

# Role of Women Farmer Representatives in Decision Making Bodies of ATMA

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## Abstract

*As women farmers are identified as an important link in the development of agriculture, extension reforms is one of the special interventions by the Government of India to mainstream gender in agricultural extension. The present study was planned with the objectives of understanding the processes adopted for identifying the extension needs of women farmers, examine the role played by women farmer representatives in decision making bodies of ATMA and identify the constraints faced by women farmer representatives in participating in decision making bodies of ATMA. The study was carried out in six states namely Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Uttarakhand and Andhra Pradesh. Three types of respondents, viz., women farmers, women farmer representatives and extension functionaries were selected for the study with a sample size of 457, 36 and 36 respectively. It was found that women farmer representatives were the main source of information for identifying the extension needs of women farmers, followed by women groups and scientists/experts. Further, women farmers revealed that their extension needs were asked during the different extension activities conducted by ATMA. It was observed that extension functionaries gave more emphasis on small and marginal women farmers while prioritizing fund allocation. The women farmer representatives have facilitated the extension functionaries in identification of extension needs and problems of the women farmers, facilitated in the planning process and implementation of extension activities. The active role played by women representatives helped in mainstreaming women in agricultural extension. However, their participation and active involvement can be further improved by addressing the constraints expressed by them.*

## Introduction

Rural women, mainly farmers, number at least 1.6 billion worldwide, and represent more than a quarter of the total world population. Nearly half of the world's farmers are women and include most of the agricultural workforce in developing countries. Women produce more than half of all the food that is produced (McClain, 2009). There is hardly any area in agriculture where women are not involved (Behera and Behera, 2013). Though women are the world's principal food producers and providers, their participation in agricultural extension activities is insignificant and they remain as

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'invisible' partners in agricultural development. A recent FAO survey showed that women farmers receive only five percent of all agricultural extension services worldwide and that only 15 percent of the world's extension agents are women (FAO, 2004).

Studies on agricultural extension have highlighted a number of weaknesses in reaching rural women (Gite *et al*, 2009). However, with time, women farmers are recognized as a vital link in agricultural development. Therefore, policy makers have given due attention by including gender component in different policies and schemes to mainstream gender in agriculture. The Government of India under "Support to State Extension Programs for Extension Reforms" made various provisions such as (i) 30 percent of the fund exclusively for women farmers and women extension functionaries (ii) 30 percent of women farmer representatives on the Governing Board (GB) and Block Farmer Advisory Committee (BFAC) of Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) etc. to address gender concerns and promote equity in agricultural extension (ATMA Guidelines, 2014). This reform has been operationalized across the country. In order to examine one of the components of the policy intervention, such as role of women farmer representatives in various committees of ATMA, this study has been conducted with the following objectives:

1. To understand the processes adopted for identifying the extension needs of women farmers
2. To examine the role played by women farmers' representatives in decision making bodies of ATMA (GB, BFAC) and
3. To identify the constraints faced by women farmers' representatives to participate in decision making bodies of ATMA

## **Methodology**

### **Selection of States**

Based on the physical and financial achievements of ATMA during 2012-13, the states were arranged in ascending order and the top 20 states were categorized into three groups viz., high, medium and low performance groups. From each group, two states have been randomly chosen giving due weightage to the regions. The states so selected were Assam (North East), Andhra Pradesh (South), Jharkhand (East), Madhya Pradesh (Central), Maharashtra (West) and Uttarakhand (North).

### **Selection of the District and Block**

One district from each selected state and three to six blocks/mandals from each selected district were randomly selected for the study. East Singhbhum, Darrang, Hoshangabad, Satara, Dehradun were the districts selected from Jharkhand, Assam,

Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, respectively. However, in Andhra Pradesh east and west Godavari districts were selected due to inadequate number of available sample for the study.

### **Sample selection and sample size**

Three respondent groups were selected for the study viz., Women farmers, Women farmer representatives and Extension officials involved in implementing the ATMA scheme.

- a. **Women farmers:** From each selected block, a list of women farmers who have been exposed to the ATMA interventions during 2012-13 was prepared. From the list, 65-80 women farmer beneficiaries were selected randomly in each state with a total sample size of 457 women farmer respondents in six selected states.
- b. **Women farmer representatives of ATMA committees:** From each district a total of six women farmers who are representing the Governing Board (GB) of ATMA, District Farmers' Advisory Committee (DFAC) and Block Farmers' Advisory Committee (BFAC) were selected randomly. Thus, a total of 36 women farmer representatives were selected.
- c. **Selection of the Extension Officials:** From each state, six extension officials involved in ATMA extension activities were selected randomly. Thus a total of 36 officials were selected for the study.

### **Data collection**

Separate interview schedules were prepared for the women farmers, women farmer representatives of the committees and extension officials of ATMA. These interview schedules were pre-tested and fine-tuned and were administered for data collection.

### **Statistical tools**

Simple percentage, cumulative frequency and ranking were used to analyze and interpret the data.

### **Result and Discussion**

#### **Process adopted by extension functionaries for identification of extension needs of women farmers**

Table 1 reveals that the extension officials have given highest priority to the interaction with women representatives in BFACs followed by interaction with women farmers/groups for identification of farmer's needs. Results also indicate that extension officials used to interact with the scientists and experts concerned and used their own past experiences to identify extension needs of the women farmers.

**Table 1. Process adopted by the extension officials for identifying the extension needs of the women farmers (N=36)**

S.No.	Process	Score	Rank
i.	Interaction with women representatives in BFACs	2.07	I
ii	Interaction with women farmer/groups	2.27	II
iii.	Interaction with the scientists/experts	3.20	III
iv.	Based on past experiences	3.50	IV
v.	Based on gaps identified in SREP	3.85	V
vi.	Interaction with the PRIs	4.33	VI

However, they have given the least preference for using Strategic Research and Extension Plan (SREP) and Panchayat Raj Institutes (PRIs) as a source for identifying extension needs of the women farmers. This may be due to the reason that women representatives and members of women groups are mainly progressive farmers, have adequate experience in the field and hence, they could have articulated the extension needs of the women farmers. Therefore, the extension functionaries might have felt this sufficient to assess the extension needs of the women farmers in addition to their past experiences in the field. Every district has spent a lot of manpower and money to assess the extension gaps professionally in the form of SREP by involving various stakeholders. However, it is observed from the result that the potential of the document is not fully utilized for training need assessment.

**Table 2. Priorities considered by extension functionaries for allocation of funds for women farmers (N=36)**

S.No.	Priority	Score	Rank
i.	To support small and marginal farm women	2.54	I
ii.	To motivate active women groups	2.98	II
iii.	To impart knowledge to women farmers	3.32	III
iv.	To bring changes in attitude and skills	3.50	IV
v.	To introduce income generating activities	4.38	V
vi.	Social mobilization and women group formation	5.08	VI
vii.	To support women headed households	5.66	VII
viii.	Linking women farmers to markets	8.54	VIII

It can be observed from the above Table that the top priority areas for allocating funds by the extension functionaries were to support small and marginal farm women and motivate active women groups. This may be due to the fact that, the norms of extension reforms state that 50 percent of the beneficiaries should be small /marginal women farmers and emphasize on group approach in the form of Commodity Interest

Groups (CIG's) to facilitate both backward and forward linkages for effective extension delivery.

The other priority areas considered by extension functionaries are bringing changes in the attitude and skills of the women farmers, promoting income generating activities, group formation and support to women headed households. However, the last priority was linking women farmers to markets. The extension functionaries expressed that though they sensitize the farmers on market related issues, the actual linking of farmers to market is limited as there is no fund provision under ATMA.

**Table 3. Mode of consultations by extension functionaries for organizing extension activities (N=347)**

S. No.	Mode of consultation	Frequency	Percentage
1	During extension events	158	45.53
2	Through progressive farmer/Farmer Friend/women representatives	91	26.22
3	Informally	54	15.56
4	By organizing special meetings	44	12.69

Among the total 457 women farmer respondents, a total of 347 respondents revealed that they have been contacted by the extension functionaries for identifying the needs of the women farmers in various ways. Table 3 above clearly shows that majority of the respondents expressed that they had been contacted by the extension functionaries during regular extension events and discussed about the extension needs of the women farmers. Due to the wide ratio of extension workers and the farmers, an exclusive need assessment exercise was not undertaken. It was also observed that in some places one BTM is holding charge of more than one block. About one fourth of the respondents expressed that the extension functionaries also consulted progressive farmers, farmer friend, women representatives of various decision making bodies to assess the extension needs of women farmers.

It was found that in all the selected states women farmer representatives were nominated in all decision making bodies of ATMA as per the norms of extension reforms. The extension functionaries expressed that the women farmer representatives involve in block and district level planning and articulate the extension needs of women farmers in the planning process.

A Farmer Friend is a progressive farmer with minimum high school education. He/she is the link between the farmer and extension functionaries. He/she is expected to have up-graded skills and lead fellow farmers by example. There is one Farmer Friend for every two villages. Some of these farmer friends are also women farmers and they act

as an important source of information to the extension functionaries for need assessment. Besides this, the extension functionaries also used informal discussions and special meetings as other modes of consultation to assess the women farmers' extension needs.

### Role played by women farmer representatives

The role performed by the women representatives of ATMA committees as perceived by them is depicted in Table 4.

**Table 4. Role performed by the women farmer representatives of ATMA committees as perceived by them (N= 36)**

S. No.	Roles	Frequency*	Percentage
i.	Collecting information on the needs and problems of the women farmers and giving feedback to committees	36	100.00
ii.	Helping in preparing Block Action Plan/ District Action Plan	25	69.44
iii.	Facilitating in organizing extension activities	20	55.55
iv.	Helping in formation and nurturing of FIGs/ CIGs	16	44.44
v.	Creating awareness among women farmers about schemes and programs	11	30.55

\*Multiple responses

It is found that almost all the women representatives perceived that they are collecting the information about the needs and problems of the women farmers and giving as a feedback to committees to undertake appropriate extension activities. More than half of the respondents felt that they are helping the extension functionaries in preparation of block and district action plans of ATMA and facilitating in organizing extension activities. However, a little more than one third of the respondents perceived that they are creating awareness about schemes and programs among their fellow women farmers.

The above table reveals that most of the women farmer representatives are aware about their roles and responsibilities as members in the ATMA committees and they are playing pivotal roles as envisaged in the extension reform guidelines. The role performed by the women representatives at field level was also felt and acknowledged by the women farmers. However, they need to focus more on formation and nurturing of FIGs/ CIGs as it is one of the important extension approaches promoted in extension reforms. This may be achieved by continuous sensitization of women representatives about their roles in promoting women groups.

**Table 5. Role performed by the women farmer representatives in ATMA committees as perceived by the extension functionaries (N= 20)**

S. No.	Roles	Frequency*	Percentage
i	Helps in selection of the villages, farmers and their needs	15	75
ii	Formation and nurturing of the groups	13	65
iii	Facilitating in organizing extension activities	13	65
iv	Helps in problem solving and decision making	12	60
v	Contributed feedback/inputs for preparation of DAP /BAP	7	35
vi	Sharing information about various schemes	5	25

\*Multiple responses

Out of 36 respondents from the extension officials category, only 20 respondents such as Project Director ATMA, BTT conveners and BTMs who were directly associated with different ATMA Committees were included in assessing their perception about the role performed by the women farmer representatives in ATMA committees. From the above data, it can be inferred that three fourth of the extension functionaries felt that women farmer representatives were helping in selection of villages, identifying farmers for undertaking various extension activities and also articulating extension needs of women farmers. More than 50 percent of the extension functionaries expressed that women farmer representatives are helping them in formation and nurturing of groups; facilitating them in organizing extension activities, problem solving, and decision making on extension activities. Quite a few of them also expressed that the women representatives are providing feedback and also helping them in preparation of block and district level agricultural plans. Overall, the extension functionaries expressed their satisfaction on the contribution of women farmer representatives in implementation of various cafeteria of ATMA activities in general and implementation of extension related activities of women farmers in particular.

### **Constraints faced by Women Farmer Representatives**

The extension functionaries expressed that they have given emphasis on certain traits of women representatives such as their social participation, cosmopolitaness and extrovert nature etc. in the selection of committee members to ensure their regular active participation in the committees. However, the study indicates that, women farmer representatives have also faced a few constraints in attending the committee meetings as may be seen in Table 6.

**Table 6. Constraints faced by the women farmer representatives for attending committee meetings (N=36)**

S. No.	Constraints	Frequency*	Percentage
1	Family responsibilities	16	44.44
2	Venue for meetings are at long distances	09	25.00
3	No TA/DA provided	09	25.00
4	Delay in communication about the meetings	03	8.33
5	Family restrictions	02	5.55
6	Due weightage not given to their feedback	01	2.78

*\*Multiple responses*

About 44.44 percent of the women farmer representatives expressed that sometimes they are unable to attend committee meetings of ATMA due to their multiple responsibilities on both farm and home. About 25% of the women farmer representatives felt that the venue of the meeting is far from their residence and their travel allowance is not reimbursed which made it difficult for them to attend the meetings regularly. It was understood from the extension functionaries of Uttarakhand and Assam that due to less /delayed budget release, Travelling Allowance (TA) was not provided on time to the representatives of the committees on a few occasions. Very few women farmer representatives also felt that delay in receiving the communication about the meetings, restriction from their families and less importance to their feedback in the meetings are some of the other reasons which hinder their active participation in the ATMA meetings.

## Conclusion

Governance in extension has been improved to some extent by mainstreaming gender through appropriate policy intervention in bringing about reforms by creating special provisions for women farmers in various committees of ATMA. The participation of women representatives has helped the extension functionaries in identifying the extension needs of women farmers. This has helped the extension functionaries to device extension plans such as DAP/BAP to address the needs of women farmers.

However, it can be further improved by maintaining gender disaggregated data at grassroot level, strengthening the review mechanism about proper implementation of the provisions made under extension reforms on gender mainstreaming and also addressing the constraints faced by women farmer representatives, to encourage their participation.

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