

Constraints Faced by the Farmwomen in Women Headed Households

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Abstract

The role of women in agriculture has become all the more important with migration of farmers and the increasing number of women headed households. However, women, as producers, still remain largely invisible and unsupported; mainstream investments and development interventions tend to focus elsewhere and are often ineffective.

This study on women headed households in Andhra Pradesh analyses the personal, socio-economic and extension related characteristics of women heading farm households, types of women-headed households, constraints they face and identifies solutions. Constraints expressed include non-availability of labour, poverty and indebtedness, high cost of fertilizers and pesticides, limitations in getting credit etc. Some of the suggestions include ensuring supply of good quality seeds, fertilizers etc., by the government; labour exchange between households and villages during peak seasonal farm operations to overcome constraint of labour shortage, imparting training on income generating activities, etc. The study concludes that income generating activities like, dairy units, sheep rearing units, vermicompost units and small business activities like mushroom units, leaf plate making and value addition to locally available products may be encouraged to improve income levels and economic status of women. Women headed households deserve special attention within the ongoing developmental schemes so as to mainstream their concerns.

Introduction

Traditionally women have been playing an equal and important role, as men, in farming and continue to do so. While men performed the arduous tasks of ploughing the land, women were more into activities like sowing, weeding and harvesting. Women continue to play a major role in providing food security to households. Their role in agriculture has become all the more important as farming is increasingly becoming a responsibility of women to feed their households. Farming is once again in the hands of women, though not with due recognition and respect to them, but as the only means of survival for the households. Women,

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as producers, still remain largely invisible and unsupported; mainstream investments and development interventions tend to focus elsewhere and as a result, they are often ineffective.

The National Commission for Women has prepared a draft policy on women in agriculture, with women at the center of agricultural development. However, the impact can be visible only when these policies are put into practice. It is also proposed that the National Policy for Farmers "will take on board all the vital issues related to Feminization of agriculture".

One of the concerns in the agriculture set up is migration of farmers and the increasing number of women-headed households. Earlier we had women-headed families when a woman was widowed or deserted, but now they have become de-facto heads when their husbands migrate. This increases the burden on women; she is responsible both for livelihood and as a caretaker. In such a scenario there is an urgent increasing need to have support services for such households. In view of this, a study was undertaken on women headed households in Andhra Pradesh with the following objectives:

Objectives

1. To analyze the personal, socio-economic and extension related characteristics of the women heading the farm households.
2. To study the types of women headed households among the sample
3. To understand the constraints faced by them and identify the solutions to cope up with them.

Methodology

Andhra Pradesh state was selected for the study and the sample was drawn from all the three regions of the state namely: Telangana, Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra. One district from each region, three mandals from each district and three villages from each mandal, were selected randomly thus making the total sample of nine villages covering all the three regions. At a rate of 10 households per village, a sample size of 270 women headed farm households were selected using random sampling method. The data were collected using the interview method and group discussion and were tabulated using averages and percentages.

Findings

Personal Characteristics of the Farmwomen heading the Households

The study revealed that the average age of sample women was between 31 to 50 years with widespread (86%) illiteracy. With regard to the marital status, 69 per cent were widows, nearly 13 per cent women were with disabled husbands and about 18 per cent were deserted women. Ninety seven per cent of the sample belonged to nuclear and only 3 per cent belonged to joint families.

Farm Experience

Experience in farming may help an individual in managing the farm more efficiently. Therefore, the years of experience in farming were assessed and the results are depicted below, in Table 1.

Table 1. Farming Experience of the Sample Women

S.No.	Region	Below 5 years	5 to 10 Years	11 to 15 years	16 to 20 years	Above 20 years	Total
1	Coastal Andhra	35 (38.89)	29 (32.22)	17 (18.89)	3 (3.33)	6 (6.67)	90 (100.00)
2	Rayalaseema	29 (32.33)	30 (33.33)	19 (21.12)	11 (12.22)	1 (1.11)	90 (100.00)
3	Telangana	28 (31.11)	33 (36.67)	19 (21.12)	4 (4.44)	6 (6.67)	90 (100.00)
	Total	92 (34.07)	92 (34.07)	55 (20.37)	19 (6.67)	13 (4.82)	270 (100.00)

(Figures in Parentheses indicate percentages)

Overall, a majority of the women in all the three regions had farm experience of ten years and less.

Land Size Operated

Farming as a livelihood is centered around the land size. Therefore, the size of land holding of the sample women was assessed and the details are furnished in Table 2.

Table 2. Average Land Size of the Sample Women

S. No.	Region	Own land	Leased in land	Leased out land	(Acres)
					Operational land holding
1	Coastal Andhra	0.80	0.80	0.10	1.50
2	Rayalaseema	2.6	0.07	-	2.67
3	Telangana	1.3	-	0.02	1.28
	Average	1.57	0.29	0.04	1.82
		(86.26)	(15.94)	(2.20)	(100.00)

(Figures in Parentheses indicate percentages)

The average operational landholding of the sample was 1.82 acres. Nearly 16 per cent of the sample had leased in land i.e. owner-cum-tenant operated farms could be observed in the coastal region.

Family Income

Family Income refers to the gross income of the family of the sample women obtained from farm and other sources, over a period of one year. Average income of the sample families headed by women, was estimated considering the various sources and the results are furnished in Table 3. Of the total income, 54.13 per cent, was obtained from crop enterprise, while dairy enterprise and other allied activities accounted for 6.11 per cent and 5.85 per cent respectively. Income obtained from poultry and sheep rearing was less than one per cent of the total family income.

As regards the income obtained from sources other than farm, wage income accounted for a maximum of 28.19 per cent. It could be pertinent to note that the livestock income particularly dairy enterprise provided only 5 to 6.5 per cent of the total family income and thus there existed scope to increase income from the livestock enterprise in the sample households.

Social Participation by the Sample Women

Social participation refers to the participation of women in different social organizations such as, Self-Help Groups, Mahila Mandals, Panchayat etc. About 63 per cent of the sample were participating in Self Help Groups and a majority of

Table 3. Average Income of the Sample Families

S.No. Source of income	Coastal Andhra		Rayalaseema		Telangana		Overall	
	Rs	%	Rs	%	Rs	%	Rs	%
(a) Income from Farm								
1 Agricultural crops	11323	64.21	7997	45.89	7674	51.83	8998	54.13
2 Vegetable crops	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3 Dairy	1134	6.43	942	5.41	972	6.56	1016*	6.11
4 Poultry	-	-	-	-	200	1.35	67	0.40
5 Sheep rearing	84	0.48	-	-	-	-	28**	0.17
6 Other allied activities	189	1.07	2730	15.67	-	-	973	5.85
Sub Total	12730	72.19	11669	66.96	8846	59.74	11082	66.66
(b) Income from other sources								
1 Service	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2 Business	89	51	627	3.60	817	5.52	511	3.11
3 Wages	4152	23.55	4609	26.45	5133	34.67	4631	28.19
4 Any others (specify)	662	3.75	522	3.00	11	0.07	398	2.42
Sub Total	4903	27.81	5758	33.05	5961	40.26	5540	33.72
Total family income	17633	100	17427	100	14807	100	16622	100

Note: * out of 270, 70 women farmers owned dairy animals

** 8 sample women households had sheep rearing.

them are from Rayalseema region. The significant benefits they could accrue out of the participation in Self Help Groups are access to credit (61 per cent), improvement in social contacts (18 per cent), and improvement in self confidence (16.3 per cent).

Extension Contact

It is surprising to know that a negligible percentage of women had contact with the extension officials in Telangana region. Only in the other two regions respondents had some extension contact.

Types of Women-Headed Households

The women headed households are of three major types viz. (i) woman-headed household, where adult male member is present, (ii) where adult male

member is absent and (iii) where the adult female remains single / unmarried. The study attempted to identify these types and reasons thereof and the results are discussed in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Types of Households Headed by Women

S. No.	Type of the household	Coastal Andhra		Rayalaseema		Telangana		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Adult male member was present	11	12.22	12	13.33	11	12.22	34	12.59
2	Adult male member was absent	78	86.67	78	86.67	79	87.78	235	87.04
3	Woman remained single	1	1.11	-	-	-	-	1	00.37
Total		90	100	90	100	90	100	270	10

Out of 270 sample households, 235 (87.04 per cent) belonged to the category of women headed households, where the adult male counterpart was absent. Another 34 households (12.59 per cent) belonged to the category of women-headed households, where the adult male counterpart was present and not contributing to the family. Only one sample woman remained single/unmarried. Thus, a majority of the women headed households were without the adult male counterpart.

Reasons for Heading the Households by Women

Women-headed households, where the male counterpart was absent is the largest group with 87 per cent of the sample households. The major reason attributed was widowhood in 185 out of 270 (68.52 per cent sample families). The second important reason spelt out by 48 households was separation/desertion.

Of 270 sample households 10 per cent% fall under the category in which the male adult counterpart was present, and the reasons such as physically handicapped, chronically ill, mentally retarded, and old age were the reasons for women taking the headship.

Constraints

A woman, in spite of her modest functioning as head of the household, has to perform her role under certain important constraints associated with her family. These constraints may impede or deter the woman from effective role performance or functioning, either directly or indirectly. The constraints as expressed by the sample women are portrayed in Table 5.

Table 5. Constraints faced by the Sample Women Heading the Farm Households

S.No.	Category	Coastal Andhra	Rayala seema	Telangana	Total	
1	General					
	Non-availability of labour in time	76	69	73	218	80.74
	Women find it difficult to manage the farm without the support of men	50	21	18	89	32.96
	Dependency on neighbours and relatives	7	34	15	56	20.74
	Taking care of disabled husband and in-laws in old age	17	25	11	53	19.63
2	Economic					
	Poverty and indebtedness	106	30	53	189	70.00
	Limitations in getting credit for women farmers	52	38	42	132	48.89
	Unable to meet the expenditure on children's education	38	30	25	93	34.44
3	Extension & Technological					
	Low or no extension contact	17	35	14	66	24.44
	Non-availability of veterinary services in time	6	20	6	32	11.85
	Lack of awareness of improved technologies and implements	5	7	11	23	8.52
4	Inputs					
	High cost of fertilizers and pesticides	65	70	82	217	80.37
	Poor quality of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides	53	30	5	88	32.59
	Non-availability of inputs in time	42	50	49	141	52.22
5	Others					
	Inadequate transport facilities for mobility	11	5	1	17	6.30

Majority of the women (81 per cent) expressed that labour do not respond in time as they lack confidence in women heading the households and fear that they will not get their wages in time.

Poverty and indebtedness were the major problems expressed by 70 per cent of the sample women, while another 49 per cent expressed the limitation in getting credit as they do not have the land title. The women do not have credibility among moneylenders as they lack repaying capacity.

Lack of extension contact was expressed by (24 per cent) of the sample women due to which the women were not aware of many of the schemes and incentives available such as, subsidized seed, fertilizers etc. Yet another problem of 'lack of awareness about improved implements' was pointed out by another 8.52 per cent of the sample women. Likewise, another 11.85 per cent voiced the constraint of 'non-availability of veterinary services on time'. On the whole, all these constraints indicate inadequate extension support at the grass root level. Yet the women-headed households do not perceive extension contact as one of the factors for improving yields. Therefore, a majority of them have not indicated low extension contact as a hindrance to them.

The constraint of 'high cost of fertilizers and pesticides', 'non-availability of inputs in time' and 'poor quality of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides' were expressed by 80 per cent, 52 per cent and 33 per cent of the sample women respectively.

Suggestions

The suggestions, as opined by the sample women, to overcome the above mentioned constraints were also elicited and the same are furnished in Table 6.

Table 6. Suggestions as perceived by the Sample Women heading the Farm Households

S.No.	Suggestions	Coastal Andhra	Rayala seema	Telangana	Total
1	Banks may provide loan / credit to women farmers	52 (57.78)	38(42.22)	42(46.67)	132 (48.89)
2	Supply of good quality seeds	30(33.33)	49(54.44)	25(27.77)	104(38.51)
3	Labour exchange	8(8.88)	52(57.78)	14(15.55)	74(27.40)
4	Training in income generating activities	8(8.89)	52(57.78)	14(15.56)	74(27.41)
5	Improving transport facilities	12(13.33)	23(25.56)	9(10.00)	44(16.30)
6	Market linkage with SHGs	6(6.67)	5(5.56)	11 (4.07)	
7	Old age / widow pensions / houses	4(4.44)	2(2.22)	6(6.66)	12(4.44)
8	Simple labour saving devices	2(2.22)	-	5(5.56)	7(2.59)

(Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages)

It can be perceived from Table 6 that the common suggestions given by a majority (38.51 per cent) was that the government should ensure supply of good quality seeds, fertilizers etc. as the farmers are put to loss due to spurious inputs.

The suggestion of labour exchange between households and between villages during peak seasonal farm operations, was indicated by 27.40 per cent of the women, to overcome the constraint of labour shortage.

To overcome yet another important constraint of poor economic status, 27.41 per cent of the sample women opined for imparting them training on income generating activities. Like-wise, about 49 per cent the sample women suggested that the banks could extend credit liberally to women farmers on preferential basis. So far, except for the thrift and credit programme through SHGs, there is no other innovative credit scheme for the landless population.

Better transport facilities were suggested by a few women for improvement in mobility to nearby markets, hospitals etc.

Very few women requested for sanction of pension and houses to widows and those deserted and they are the most deprived lot among the rural women.

However, the market linkage for SHG was suggested by a handful of sample women heads in Rayalaseema and Telangana regions.

Conclusion

Income generating activities like, starting dairy units, sheep rearing units and vermicompost units among the land based activities and small business activities like mushroom units, leaf plate making and value addition to the products that are locally available may be encouraged to improve the income levels and economic status of the women. The women headed households deserve a special attention within the ongoing developmental schemes so as to mainstream their concerns.

References

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