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Impact of off farm income of farm women on household food security

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Abstract

Off farm sectors are working as substitutes during extremity and farm women play an important role in household food security. Women contribute their maximum portion of income in securing food for them and for other members of the family. According to a survey conducted by IFPRI (2001), women play a dominant role to gain household food security. The study has attempted to find if various independent variables (Socio -personal and Socio- psychological) have any relation with the off farm income of the respondents. The study had also analysed the contribution of off farm income of farm women in the total household income and its impact on food security. The study was done in two blocks of Cooch Behar district of West Bengal and were selected purposively. 120 farm women were selected randomly from four villages as respondents. The data were collected by personal interview method with the help of structured interview schedule. Statistical tools like frequency, percentage, mean, SD, ranking, correlation etc has been used to analyse the data. It was found that independent variables like education, land holding, social participation, cosmo politeness and training attended had positive and significant association with off farm income and off farm income of the farm women had high level of contribution in the total household income. It has also been found that there is a positive and significant relationship between off farm income, total household income and food security. The study concludes that woman play a vital role in securing household food accessibility and availability. Thus, policies across different sectors like agriculture, credit, labor markets etc need to recognize women as equal workers and contributors to household food security as well as overall household economy by ensuring equal entitlements to resources, services and returns to labor (wages). The terms and conditions of women's engagement in the non farm sector should be encouraged through improved access to market, information and transportation. Local government bodies (panchayats) should provide women with a genuine voice and control over local resources, enabling them to mainstream the gender issues in the planning and implementation of programs and their implementation.

Keywords: Farm women, food security, off farm activities, off farm income

Introduction

Agriculture and off farm sector secure food for approximately 58% of rural population of India. However, small and marginal farm women are unable to meet the basic requirement of their family with the farm income only, generated from agriculture. Landless, marginal and small farmers who are not getting enough income from agricultural sector are dependent on off-farm sector. Off farm sectors are working as substitutes during extremity. In rural areas 1/5th of the employment opportunity comes from off-farm sector. According to the annual report of Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India, (2015), labour force engaged in agriculture sector has been declined from 238 million in 1999-2000 to 228 million in 2014-2015, while labour force engaged in off-farm sector has surprisingly increased from 159 million in 1999-2000 to 239 million in 2014-2015. The small holding households who are facing lack of credit facility, are more dependent on off-farm income for food security in term of availability and access. Farm productivity is also found to be improved by cash income earned from off farm sector. Moreover, off-farm income has a strong impact on reduction of the burden of household expenditure. Hennessy (2006) ^[1] said, approximately 40 percent of farm households have an off-farm income and that almost 30 percent of the farming population are only sustainable because of off-farm income.

Women play an important role in household food security. Women contribute their maximum portion of income in securing food for them and for other members of the family. According to a survey conducted by IFPRI (2001), women play a dominant role to gain household food security. As agriculture is seasonal in nature so the income which is earned is also uncertain. Different time during the year the farmers used to face extremities as a result their families

face many troubles in acquiring their basic needs. The small as well as marginal farm women hence choose alternative activities which will fulfill all the needs of the family and will make them economically sustainable.

Dsouza *et al.*, (2020) [2] studied the impact of off-farm work on food security. They found that when the farm women of household engaged in off-farm activities then the food availability of whole family used to be secured. It is because women's income is fully used for betterment of household food security, while men spend their income in durable goods. Rahman *et al.*, (2020) [5] stated that during the lean period of farming sector or in off-farm season, the off-farm income can improve food availability in household for a longer period. Dzanku (2019) [3] shows that off farm income of women is more responsible for food security of rural household. Holden *et al.*, (2004) also said that off-farm income can increase food security of households. Ellis (1998) [4] showed that off-farm income has major role in food availability and accessibility.

In this backdrop the study has attempted to find if various independent variables (Socio -personal and Socio-psychological) have any relation with the off farm income of the respondents. The study had also analysed the contribution of off farm income of farm women in the total household income and its impact on food security.

Material and Methods

The study was done in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal. The state and district were selected purposively due to the

convenience of the researcher. Coochbehar I and Coochbehar II blocks were also selected purposively. Total four villages namely Chandmari, Pathpisu & Maheshbathan, Gopalpur were selected from Coochbehar block I and Coochbehar block II respectively, through simple random sampling without replacement method. 120 respondents were taken from these four villages through simple random sampling method. Where 60 farm women has some kind of off farm income and the rest 60 were not involved in any off fram activities. The socio-personal and socio-economic profile of the farm women and opportunities for different off farm activities in the study area were studied with the help of available secondary information sources and primary sources in the study area. The data was collected during the period of February 2021 to April 2021. Data collection was done though personal interview method with the help of structured schedule meant for the study. The primary data was collected through personal interview of the respondents individually in the field, home or at their work place. The information was than recorded on the interview schedule. The data thus collected, was then tabulated and scientifically analysed based on the objectives of the study with the help of SPSS software. The conclusion and recommendation were made on the basis of the results. Statistical tools like frequency, percentage, mean, S.D, ranking, coefficient of correlation etc were used.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Coefficient of correlation(r) between independent variables and off farm income.

Sl. No.	Independent variables	Coefficient of correlation (r)
1	Age	-.173**
2	Marital status	-.339**
3	Family type	-.009
4	No. of children	-.142
5	Old person	.083
6.	Economic status	-.017
7.	Education	.232**
8.	Farmer category	.013
9.	Land holding	.225**
10.	Social participation	.251**
11.	Access to credit	.087
12.	Cosmo politeness	.292**
13.	Training attended	.320**

** significant at 1% level, * significant at 5% level

The table shows the coefficient of correlation (r) between various independent variables like age, marital status, family type, no. of children, no. of old age person, economic status, education, category of the farmer, land holding, social participation and the dependent variable, off farm income. It has been found that age and marital status has negative but significant relation with off farm income. With the advancement of age, women become busier with household work and other responsibilities hence get less scope to get herself involved with off farm activities. It has been observed that married women are not allowed to go out or get involved in off farm activities due to the patriarchal mind set of the people of the study area. Hence, marital status has found to be negatively but significantly associated with off farm income. Many independent variables like family type, no. of children, no. of old age persons, economic status, farmer category and access to credit could not establish any association with off farm income, whereas, few independent variables like education, land holding, social participation, cosmo politeness

and training attended were found to have positive and significant association with off farm income. Education makes people more wise, skilled and develops positive attitude whereas, land holding and social participation ensure funds availability and more opportunities. Cosmo politeness and training provides them confidence and opportunity. This might be the reason that these independent variables could establish a positive relation with off farm income.

Table 2: Contribution of off farm income in the total household income

N=60		
Level of Contribution (%)	Frequency	Households (%)
Low (1-33)	2	3.33
Medium (>33-66)	14	23.33
High (>66-100)	44	73.33
Total	60	100.0

The table shows the contribution of off farm income on the total household income of farm family in the study area. The majority of the farm women were from marginal farmer's family and their income from the farm was low. It has been found that the off farm income of the farm women had high level of contribution in the total household income. Out of 120 farm women, 60 respondents had some kind of off farm income. Out of those 60 farm women, 44 respondents had shown high level of contribution in the total household income, which makes 73.33% of the respondents. 23.33% of the farm women had medium level of contribution. Very few farm women i.e only 3.33 % among the selected farm women were found to have low level of contribution in total household income. Thus, it can be concluded that off farm income do contribute immensely on the total household income.

Impact of off farm income on household income and food security of farm women.

Table 3: Coefficient of correlation between off farm income, Household income and Food security.

Sl. No	Independent variables	Coefficient of correlation (r)
1.	Household income	0.192*
2.	Food security	0.764**

** significant at 1% level, * significant at 5% level

The table depicts that there is a positive and significant relationship between off farm income and food security. It has been seen that when a woman starts earning, she tries to spend the money on household food security and nutrition along with children's education. The correlation results prove that off farm income has positive and significant impact on food security and hence when off farm income increases food security tends to increase too. The observation is same with that of many other researchers like Rahman *et al.*, (2020) [5], who have reported in their study that in India the number of rural families involved in off farm activities has been increasing and this can provide a lion's share in their income. They have also stated that the families which are engaged both in farming and off farm activities can get better access to food availability and accessibility.

The table also shows that the total household income is also positively and significantly associated with the food security. This household income also includes the off-farm income of farm women has positive and significant relation with food security indicates that with an increase in the total household income, food security also increases. The finding has similarity with the findings of Yacob *et al.*, (2016), who have showed in their studies that maximum of the farming households are marginal and small, If they start adopting extra source of income besides farming, they can mitigate the problem of food unavailability and inaccessibility to a great extent.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The present growth model of the development is focusing on urbanization and manufacturing, rather than strengthening the bases of rural lives, misses the core elements of gender and broader social equality and justice. Food security is the basic right of human beings and woman play a vital role in securing its accessibility and availability. In rural areas, household members should encourage the farm women, to take up off farm activities as their earnings have direct impact on

household income and hence improve the food security level. Policies across different sectors like agriculture, credit, labor markets etc need to recognize women as equal workers and contributors to household food security as well as overall household economy by ensuring equal entitlements to resources, services and returns to labor (wages). Women should be recognized as farmers and given full support physically and mentally to pursue agricultural enterprises irrespective of their land-ownership status. Agricultural information and technology need to take into account gender-specific needs and constraints like the issue of time shortage in case of rural farm women. The terms and conditions of women's engagement in the non farm sector should be encouraged through improved access to market, information and transportation. Local government bodies (panchayats) should provide women with a genuine voice and control over local resources, enabling them to mainstream the gender issues in the planning and implementation of programs and their implementation.

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