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Livelihood analysis of women agricultural labourers in Cuttack district of Odisha

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Abstract

India is the second most populous country of the world and has changing socio-political demographic patterns that have been drawing global attention in recent years. Despite several growth orientated policies adopted by the government, the widening economic, regional and gender disparities are posing serious challenges for the health sector. Agricultural labourers who are largely landless and form a significant section of rural society mainly depend on wage employment in agriculture.

Majority of women are in service providing sectors, manual labourers such as agricultural labourers, construction workers, contract labourers, laundry and domestic workers etc. Women agricultural labourers play a pivotal role in the field of agricultural development. In India, 85% of rural women are agricultural labourers, yet only about 13% engaged in their own land. So it is very important to know the socio-economic and working conditions of these women working in various fields. Because of female illiteracy, mere poverty starvation and un-employment, women agricultural labourers need more assistance for sustainable agricultural development and gender equity.

To undertaken reform and to gain equal rights to economic resources the women agricultural labourers should provide equal access to land, inputs, knowledge, financial support, markets and opportunities. The purpose of this study was to estimate the extent to which socio-economic characteristics, and community related factors influencing livelihood sustainability of women agricultural labourers which directly or indirectly affect their socio-economic environment along with their health. The study was conducted in Cuttack district of Odisha.

Keywords: Women agricultural labourers, livelihood

Introduction

Women carry out the bulk of the work in agricultural production. A round 70-80% of all field work is done by women and most post-harvest and processing tasks are solely their responsibility. There is, however, a strict sexual division of agricultural work. All operations involving machinery and draught animal are performed by men. Thus, men are responsible for all harrowing and leaving, for irrigated using bullock bailing, for threshing where animals where are used and for spraying, All activities involving direct manual labourers are assigned to women.

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 labour 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.

Review of literature

Thresia (2008) in his paper "Women workers in agriculture: gender discrimination, working conditions and health status" pointed out some very important issues of women agricultural labourers. The biggest issue was related to physical (abortions, stillbirths, and premature deliveries) and mental health because of the dual work burden, economic and social insecurity, poverty. In addition they have gender discrimination in terms of proper education,

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employment and resources, which make them helpless and powerless with low self-esteem. Basic facilities like clean drinking water and washroom facilities were also not available in spite of having long working hours with lower wage rates on farms.

Anriquez (2010) has reported that women socio-economic condition and their work in agriculture as farmers on their own account, as unpaid workers on family farms and as paid or unpaid labourers on other farms and agricultural enterprises. They are involved in both crop and livestock production at subsistence and commercial levels. They produce food and cash crops and manage mixed agricultural operations often involving crops, livestock and fish farming.

Mugadur & Hiremath (2014) studies about socio-economic condition of women agricultural labour in Mangudi village and found that women face many problems like illiteracy, low and irregular wages, scolding and beating by men etc. They concluded that women agricultural labourers do not know how to face these problems.

D. Swamikannan and C. Jeya Lakshmi (2015) [6] in their research article with the caption, "Women Labour in Agriculture in India: Some Facts" have studied about women labourers in Indian agriculture sector and found that female work participation rate has declined drastically during last few decades, which shows that female workers are moved from agricultural to non-agricultural activities because wage differences between male and female workers for the same type of work discourages female workers.

Objective of the Study

1. To study the socio-economic condition of the respondents

2. To analyze the working condition of the respondents

Methodology

The study was based upon both primary and secondary data. The primary data had been collected from 250 sample respondents. The secondary data had been collected from journals, books, articles, reports and websites. Ex-post facto research design was adopted for the present research study. The present study had been carried out in two blocks namely Badamba and Banki block of Cuttack district. Purposive random sampling method had been selected for data collection.

Primary data was collected with help of interview schedule. Secondary data was collected from various reports, books, journals and websites. The data was analysed through SPSS software package and interpreted for result.

Socio-Economic profile of women agricultural labourers

Women in rural India are involved in various stages of agricultural operations starting from sowing of seeds to hand weeding, harvesting and post-harvesting activities. Women make essential contributions to the agriculture and rural economies in all developing countries. Hence it is barely necessary to study about different socio-economic variables of women agricultural labourers in their daily life. Socio-economic profile of the respondents has been analysed in terms of age, education, size of family, types of family, leadership pattern, housing pattern, land possession and monthly income etc.

Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents by their Socio-Economic Status (n=250)

Variable	Sub-Group	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	Young (Up to 35)	75	30
	Middle aged (36-55)	137	54.8
	Old (>55)	38	15.2
Educational Status	Illiterate	53	21.4
	Can read and write	46	18.57
	Primary education	125	50
	Middle education	15	5.75
Family Size	High school	11	4.28
	Small	168	67.15
	Big	82	32.85
Family Type	Nuclear	154	61.6
	Joint	96	38.4
Housing Pattern	Kuccha house	96	61.5
	Semi pucca	154	38.5
	Pucca house	0	0
Land Possession	Landless	59	23.7
	Tenant farmer	147	58.8
	Marginal farmer	44	17.5
	Small farmer	Nil	Nil
	Medium farmer	Nil	Nil
	Large farmer	Nil	Nil
Monthly Income	Landless	59	23.7
	Up to 1000/-	38	15.2
	1000-2000/-	105	42
	2000-3000/-	98	39.2
	Above 3000/-	9	3.6

From the survey, the table-1 inferred that the majority (54.8%) of the women agricultural labourers belonged to the age group of 36-55 years. Regarding educational status, the

great proportion (21.4%) of the respondents were illiterate (couldn't read and write). Based on the data majority (67.15%) of the respondents were having small (1-3

members) size of families. Majority of respondents (61.6%) respondents were having nuclear family type. From the above table it was clear that majority (61.5%) respondents were having kuccha houses. From the land point of view majority of respondents (58.85%) were tenant farmers. In terms of

monthly income, the majority (42%) of the respondents were able to earn Rs.1000-2000 per month as their source of livelihood. Besides, all the respondents belong to Hindu religion, married and they get their wages in daily basis respectively.

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents by their mode of savings and debt (n=250)

Variable	Sub Group	Frequency	Percentage
Mode of Savings	Bank	62	24.8
	SHG	92	36.8
	Informal group	96	38.4
	Any other	Nil	0
Amount of Savings	Upto 10000/-	198	79.2
	Above 10000/-	52	20.8
Mode of Debt	Friends and relatives	57	23
	SHG	105	42
	Informal group	88	35
	Any other	Nil	0
Amount of Debt	Upto 10000/-	38	15.2
	Above 10000/-	212	84.8

Based on the field investigation, the table-2 expressed that the mode of savings wise distribution of the respondents. It is observed that a good number of the women agricultural labourers have possessed savings habit through informal group (38.4%) followed by SHG (36.8%) and Bank (24.8%) respectively. Majority of respondents (79.2%) respondents have their savings amount up to Rs.10000/- Further, it is heartening to note that the rest of the workers have not possessed any form of savings through their wages due to

economic needs of the family. Moreover from the study, it is clear that the mode of debt was as follows. Majority of the respondents (42%) used SHG as their borrowing unit followed by informal groups (35%) and friends and relatives (23%). Majority (84.8%) of the respondents having their debt amount above Rs. 10000/-.

Working conditions of women agricultural labourers

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents as per the working condition (n=250)

Variable	Sub Group	Frequency	Percentage
No. of working hours in the field per day	Upto 2 hrs	55	22
	Upto 4 hrs	167	66.8
	Upto 8 hrs	28	11.2
Wages per day	<200	31	12.4
	200-300	210	84
	>300	9	3.6
No. of days employment available in a month	10 days	75	30
	15 days	143	57.2
	20 days	25	10
	More than 20 days	7	2.8

The table no 3 indicated that, majority of the respondents (66.8%) stated that they worked up to 4 hours a day in the field and only (11.2%) of the respondents opined that they worked up to 8 hours a day in the field. It is clearly revealed in the present study that these women agricultural labourers have to work minimum 2-4 hours a day in the field. It could be seen from the data in the table no.3 that, majority of the respondents (84%) get the daily wages in between Rs.200-300/-, while only (3.6%) of the respondents get the daily wages more than Rs300/-. It was revealed from the above

table that, majority of the respondents (57.2%) stated that they get only 15 days work in a month, (30%) of the respondents stated that they get 10 days work in a month, another (10%) of the respondents stated that they get only 20 days work in a month and very few (2.8%) of the respondents opined that they get more than 20 days work in a month. It is revealed from the study that majority of the respondents get only few days work in a month. It clearly shows their lower economic status.

Table 4: Distribution of the respondents by their challenges at work place (n=250)

Category	Frequency (%)	
	Yes	No
Over load of work at work place	195 (78)	55 (22)
Less wage in comparisons to work	46 (18.4)	204 (81.6)
No opportunity to save the wage	32 (12.8)	218 (87.2)
Gender discrimination at work place	187 (74.8)	63 (25.2)
Wage discrimination at work place	221 (88.4)	29 (11.6)

Based on the survey, the table-4 found that the three fourth (78%) of the respondents had done overload work at agricultural field for their livelihood followed by the majority (81.6%) of the women workers had not earned enough and sufficient wage for daily means and almost all (87.2%) the respondents are unable to get a chance to save their wages due insufficient of wage as well as lot of family commitments. Further, it was painful to note that in the modern era the majority of the women agricultural workers had discriminated by others at the work place on the basis of gender (74.8%) and wage (88.4%) respectively.

Conclusion

Agriculture is increasingly becoming the preserve of women has important implications for policy. Based on the above analysis we may draw the following conclusion. The female agricultural labour households belonged to the socially and economically backward communities in the society. The wage income is the main source of income and the income from non-agricultural activities is small. Majority of female labourers are illiterate or having an educational level up to primary.

Due to low income the households are forced to borrow money from all available sources and are in debt. Almost all the households are poor or BPL households and enjoying the benefits under BPL categories. The subsidized distribution of food grains through ration shops, agricultural workers pension, old age pension, financial support given for construction of the houses have considerably helped the households to maintain a better level of living. The study found that the consumption of food items are poor and not sufficient to provide the required calories.

It is found that poverty due to low wages and income lack of jobs and unemployment, lack of non-agricultural employment, high cost of living are the other major problems faced by the female agricultural labourers both in family level and working condition. Women empowerment should imply a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self reliance, to assert their independent right to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination.

- The women in rural areas should be educated.
- Minimum and equal wages should be fixed by state Government for agricultural labour and the rates should be reviewed periodically.
- Conscious efforts are needed for training of female work force in the rural areas in alternative skills.
- There is need to make available cheap credit to needy agricultural women to start self - employment and as a result of that our rural women may get additional opportunity for gainful employment.
- There is need to bring about some attitudinal and institutional changes to remove the prejudices, against women and to remove the general feeling that women are

good just for house and unskilled work.

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