

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT

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In a stratified society like ours access and empowerment of different section of the societies are becoming serious concerns and to address it planners, managers, social scientist all over the world have started deliberating and devising way out like anything. In this direction genders issues are dominating over other vulnerable issues like poverty, class conflicts, communities, ethnic issues etc. In ensuring an egalitarian development gender equity still remains as a pertinent question as it has been for the thousands of years of human civilization.

Gender issues beyond its epistemological meaning certainly imbibes other components like production relation, access to education, geographical distribution, occupational imperatives, marital system and even physical & physiological weaknesses.

The present deliberation will go contextual with the realm of women's empowerment in sustainable agriculture development. The sustainability of agriculture development has become a prerogatives to the women's participation moving across the caste, Creed and economic echelons. Our need is to ascertain and assure the areas where women are still far from enjoying the minimum privileges and question of empowerment has been thrown to a very complex, integrated situation the access to resources, institution, decision making process and information etc. are the pertinent question in making the women empowered, confident, and accorded to the mainstream social processes.

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So, a stepwise discussion will unveil the areas of concerns and the expected redressals therewith:

Following are some of the major handicaps in overall development of women and the suggestions to overcome with special reference to agriculture.

Limited access to resources (Land) :

Access to assets is the single most urgent need for the upliftment of women in general and farm women in particular. Though the Indian legislation permits equal right of man & women in property yet the condition in actual sense is not so. Rural women still do not have ownership on land and the pattas are allotted in the name of their husband. Due to this the cannot take independent decision on various agricultural aspects. Therefore, concerted efforts are needed to promote women access to resources. For this, following measures are suggested.

In the distribution of land to the landless women should also be included in the existing Govt. policies on distribution of joint pattas to husband & wife. Short term operational ownership of land female farmers while giving land on leasing may be arranged.

Limited access to input & credit:

Though women make substantial contributors to agriculture development, their access to the most crucial input “credit” is limited. Since they are not land owners, the credit flow generally goes in the name of male members (i.e. owners). For promoting women’s access to farm input & credit, following measures may be taken:

- ☞ Credit flow to rural women could be channeled through credit & thrift societies.
- ☞ Voluntary agencies in each district may be identified which could help in developing women organizations.
- ☞ Credit organizations should simplify the procedures & modalities to suit the educational level of rural women & also organize credit camps in village exclusively for women.

- ☞ Farm women should also be recipient of credit for which possession of assets may not be insisted upon.
- ☞ Existing loaning policies of NABARD need orientation towards women credit eligibility by granting them the status of a producer.

Inadequate technical competency :

Though women are involved in almost all agricultural operations, yet, they have inadequate technical competency due to their limited exposure to outside world. This has compelled them to follow the age old practices which in turn result in poor work efficiency and drudgery.

Training is an important component of HRD which enhances knowledge, skill and attitude. For building technical competency among farm women, specialized need based and skill oriented training should be organized preferably at village level. Some of the priority areas in which women need training are :

- ♦ Conservation and management of natural resources
- ♦ IPM and INM
- ♦ Renewable energy sources
- ♦ Seed production technology
- ♦ Use of fertilizer
- ♦ Post-harvest management

Looking into the importance of conservation and management of natural resources for sustainable development, due emphasis should be given on this aspect and it should be included as an essential feature in all the training programmes organized for farm women. For effective training programmes, following points should be considered.

- i) Extension agencies should pursue the family approach to training
- ii) Training should be organized at appropriate time specially the pre-seasonal training.

- iii) There should be proper followed-up of the programmes and there should be synchronization in time between knowledge and skill transfer and the supply credit and other inputs needed to apply the knowledge.
- iv) During training, the training institute should identify the active participants and intensive training should be imparted to them so that they can be used as a 'para-extension workers' for dissemination of technical information.

Poor participation in decision making :

Generally, decision regarding the activities requiring technical competency and money related matters were taken by male members. Since knowledge and economic independence are the parameters of women empowerment enhancing the technical knowledge, skills and building greater involvement in various farm activities.

Poor existing Research and Extension System No or Poor gender consideration:

Though several technological breakthrough have been observed in the recent past the technologies by the researchers are not tailored to the specific needs of the farm women. With the result, most of the agricultural operations are performed manually and in an unskilled manner which results into greater drudgery on the part of farm women. In order to cater to the technological needs of the farm women, there is need to re-orient the entire research system for which following measures may be taken.

- ☐ In order to make scientific information in agriculture and skill areas more useful, it should be tested and refined keeping in view the different farming situations in socio-cultural milieu. It would lead to women specific technologies.
- ☐ Some of the tasks and operations which women are specifically involved and which are drudgery prone include transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing etc. Therefore, these require special

attention of the farm scientist for evolving relevant technologies or modifying the existing ones.

- ❑ The design, development and testing of agricultural implements and machinery should be undertaken with the active participation of rural women. In this regard with local artisans will be helpful. In essence machinery should be a blessing rather than become a curse.
- ❑ While evolving agricultural technologies; indigenous practices used by women should be paid due attention for blending with the frontier ones for greater adoption.

Like research, existing extension systems are also not much oriented towards women folk as reflected by the fact out of the total 88,000 VEWs only about 10% (9000) are female. This has adversely affected the transfer of technology. Most of the extension programmes are “target oriented” rather than “need based” which are formulated without analysing and documenting needs of the farm women. Farm women in India have to be tackled with different kind of extension models because of the fact that they differ with men on various counts, viz. Innovativeness educational level, intellectual ability, flexibility, decision making etc. with this assumption a separate extension strategy needs to be developed for all developmental programmes intended to benefit farm women. Some of the suggestions in this regard are :

- Women farmers should be included as the direct clientele in the existing extension systems.
- Women development projects should use participatory approach at all stages i.e. in identification of needs, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Under T&V system like Kisan Mandal, Mahila Kisan Mandals should be constituted or at least 50% of the women participation in such groups should be assured.
- In order to provide effective base for access to services and facilities, women agriculturist should be organised into autonomous groups.

- With a view to abreast women with latest agricultural innovations state govt. should initiate: “Advance Information Centre for Women” at village level.
- In order to develop and disseminate appropriate technologies for farm women, there is need to strengthen linkage between various research and extension organisations engaged in transfer of technology.
- Female extension personnel should be recruited at various hierarchical levels.

Limited exposure to mass media :

The transfer of technology approach which mainly includes mass media are also not paying due attention towards dissemination of adequate and timely agricultural information to the farm women. Some of the important points in this regards are :

- ❖ At present coverage of agricultural programmes on Doordarshan is only 12% of the total telecast time (in Hindi), out of which, the programmes related to women are negligible. Therefore there is utmost need to provide adequate coverage to the programmes related to women, the authorities of mass media may apportion at least 25-30% time to farm technologies/information pin pointed to farm women.
- ❖ A few programmes which are meant for women are telecast at a time, which is not suitable for them. Therefore, the media personnel are required to pay due attention towards timings of the programmes.
- ❖ Though the broadcast of agricultural programmes on AIR is a regular feature, the programmes are monotonous in nature and stereotype. Therefore authorities of AIR should have effective linkage with communication personnel for bringing about the programmes in a variety of ways, viz. use of success stories, experience features etc. that would be more interesting to the listeners.
- ❖ Looking at the low literacy rate of rural women, technical literature developed for them should be in a simple language (preferably in local

dialect) with due emphasis on illustrations so that even the neo-literates can make use of it.

- ❖ There should be state level co-ordination committee in order to review, monitor and evaluate various programmes being telecast, broadcast and published by the different print media. Feed back and suggestions of the audience/listeners/readers would improve the quality of programmes.

Untapped women potential:

Though women have many inherent capacities like high determination, sense of responsibility, better managerial ability, yet their potential has not been identified by the extension personnel. For example, women are considered as reservoirs of rich traditional wisdom with respect to various agricultural practices. This potential could be explored by the extension scientists and be communicated to the researches for proper moulding of traditional technologies with modern ones. This could certainly help in agricultural production on sustainable basis.

Looking to the present status of women in agriculture and their limited access to research and extension services, it is utmost needed to revamp the entire approach towards women farmers to cater to their existing needs emphasizing the future challenges which the country has to face in the coming years. For this, there is no way but to develop the human resources. Hence, empowerment of women is the need of the day, as it is only the surest way of making women as “partner’s in development” and bringing them in the mainstream of development, not only as mere. “Beneficiaries” but also “Contributors”. If women are empowered the day is not far away when “Feminization of Agriculture” will be in the offing and the theme “Women Feed the World” will be true in its actual sense.

Strategies are the designed and directed actions following a stipulated pathway to accomplish goals. So on the assessed and identified problems following strategic intervention can be suggested.

Short term strategies:

Emphasis in this phase is to fulfill their basic needs through welfare programmes like :

- ♦ Literacy programme
- ♦ Family planning programme and health education
- ♦ Nutrition programme for mothers and children
- ♦ Portable water and appropriate fuel for cooking and heating the house
- ♦ Access to household technology
- ♦ Home economic programme

Mid term strategies:

Emphasis is on facilitating their involvement in economic activities and strengthening their economic base for entering in social and political mainstream of the society. Some strategies at this phase are :

- Access to appropriate technology and financial resources
- Ownership of productive assets
- Attaining income security through income generating projects
- Access to communication media to improve their communication and mediation skills
- Access to and prospering of all types of non-formal education like extension and vocational education in order to improve their entrepreneurial skills.

Long term strategies :

Social and political mainstream are important components of empowerment at high level. Some strategies which can be applied at this phase are :

- Enhancing organizational and social leadership skill in community action

- ☐ Building their capacity through collectivization and social political participation.
- ☐ Increasing their negotiation power in action for entailment rights.
- ☐ Increasing their access to political power, policy formulation and strategic gender training programme
- ☐ Establishing organisation or self help groups for their own networking and empowerment through group-building.
- ☐ Providing distance education and correspondence courses
- ☐ Encouraging socio-cultural changes by exploring gender issues.

Literacy:

Literacy programme is very important in the process of women's empowerment. It is a base for any educational programme. It enables rural women to acquire new knowledge and technology required for improving and developing their tasks in all fields. Literacy helps rural women to bring up their children and carry out the responsibility of motherhood.

Family Planning and Welfare Programme :

Family planning programme and health education are two very important basic needs for empowerment of rural women. In most of the developing countries, rural women suffer from the strain and burden of frequent pregnancies, lack of access to new methods and suitable contraceptives. This is one factor which affect their lives by with drawing them from participating in the process of development.

Non-Formal Education :

Non-Formal Education (NFE) is an effective method of women's empowerment in rural areas. Due to some constrains like lack of sufficient time and higher level of age, it is very difficult to provide formal education to rural women. Therefore, non-formal education is the best vehicle in transferring new knowledge and technology to them NFE for empowerment means

people gaining an understanding of and control over social, economic and/or political forces to improve their standing in society. Some indication of the effect of NFE for empowerment are :

- Increase access to resources
- Increase collective bargaining power
- Improved status, self-esteem and cultured identity.
- Ability to reflect critically and solve problems
- Ability to make choices.
- Legitimation of people's demands by officials
- Self-discipline and ability to work with others.

Extension Programme :

Rural Women would benefit immensely from modern scientific knowledge, technology and skills. Till recent times, agricultural policies and programmes in most developing countries have generally ignored women's need and concerns as farmers. Only over the last decade, there has been increasing awareness of the extent and significance of women's activities in agriculture. Most developing countries have now started training rural women in new technologies. In spite of recent consideration on launching extension programmes for rural women, some impediments hinder them from reaching extension facilities like.

- Illiteracy
- Financial barriers of govt. and families to invest on women's education.
- Lack of time due to heavy households responsibilities
- Lack of valid statistics and data about the roles needs and problems of rural women.
- Giving less attention to women's enterprises by extension and research centres.

- Less number of educated women to take the responsibilities of extension activities (Female, extension workers).
- Social and cultural barriers in some societies in which contact between women with male extension workers is prohibited.

There are some appropriate and effective extension educational methods for rural women like.

- Mobile courses instead of farmer's training centre.
- Utilisation of educated girls and widows as female extension workers
- Education of women through negotiation between husband and wife or inter spouse communication.
- Tours and visits organized by women's group or organization (co-operatives etc.).
- Set up extension organisation for rural women like Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.
- Encourage make extension agents to work with women's group.
- Post female extensionists in their local areas or close to their husband's workplace.
- Working women extensionists in pairs (husband and wife as extension workers).
- Encourage and support the establishment of women local groups and organisations to take up responsibility of communicating new science and technology to rural women.

Community Education

Community education is an integral part of community development and community empowerment is a way by which people involve in-group efforts to identify their problems, analyse their cultural and socio-economic roots of problems, and develop strategies bringing positive change in their lives and in their communities. It is an ongoing process that demands time and continued commitment towards better quality life and justice for community.

Community education can uphold there effective involvement of rural women in building community through collective action. This type of education gives them the power to participate in all aspects of community development and be active citizens. This education will also tackle social and cultural barriers which restrict the participation of rural women in social activities.

Adult Education :

Adult education is another type of non-formal education which is an effective strategies intervention for empowerment of women. This will lead the community to have same impression about the necessity of women's empowerment and pay attention to their gender specific needs. Older people have a lifetime experience, knowledge and wisdom to offer to others in their community. In view point, girl's education in some countries where there are social and cultural barriers for educating females, community level work may help parents understand the value of educating girls. Adults' education classes provide one such opportunity for influencing the thinking of parents.

Access to communication Media:

Access to communication media prepares women for improving their communication and mediation skills to strengthen their capacity to contact and mediate with external world. Consequently, the employment of this skill will prepare the way for transaction of their own experiences, knowledge and work skills with other persons and increase their awareness about the women's rights, allocated facilities, and resources by government or other organisations.

Access to appropriate Technology

Experience show that the technology can be appropriate for rural women when it has the following characteristics:

- Based on their needs and problems
- Cheap, simple and small scale,
- Harmonise and compatible with local materials, resources and cultures

- Locally available skills and knowledge
- Labour and time saving
- Access and control of rural women.

Due to some implements like, lack of access to land, credit, education, lack of recognition and their contributions to village life, rural women don't have suitable access to and control over new technology.

Access to credit:

One factor hindering rural women's empowerment is their limited access to credit and saving schemes. This problem restricts their access to technology, income generating projects, land possession and allotment of resources required for development. In order to have access to credit setting up self help group local banking system by women, non governmental organisation and provision of facilities by govt. need to be established. SEWA as a women's banking founded by Mrs. Ela Bhat in Ahmedabad and Indira Mahila Jojna are two successful examples in this direction.

Participation:

Women can be integrated into development process in two ways. Firstly as participants and secondly as beneficiaries of development. Women can be beneficiaries of development, if they are active participants in the development process. They also benefit through greater access to education, employment, improved social services such as health, housing, sanitation and improved technology. Within the development projects, instrumental participation is viewed as a way of achieving certain specific targets; and transformations participation is viewed as an objective itself, and as a means of achieving some higher objective such as self help and or sustainability. Since the goal of empowerment is to meet strategic gender needs proving opportunity for rural women to participate in development programme is not only a way to help community and family but also an occasion for their empowerment.

Work and Empowerment:

- Farming in a small piece of land
- Raising livestock
- Collection of forest produce
- manufacturing at home or in sheds
- Hawking, vending, trading
- Providing services
- Selling manual labour

One of the important means of achieving empowerment in the status of women is to promote additional avenues for employment.

Ownership and Control over Resources:

They need to have control over limited resources, like land and livestock, so that they could take away decisions and implement them in any way that is required ownership and control over productive assets will create a sense of belonging and owning. It will thus help to take responsibility in family and local group activities. Other impact of control is to enhance their decision making ability to meet some physiological needs like self esteem and confidence.

Access to co-operatives and local women's organisation:

Collectivisation has been recognized as a tenant of women's empowerment. It has been defined as a process of bringing a group of women together at a base to become an integral part of an economic activity. Some impact of collectivization on rural women are :

- Bring about new identities inside the group
- Facilitating their responsibilities through sharing their information, knowledge, experience-skills, time frames, spaces and other resources like money etc.

Some suggestions on empowerment of rural women:

- Increasing their access to new information, credit labour, markets and growing sector of economy.
- Furthering their social and political participation at all levels and overcoming structural barriers to women's full productivity.
- Increasing govt. assistance for the family unit (child care, health care. F.P.P.)
- Facilitating the establishment of organizational structures like farmer's group and organizing them gender sensitivity at all level of planning and implementation of development programmes.
- Increase the economic self-sufficiency of women through self-employment.
- Increase their power of negotiation about redistribution of power resources within households, civil society and the state.
- Strengthening educational and training programmes for them.
- Increasing their access to and over appropriate technology that affect on reducing work burden.

Conclusion

Gender sensitivity and systematic approach are two factors important for rural development programme targeted either at women or both women and men. Empowerment is a complicated process, which comprises of short-term and long-term strategy. Under each strategy, several projects need to be formulated and carried out. The process of women's empowerment is conceptualized in terms of personal assertions and confidence, ability to project themselves as women, attaining economic independence, ownership of productive assets, ability to handle capital and assets and provide leadership in both women and community related issues at all levels.

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