
Empowering Indian Women in Agriculture

Ranjith Rao.Manda

Master of Social Work, Osmania University Hyderabad-07

Abstract:

Agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. But the sector is underperforming in many countries in part because women, who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity. In this paper we draw on the available empirical evidence to study in which areas and to what degree women participate in agriculture. Aggregate data shows that women comprise about 43 percent of the agricultural labor force globally and in developing countries. But this figure masks considerable variation across regions and within countries according to age and social class. Time use surveys, which are more comprehensive but typically not nationally representative, add further insight into the substantial heterogeneity among countries and within countries in women's contribution to agriculture. They show that female time-use in agriculture varies also by crop, production cycle, age and ethnic group. A few time-use surveys have data by activity and these show that in general weeding and harvesting were predominantly female activities. Overall the labor burden of rural women exceeds that of men, and includes a higher proportion of unpaid household responsibilities related to preparing food and collecting fuel and water. The contribution of women to agricultural and food production is significant but it is impossible to verify empirically the share produced by women.

Women's participation in rural labour markets varies considerably across regions, but invariably women are over represented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work, and the available evidence suggests that women are often paid less than men, for the same work. Available data on rural and agricultural feminization shows that this is not a general trend but mainly a sub-Saharan Africa phenomena, as well as observed in some sectors such as unskilled labor in the fruit, vegetable and cut-flower export sector. This paper re-affirms that women make essential contributions to agriculture and rural enterprises across the developing world. But there is much diversity in women's roles and over-generalization undermines policy relevance and planning. The context is important and policies must be based on sound data and gender analysis.

Key words: Women, gender, agriculture, labor force, employment, production, time-use, demographics, market access.

I.Introduction:

The international development community has recognized that agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor. But the agricultural sector in many developing countries is underperforming, in part because women, who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as

farmers, laborers and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources. Efforts by national governments and the international community to achieve their goals for agricultural development, economic growth and food security will be strengthened and accelerated if they build on the contributions that women make and take steps to alleviate these constraints. Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but they are essential to the wellbeing of rural households. This paper contributes to the gender debate in agriculture by assessing the empirical evidence in three areas that has received much attention in the literature:

1. How much of the agricultural labour in the developing world is performed by women?
2. What share of the world’s food is produced by women?
3. Do women face discrimination in rural labour markets?

Women in India are the backbone of the society and important resource in agriculture and rural economy. They make essential contributions to the agricultural development and allied and household activities and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. These activities include producing agricultural crop, cleaning animals, preparing food, working in rural enterprises, engaging in trade and marketing, caring family members and maintaining their homes. About 63% of all economically active men are engaged in agriculture as compared to 78% of women. Traditionally, women have always played an important role in agriculture- as farmers, co-farmers, wage labours and managers of farms. They have conventionally been producers of food from seed to kitchen. They carry the heavier work burden in food production and because of gender discrimination, get lower returns for their work. The multiple role of women leads to a significant contribution in real terms to the productive system. But it is unfortunate that her role is not adequately recognized and properly her contribution not qualified in the male- dominated society. They have been underrepresented in the development process.

II. Women’ contribution in agriculture and allied activities:

M.S.Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist, describes that it was women who first domesticated crop plant and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. While men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and begun cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fiber and fuel. Women have played and continue to play a key role in the conservation of basic life support

systems such as land, water, flora, and fauna. They have protected the health of the soil through organic recycling and promoted crop security through the maintenance of varietal diversity and genetic resistance. Women in India are major producers of food in terms of value, volume and number of hours worked. In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture is as high as 70%. In 2009, 94% of the female labor worked in cereal production, while 1.4% worked in vegetable production and 3.72% were engaged in fruits and spice crops. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, Indian women represented a share of 21% and 24% of all fishers and fish farmers respectively. Rural women play a vital and crucial role not only in agricultural production i.e crop production but also allied activities such as horticulture, livestock rear-harvest operation, tending animals, agro-forestry, fisheries etc.

Most of the work that women do, such as collecting fuel, fodder and water, growing vegetables and keeping poultry for domestic consumption go unrecorded in the census country. Many women who work on family land are not recorded as workers. Rural women engaged in agriculture form 78 per cent of all women in regular work. They are a third of all workers on the land. The traditional gender division of labour ensures that these women get on average 30 per cent lower wages than men. A recent study conducted by Women and Population Division of FAO revealed that in developing countries women provide 70 percent of agricultural labour, 60-80 percent labour for household food production, 100 percent labour for processing the basic food stuffs, 80 per cent for food storage and 90 per cent for water and fuel wood collection for households. Women produce between 60 to 80 percent of the food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world's food production,

therefore, women's role in food production ensures the survival of millions of people in all regions. Women's livelihood strategies, and their support and means of ensuring food security are diverged and complex, from cultivating field crops to livestock rearing, home gardening, gathering etc. They make above contributions despite unequal access to land, inputs and information.

III. Economically active population in agriculture:

Data on the economically active population in agriculture are available for many countries, and provide the most comprehensive measure of the participation of women in agriculture. In this measure, an individual is reported as being in the agricultural labour force if he or she reports that agriculture is his or her main economic activity. However, these data may underestimate female participation in agriculture for reasons discussed below, and caution is advised in interpreting changes over time because improvements in data collection may be responsible for some of the observed changes.

IV. Problem faced by women farmers in India:

1. Women have unequal land rights. They hardly enjoy land ownership rights directly in their names. Limited rights or access to arable land further limits livelihood options and exacerbates financial strain on women, especially in women-headed households.
2. Women have limited access to use of productive resources.
3. Women perform all un-mechanized agricultural tasks and perform

multiple tasks which add more burden to them due to lack of equipment and appropriate technology.

4. Women have little control over decision making process, either inside home or outside home. Without access to capital or household decision making abilities women lack the resources that are for their labor stability and stability of their household.
5. Few women holding of agricultural productive resources such as land, animals and machinery. 6. Poor women farmers are less able to purchase technology to adapt to climate change due to lack of access to credit and agricultural services. They often have low productivity due to an inability to invest in things such as improved seeds and soil replenishment.
6. Women farmers in agricultural sector suffer from high illiteracy rate among them. They do not know their legal rights.
7. Women earn less wages, especially in joint, informal and private sector.
8. Miss applying some laws and regulations in favour of women such heritage legislation.
9. Lack of market intelligence and inadequate information put women farmers under unfavourable situation with weak bargaining power with the buyers.

V. Status of women in agriculture:

Globally women constitute half of the world's population and produce half of the agricultural products according to a UN report. This indicates the contribution of women in the

economic prosperity of the nations, whose lifeblood is agriculture, through their participation in agriculture as cultivators, agricultural labourers and casual helpers. In spite of this, women suffer from womb to tomb in the male dominated society. Their labour plays a key role in the survival of millions of families. The problem of poverty cannot be tackled without providing opportunities of productive employment to rural women. Women are important economic agents in India, particularly in the context of poverty. Women's income in the poverty groups is critical for household survival. Three quarter of women all over the world live in rural areas and work in agricultural sector and a wide range of related activities. In addition, a large number of women in rural areas, like their men folk depend on daily wages earned in agricultural operations. Though they work hard for long hours, they get very less money leading to indebtedness. Yet they continue to depend on the land owners for employment and loans. They are frequently tortured by the landlords for their personal interest and enrichment. They are treated as sub-servant or personal property. Thus, their dependence on agriculture makes the land lords utilize freely the services of all the members of the families. In the process of economic exploitation the female agricultural labourers even become the targets of sexual harassment. Farmers, particularly women, face a high degree of economic, legal, and institutional uncertainties when investing in their land and other resources.

VI. Conclusion:

Rural women are the major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Her work ranges from crop production, livestock production to cottage industry. From household and family maintenance activities, to transporting water, fuel and fodder. Despite such a huge

involvement, her role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic, and political indicators.

Women's wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and women's engagement in multiple home-based economic activities leads to under remuneration for their work. Women spend long hours fetching water, doing laundry, preparing food, and carrying out agricultural duties. The nature and sphere of women's productivity in the labor market is largely determined by sociocultural and economic factors. Women do not enter the labor market on equal terms when compared to men. Their occupational choices are also limited due to social and cultural constraints and lack of supportive facilities such as transport, and accommodation in the formal sector of the labor market.

References:

- [1] I. Bala. N (2010), "Selective discrimination against women in Indian Agriculture - A Review" *Agricultural Reviews*. 31 (3): 224 – 228.
- [2] Census of India, (1981) Series India, Primary Census Abstract, General Population, Part 11B (i), pp.7-8.
- [3] Damisa, R. Samndi and M. Yohana(2007). "Women Participation in Agricultural Production- A probit Analysis" *Journal of Applied Sciences*. 7(3): 412-416.
- [4] Dhaka et. al (2012), "Constraints in Knowledge and Information Flow amongst Farm Women" *International Journal of Agriculture, Environment & Biotechnology*. 5(2): 167-170.
- [5] Farid et.al (2009), "Nature and extent of rural women's participation in agricultural and non-agricultural activities" *Agricultural Science Digest*. 29 (4): 254-259.
- [6] Gupta, R. (1987), "Role of women in economic development". *Yojana* 31(8): 28-32.
- [7] Johnson. R.A. and D.W. Wichern. (2000). *Applied Multivariate Statistical Analysis*. Pearson Education Asia.
- [8] Rajan Kumar Sahoo and Gyanindra Dash (2009) "Agriculture and Rural Economy" Regal Publications, New Delhi.
- [9] Role of Women in Agriculture, prepared by Sofa Team and Cheryl Doss, ESA working paper no. 11- 02, March 2011, PP. 2-17.
- [10] Singh and Vinay (2013). "Gender participation in Indian agriculture: An ergonomic evaluation of occupational hazard of farm and allied activities" *International Journal of Agriculture, Environment & Biotechnology*. 6(1): 157-168.
- [11] Unnati. A, G.S Ankush and A. V. Mande (2012) "Extent of participation of farm women in Decision making" *Journal of Dairying Foods & Home Sciences*. 31 (1): 72 – 74.