

# STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN CULTIVATORS

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Historians believe that it was women who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. Women is regarded as **“the creator of all green things in the world”**. Intellectual decision making and physical participation of women in agricultural production system is substantial. Indian rural women have been always an important and prominent partner in agricultural sector.

Nearly 78 per cent of women are actively involved in agriculture as compared to 68 per cent of men. 34.55

per cent of women cultivators are engaged in agriculture. According to recent studies 50 - 90 per cent of all agricultural activities are carried by women and women produce 44 per cent of the world food today (Country report, 1995). An increasing role of women in agriculture for nation building is extremely vital. The most of the farmers in India are women (Shiva, 1991) and also many decisions from seed to resources such as land, labour, input allocation are taken by women themselves or jointly with the husbands or with family members. The most of

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the men always takes decisions with consulting their female counterparts. But, over the years women cultivators are typically and wrongly characterized as "economically inactive" and women cultivators play only a "supportive role" in agriculture as farmers' wives (Samanta, 1994). Women have played and continue to play a key role in the conversion of the agricultural resources such as land and water to food grains.

### **Decision making**

Research results indicated that on the most of the occasions women emerged as a independent decision makers. Men and women usually discuss matters with each other. Most of the women managing farm decisions solely depends upon the women cultivator. Over the years women emerge as not only good home makers but also intellectual decision makers in the farming. Many results indicate that women participation in the decision making is crucial in all agricultural activities.

### **Supervision**

Women cultivators perform as efficient supervisors of farm labourers, direction, operations and allocation of resources. Women cultivators periodically check the requirement of irrigation, fertilizer and also pest and disease occurrences.

### **Participation**

Besides decision making and supervision, they also contribute as

cultivators cum labourers. Most of the small and marginal women farmers perform almost all farm operations along with the labourers. Extent of participation mainly depends upon size and land holding and caste factors. Increased land holding and higher caste will reduce the participation of women in agricultural activities.

In agriculture, women cultivators emerged as intellectual decision makers, effective supervisors and also they perform most of the agricultural operations. However, these facts are not reflected in the government policies and training provisions.

### **Problems of women cultivators**

\* **The first and foremost problem of women cultivators is the "Inadequate access to the modern agricultural technologies"**

Government agricultural extension policy and extension agents never considered women cultivators as independent entities. They are always treated as women cultivators in rural areas as a part of household or appendage to men.

Agricultural technology is often designed and disseminated without considering women cultivators.

In India most of the agricultural extension agents are men. Estimates indicated that, only 0.59 per cent of farm extension workers are women.

Men extension workers mainly concentrate on male farmers and it is not easier for male extension agents to

communicate to women cultivators in rural areas due to socio-cultural difficulty. There is an implicit belief that the information provided by the extension agents to the male members of the family would automatically trickle down to the female members which, however, is often not true.

- **Women cultivators access to inputs and market facilities is limited**

Rural socio-cultural climate does not allow women cultivators to move freely and get the required inputs from the far off places.

Dual responsibility - cultivators also act as a home makers. Their household responsibilities won't allow to devote much time on getting inputs and going to markets.

- **Women have limited access to credit**

In the patriarchal type of family land ownership vested only with male members. This hinders the women cultivators to get institutionalized credit for cultivation purpose.

- **Most of the agriculture training programmes, developmental programmes target only male farmers**

Proportionate provision of training for farm women cultivators are not ensured. This make the farm women less skilled, less knowledgeable about recent technologies in agriculture. In turn it affects the overall production system of agriculture in the country.

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- **Neglect of women cultivators in mass media**

Mass media such as TV, radio, newspapers and farm magazines neglect the women cultivators. Awareness, interest and recognition are not provided to them through these media.

- **Contribution of women cultivators not recognized**

Women cultivators in rural area are considered as economically inactive. But in reality it is not so. This un-recognition hinders their job satisfaction and performance.

- **Research recommendations not inline with the needs and interest of farm women cultivators**

Before starting research and extension gender analysis is a must. Research work should be carried out with the participation of women cultivators. Women cultivators should have a 'say' in the technology development and dissemination process.

## **STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN CULTIVATORS**

- **Recruitment of more women extension agents**

Involving more women extension agents will facilitate the easy access of technology by the women cultivators. However, recruitment of women extension agents and covering large spectrum of cultivators may take reasonable time.

**Formation of women farmers groups for easy communication of male extension agents**

Formation of women groups will facilitate easy access of male extension agents to women cultivators. This 'group approach' alleviates many cultural difficulties of male extension agent working with women cultivators.

**Male extension agents can disseminate technical information through existing women groups**

Recent days most of the rural areas possess the women groups such as mahila mandal, etc., Extension worker can work with such existing women groups.

**Selection of women cultivators as contact farmers**

Women cultivators should be selected as 'contact farmers'. It will facilitate easy access and technical know-how to women cultivators.

**Introduction of correspondence courses in agriculture exclusively for women cultivators**

This will provide latest technology for improving their farm and home life. This technique become more economical and convenient to farm women. However, it may get limited readers, because of more illiteracy in rural areas.

**Agricultural inputs are made available near by rural areas, it should be easily accessible to women cultivators**

Agricultural inputs be made available through village co-operatives or through other input agencies in the villages.

**Market information and access to markets for the women cultivators are to be ensured**

Market information should be provided through extension agents and market infrastructure should be developed for easy disposal of agricultural produces in rural area itself.

**Agriculture credit must be made available to women cultivators**

Through co-operative and the nationalised banks financial requirement of women cultivators should be ensured. Cumbersome procedures and security needed for getting the loan should be reduced.

**Appropriate technology should be introduced in rural areas for reducing drudgery of farm women**

For instance smokeless chulha, solar cooker.

Introduction of science and technology in rural area will make women's domestic role easier.

**Exclusive training programmes for woman farmers should be started with concentrated efforts in agriculture sector**

Such training programmes will encourage woman farmers to contribute more competently.

**Focus on women cultivators through mass media**

Mass media such as TV, radio, newspaper and farm journals should focus more on women farmers. Women cultivators' experiences, success stories in agriculture should be published and telecast.

**Initiating research on gender issues**

More systematic, intensive research studies should be initiated to account the women contributions, their needs and constraints in agriculture.

**Technology development and dissemination has to involve women**

Participatory technology development and dissemination be ensured.

**NGOs are to be given more responsibility to target the women cultivators**

With available government machinery it may not be possible to address problems of women cultivators and technology dissemination fully. So, NGOs must be given more role to play.

**Conclusion**

The unrecognised potential of women in large segments of Indian rural society can be realized through feminization in agricultural research and extension. Prosperity and growth of the nation heavily depend on the empowerment of women cultivators.

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