



ISSN (E): 2277-7695
ISSN (P): 2349-8242
NAAS Rating: 5.23
TPI 2023; SP-12(9): 2058-2060
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www.thepharmajournal.com
Received: 03-07-2023
Accepted: 12-08-2023

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Empowering the backbone: Role and involvement of women farmers in India's agriculture sector

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Abstract

Women's contributions to agriculture, whether subsistence farming or commercial agriculture, the agricultural industry in India relies substantially on the efforts of women farmers, who make up a significant section of the rural workforce. Despite their critical role, women frequently confront gender-specific hurdles and limits that prevent them from fully participating and empowering in agriculture. Women farmers make up a sizable and frequently neglected proportion of the worldwide agricultural workforce. Women have been engaged in agriculture for centuries, playing an important role in food production, processing, and distribution. Women farmers have long experienced inequities in access to resources, financing, land ownership, and decision-making authority, despite their significant contributions. Recognizing and tackling gender inequities is critical for gender equality and food security and sustainable agricultural development. On this basis, women farmers are generally paid less, while working harder and longer hours.

Keywords: Involvement, role, women, agriculture

Introduction

The role and involvement of women farmers in Indian agriculture are crucial and multifaceted. Women's contributions to farming activities span various aspects of agricultural production, but their efforts have often been overlooked and undervalued. Over time, there has been an increasing recognition of the significance of women farmers in Indian agriculture. Women constitute a substantial portion of the agricultural labor force in India. They are actively engaged in various farming tasks, including planting, weeding, transplanting, harvesting, and tending to livestock. In rural areas, many women engage in subsistence farming, growing crops for household consumption. They often cultivate vegetables, fruits, and other crops that directly contribute to family nutrition. Further, Women are often the guardians of traditional agricultural knowledge and seeds. They engage in seed saving and preservation, helping to maintain crop diversity and preserve indigenous farming practices. Women are extensively involved in post-harvest activities, including threshing, winnowing, cleaning, sorting, and packaging of agricultural produce. Their role in these activities contributes to the preparation of marketable products. In recent years, more women have ventured into agri-entrepreneurship and agribusiness activities. They're involved in food processing, value addition, and creating marketable products from their farm produce. The Indian government has implemented various policies and initiatives to support women farmers. Programs like the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) aim to empower women by providing training, access to resources, and market linkages.

Objectives

1. To observe the socio-economic status of women farmers.
2. To assess the role of women farmers in agriculture sector.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Kanpur district of Uttar Pradesh which was purposively selected for the study purpose. Two blocks, namely Kalyanpur and Chaubepur was randomly selected from a total of ten blocks in the district. Random selection of 6 villages was done from the selected block from which a total sample size of 300 women farmers of landless, marginal and small farmer's category was drawn through systematic random sampling method to conduct the present investigation. Dependent and independent variables such as age, caste, education, income, role, knowledge, performance, etc were studied.

The statistical tools applied were percentage.

Result

Table 1: Distribution of farm women according to age group N = 300

Age group	Frequency	Per cent
30 to 40 years	65	21.0
40 to 50years	145	48.0
50 to 60 years	58	19.0
60 years and above	32	10.0
Total	300	100.0

When women in rural areas have spent 10-12 years of their marriage and they are matured, they accompanied by older women of the family to contribute as a worker to their family's main occupation i.e. agriculture. So, it is clear that

Table 2: Distribution of farm women according to land holding N = 300

Category	Frequency	Per cent
Landless	75	25.0
Marginal	165	55.0
Small	60	20.0
Total	300	100.0

Marginal farmers had less cropping, less level of adoption of modern agriculture technologies and less knowledge about hybrid seeds and inter- cropping system as compared to small farmers.

Table 3: Distribution of women farmers is according to participation and involvement in different agricultural activities. N= 300

Agricultural activities	Frequency	
	Manual	By machine
Pre-sowing		
Irrigation for land preparation	-	100.0
Puddling	20.0	80.0
Land levelling	10.0	90.0
Seed selection	85.0	15.0
Seed treatment	91.0	9.0
Nursery bed raising	100.0	-
Sowing	100.0	-
Uprooting & transport of seedlings	100.0	-
Transplanting seedling	100.0	-
Bunds making	100.0	-
Fertilizer/manure application	10.0	90.0
Post-sowing		
Irrigation	-	100.0
Weeding	100.0	-
Hoeing	100.0	-
Fertilizer application	10.0	90.0
Fungicide and pesticide application	-	100.0
Insect-pest control	10.0	90.0
Harvesting	5.0	95.0
Bundle making	100.0	-
Winnowing	20	20
Post-harvest		
Preparation of threshing floor	100.0	-
Carrying from produce to threshing floor	100.0	-
Hand threshing	100.0	-
Threshing through machine	-	100.0
Winnowing	40.0	60.0
Drying and cleaning of produce	95.0	5.0
Care and treatment of seeds & grains	100.0	-
Packaging	-	-
Tagging	70.0	30.0
Storage	100.0	-
Marketing	100.0	-

Mainly rural women are engaged in agricultural activities in there different ways on the socio economic status of their family and regional factors such as paid labourers, cultivators

doing labour on their own land and manager of certain aspects of agricultural production by way of labour supervision and the participation in post harvest operations.



Fig 1: Distribution of farm women according to the type of work

Table 4: Distribution of farm women according to the type of work

Activities	Frequency	
	Manual	By machine
Field preparation	-	100.0
Seed selection	85.0	-
Seed treatment	91.0	9.0
Sowing	100.0	-
Weed control	100.0	-
Weed management	85.0	15.0
Bunds making	100.0	-
Puddling	100.0	-
Uprooting and transport of seedlings	100.0	-
Transplanting	100.0	-
Irrigation	-	100.0
Fertilizer application	40.0	60.0
Insect pest control	10.0	90.0
Harvesting	45.0	55.0
Bundle making	100.0	-
Carrying farm produce to threshing floor	100.0	-
Threshing	55.0	45.0
Winnowing	90.0	10.0
Drying and cleaning of farm produce	58.0	42.0
Care of seeds and grains	100.0	-
Packaging	70.0	30.0
Tagging	15.0	85.0
Storage	100.0	-
Marketing/Transplanting	100.0	-

Distribution of women farmers according to the type of work they perform in agriculture. 100.0 per cent of women farmer were involved in sowing, weed control, bunds making, puddling, uprooting and transport of seedlings, transplanting,

bundle making, carrion farm produce to threshing floor, care of seeds and grains storage and marketing or transportation by working manually. So, it is critical to adopt current agricultural technologies that are woman-friendly, easy to handle, low-cost, and simple to operate by farm women, as well as to provide training at regular intervals to minimize their stress and weariness and so boost production.

Conclusion

Women farmers in India are instrumental in ensuring food security, rural development, and sustainable agriculture. Their active participation, knowledge, and resilience contribute significantly to the growth and transformation of the agriculture sector. Addressing gender-related constraints and empowering women in agriculture are essential steps toward achieving inclusive and equitable agricultural development in India.

Recommendation

1. Government and non-governmental organizations should work towards ensuring that women have equal access to agricultural land and property rights.
2. Promote skill training and capacity-building programs for women farmers to enhance their knowledge and proficiency in modern agricultural techniques, sustainable practices, and value addition. Such training can enable them to increase their productivity and income.
3. Supporting women's participation in farmer producer organizations (FPOs) and linking them to larger markets can improve their bargaining power and income prospects.
4. Encourage the adoption of agricultural technologies and innovations among women farmers. This includes providing access to information and communication technology (ICT) tools, weather forecasting, market information, and efficient irrigation methods.

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