

# Role of women in Agriculture and Rural Prosperity



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## Abstract

Agriculture is the most important economic activity across the world in general and especially in developing countries like India where more than 60% of the total population directly and indirectly dependent on it. According to Economic Survey of India 2020-21, the share of agriculture in Gross Domestic Product(GDP) is 19.9%.It is the mainstay of rural prosperity where women play pivotal role towards this. About 80% of women working in informal activity are engaged in agriculture and allied activities and playing significant role in making India Atmanirbhar.

**Keywords:** Female labour Force Participation, Financial Inclusion, Social and Behavioral Change, Self Help Groups (SHGs)

## Introduction

The Women is the backbone of agricultural workforce but worldwide her hard work has mostly been unpaid. She does the most back-breaking and tedious tasks in homes, animal husbandry and agriculture

Agriculture in India is a female intensive activity. Recently, India has seen increase in female participation in Agriculture .The agriculture census 2015-16 has established that that the share of female operational holders has increased from 12.57%.The average land holding with women farmers is 0.9 ha while the highest is of 2.84 ha in Nagaland.

## Aim of the Study

To analyze the contribution of women in agriculture and rural prosperity, identifying the issues and concerns faced by them and possible step that needs to be taken to address their concerns and provide optimum opportunity to them.

## Agriculture and Female Employment

Feminization of agriculture occurring generally across the world and especially among developing countries. In India about 70% of female labour workforce engaged in Informal sector is in Agriculture. Continuous outmigration of male workers towards urban areas adding to the feminization of Agriculture.

Feminization of Agriculture is more pronounced in Northern India in comparison to Southern India .Reason being continuous migration of male workers in Northern region as compared to Southern.

The central role is all operations of agriculture and even rural household management is played by women .Women are involved in all aspects of agriculture from seed and crop selection to harvest and pest harvest management, processing and marketing. According to estimates, the agriculture sector employs about 4/5<sup>th</sup> of all economically active women.

Close to 20 million women are engaged in animal husbandry and 75 million women are engaged in dairying against 1.5 million men in animal husbandry and 15 million men in dairying.

But women farmers are:-

1. Marginalized and disadvantaged in land rights, wages and representation in group activities.
2. Women have very limited access to productive resources which consequently limits their productivity.

## Withdrawal of Women from Agriculture

Dual responsibility of women(household and farmwork), rising alternative opportunity through self help groups(SHG), formal employment opportunities due to rising educational opportunities and awareness among women has led to withdrawal of women from Agriculture. Rising water scarcity due to climate change leading to less remunerative farming consequently leading to withdrawal of women from Agriculture.

Lack of availability of hard asset on women name, due to lack of collateral property they fail to access the financial institution( formal credit) which further lead to withdrawal of women from Agriculture.

International labour organization's statistics (ILOSTAT), based on data from 1995 to 2019, conducted a study on percentage women and men of active employment age engaged in agriculture.

It indicated continuous withdrawal of women workforce since 1995.The percentage of females engaged in agriculture has been sizable at 54.6% in 2019 against 39.5% of male.

The withdrawal of women workforce from agriculture is a welcome move due to empowerment of women through alternative employment opportunities, better education and access to resources and rights etc.

#### **Financial Inclusion and Rural Women**

The Minimum Wages Act needs to be implemented in letter and spirit to ensure rise in living standard and attractiveness towards Agricultural work,it will help in preventing withdrawal of female from Agriculture due to low financial opportunity.

The government of India under MGNREGA tried to ensure rise in rural wages as 50% reservation provided to women it will help in easing women role in Rural Development and consequently higher role of women in Agriculture and Rural Prosperity.

NABARD's All India rural financial inclusion survey, 2016-17 indicated that the structure of rural income has been changing rapidly. The wages including labour wages has taken a front seat both in agriculture and non-agriculture households in terms of earnings to households; however, agriculture is still an engine of growth and poverty reduction in rural areas being the main occupation.

Women's participation in wages/ salaried activities was dismally low, it was low because many women members have to attend to domestic work only & are not engaged in economic activity.

**Table 1: Percent male and female involved in various economic activity in rural India**

Employment	Male(%)	Female (%)
Farmers and other self-employed	27.8	4.8
Working as casual labour in public works(other than MGNREGA)	21.1	5.7
Participating in Educational institution/activity	15.9	12.3
Salaried(regular and/or wage employees	14.0	3.2
Wage labour-MGNREGA	1.5	2.2
Other works-wage labour	5.7	1.9
Domestic duties only	3.6	59.4
Rentiers/retired/pensioners	2.4	2.6
Employer	1.8	0.3
Unpaid family worker	1.7	2.4
Not worked but seeking/available for work	2,5	0.5
Engaged in other miscellaneous activities	2.5	4.5

#### **Significance of Women Participation**

Women participation is a must for holistic financial sound and sustainable economy of a Nation. To raise rural prosperity female need to be activity engaged in agriculture productivity and rural prosperity,as India aspire to be a progressive and developed Nation women who constitute 50% percent of the population needs to be actively engaged in various economic activity.

Women economic empowerment is directly proportional to poverty reduction as women spend their earning in productive work eg. Health and education of children.

The All India Rural financial survey 2016-17 indicated that financial knowledge and attitude among women are higher and solid in comparison to their male counterpart. The GDP growth rate of India can be raised by 1.5 to 2 % by ensuring rising women participation in workforce in the country.

According to Renovate Consultancy Firm Mckinsey report titled " Power of Parity" India could add \$ 700 billion of additional GDP in 2025 which is equivalent to 1.4 percentage point by bolstering points by bolstering gender parity.

#### **Way Forward**

##### **Mobilize the Rural Women**

Mobilization of Rural women by providing value addition to their produce, organization of modern agriculture literacy progress under which recent development and productive method will be imparted. By making women aware about the facility available they will be self motivated to mobilize the self help groups(SHG).

There is the need to mobilize women into self help groups (SHGs) on the line of the National Rural livelihood Mission.

The National Rural Livelihood Mission of the Ministry of Rural development has had a considerable impact on the rural development of India by mobilizing women into SHGs and personality capitalization support to such SHGs.

Apart from SHGs, 63 lakh women farmers were also provided support for livelihood interventions.

##### **Role of Financial Institutions**

The banking and other financial institutions need to proactively reach out to SHGs for financial empowerment.decentralization in their functioning, especially of minimum one rural banks in every Panchayat to increase the coverage of formal financial institution.

##### **Creating an ecosystem for empowerment**

There is the need to provide an opportunity to poor rural women to have access to markets, skills and business development services.

##### **Skill Development**

Low skilling levels in women are a cause of concern, the skill India Mission needs to work proactively. Machinery needs to be designed in such a way that women in their traditional dress easily handle agriculture tools and machinery. There should be Customization of machinery so that they can handle it with their power and force. Skilling programs should be imparted at sub divisional or block level.

**Business Development Support**

Out of box initiatives like subsidized loans for businesses led by women, providing market access and mentoring entrepreneurs can have a far reaching impact on women empowerment.

Organisation of large number of self help groups(SHG), female cooperative organization, women led farmer producer organizations etc these will lead to rising Business opportunity for women and will help in value addition of Agriculture Produce produced by women.It will have multiplier effect on women role in Agriculture and Rural prosperity.

**Social and Behavioral Change**

There is requirement of change in social attitudes towards women,It can be brought at faster pace by ensuring womrn accessibility,mobilization, and participation at highest level in political ,economic and other sector.

Women tend to drop out in response to family pressure even after completing the skill programmes and consequently getting jobs.

To realize the development potential of the women workforce, we need to adopt proactive approach.

**Safety Aspects**

The security threat to women while performing their agriculture activity raising eyebrows to women and restraining their participation in agriculture and adding to rural distress,

There is requirement to ensuring commuting and safety in travelling for women it will raise the women workforce in rural areas, agriculture participation and consequently raising rural prosperity. The government of India needs to work proactively in ensuring safety and security for women in rural areas as it has multiplier effect on the women participation in agriculture workforce and rural prosperity due to inclusiveness attached to it.

**Conclusion**

The rising population and consequently fragmentation of land holding needs to be arrested, the law of inheritance further leading to unremunerative farming imparting women role in Agriculture and rural prosperity, today the need lies in granting legal right to land for women, The Hindu succession Act 1955 needs to be implemented in letter and spirit.

The member of women in the total workforce in India is only 27%, and more seriously, almost 20 million women had withdrawn from the workforce during 2005 and 2012. On a global landscape, India ranked 120<sup>th</sup> among 131 countries so far as women workforce participation is concerned.

India is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy of the world. However, compared to China where women contributed about 40% in economic activity, the contribution of Indian women is about 17-18 %.

There is an urgent need to reform and revisit outdated legislation and policies that act as deterrents to women staying or entering in the labour market.

Government should work proactively to ensure inclusive development, it will be achieved by growth with equity in social, economic and political

aspects, Inclusive development will lead to social and behavior change and consequently mobilization of women, rising economic participation in agricultural activity and rural prosperity.

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