000		4,39,000
B:C Ratio	1.977				

SUMMARY

Earlier the women farmers were treated as 'helping hands' of the families for their contribution in agricultural activities. It is established fact that rural women plays vibrant role in Indian agriculture and economy but the irony with women farmer is, that the role played by them is always undervalued and the tag of 'helping hand' has not changed yet. The performance of women farmers is always appreciable and they can

succeed in many avenues but they face lot of challenges like limited access to inputs (land, seed, fertilizers etc.), critical services (capacity building) and organized markets to prove their existence as compared to male counterparts. So there is an urgent need of strengthening and empowering the Indian rural women for holistic development of society and our country.

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JOURNEY of KVKs – Farm Science Centres

