



Empowering Growth: The Vital Role of Women in Agriculture

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Agriculture is the backbone of global food production and a significant contributor to the economy of many countries. While it's often perceived as a male-dominated industry, the role of women in agriculture is indispensable and multifaceted. Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields. The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture varies greatly from region to region. But regardless of these variations, women are actively involved in various agricultural activities.



As per Census 2011, out of total female main workers, 55 per cent were agricultural labourers and 24 per cent were cultivators. However, only 12.8 per cent of the operational holdings were owned by women, which reflect the gender disparity in ownership of landholdings in agriculture. Women play a crucial role in all farm-related activities from land preparation to marketing. Women's empowerment is a crucial aspect of sustainable development and agriculture plays a significant role in achieving this goal. They contribute a higher proportion of labour in agricultural sector than men. This article explores the crucial contributions of women to agriculture, the challenges they face, and the importance of empowering and supporting women in this vital sector.

The Diverse Roles of Women in Agriculture

- 1. Farmers and Labourers:** Women are active participants in farming, whether as smallholder farmers tending to family plots or as agricultural labourers in larger commercial operations. They contribute significantly to crop cultivation, livestock management and overall farm productivity.
- 2. Food Processors and Preservers:** Women play a pivotal role in post-harvest activities such as cleaning, sorting, processing and preserving agricultural products. They are often responsible for transforming raw produce into marketable goods.
- 3. Entrepreneurs and Agribusiness Owners:** Many women have ventured into agribusiness, managing their farms or agricultural enterprises. They contribute to the supply chain by producing, processing and selling agricultural products.
- 4. Innovators and Researchers:** Women are actively involved in agricultural research and innovation, developing new farming techniques, crop varieties and sustainable practices that benefit the entire industry.
- 5. Community Builders:** Women often act as community leaders and educators, sharing agricultural knowledge and organizing cooperative efforts to improve farming practices and access to resources.

Challenges Faced by Women in Agriculture

1. **Gender Discrimination:** Women in agriculture often face gender-based discrimination, limiting their access to resources like land, credit and technology. Cultural norms and unequal property rights can perpetuate these disparities.
2. **Limited Access to Education:** Lack of access to education and training opportunities hinders women's ability to adopt modern agricultural practices and technology limiting their productivity.
3. **Unpaid and Underpaid Labour:** Women's contributions to agriculture frequently go unrecognized and uncompensated. They are more likely to engage in unpaid or underpaid labour, which can perpetuate poverty.
4. **Work-Life Balance:** Balancing household responsibilities with farming duties can be challenging for women, particularly in cultures where traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained.
5. **Climate Change and Environmental Stress:** Women are often disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, as they are responsible for securing food, water and fuel for their families. Climate-induced challenges, such as droughts and floods, can exacerbate their workload and vulnerabilities.

Scheme related to women

Governments around the world often introduce various schemes and programs aimed at promoting the welfare and empowerment of women. These schemes can cover a wide range of areas, including education, health, economic empowerment and social inclusion. Here are some common types of schemes related to women:

Education Schemes:

Scholarships for Girls: Many governments offer scholarships to encourage girls' enrolment and retention in schools and colleges.

Girls' Education Initiatives: Programs may focus on improving access to education for girls in marginalized communities, including building schools and providing learning materials.

Healthcare Schemes:

Maternal Health Programs: These schemes provide healthcare services and support for pregnant women and mothers, including prenatal and postnatal care.

Family Planning Services: Government programs often offer family planning services, including access to contraceptives and reproductive health information.

Economic Empowerment Schemes:

Microfinance Programs: These programs provide small loans to women entrepreneurs and support the establishment of women-owned businesses.

Skill Development and Training: Training and capacity-building programs help women acquire skills needed for better employment opportunities.

Women's Safety and Empowerment:

Women's Helplines: Many countries have helplines and support services for women facing domestic violence and abuse.

Women's Shelters: Safe spaces and shelters provide refuge for women escaping abusive situations.

Political Participation Schemes:

Reserved Seats: Some countries reserve seats for women in legislative bodies to promote their representation.

Training for Women Leaders: Programs offer training and mentorship for women interested in politics and leadership roles.

Entrepreneurship and Business Support:

Women Entrepreneurship Programs: These initiatives provide support for women-owned businesses through funding, training, and mentorship.

Market Access Initiatives: Schemes help women entrepreneurs access markets and promote their products.

Social Welfare Schemes:

Widow Pension Schemes: Financial support is provided to widows and single mothers to help them meet their basic needs.

Nutrition Programs: Government programs often focus on improving the nutritional status of women and children.

Legal Aid and Awareness:

Legal Aid Clinics: These clinics offer legal support and services to women who face legal issues, such as divorce or property disputes.

Gender Sensitization Programs: Initiatives aim to raise awareness about gender-related issues and promote gender equality.

Childcare and Family Support:

Subsidized Childcare: Governments may provide subsidies or financial assistance for childcare services to help women balance work and family responsibilities.

Parental Leave: Paid parental leave policies can benefit both women and men in managing family responsibilities.

Rural Development Schemes:

Women in Agriculture: These schemes target women farmers and provide them with resources, training and access to markets.

The Importance of Empowering Women in Agriculture

1. **Food Security:** Empowering women in agriculture enhances food security by increasing agricultural productivity. When women have access to resources and training, they can produce more food for their communities.
2. **Economic Growth:** Women's participation in agriculture contributes significantly to economic growth. Their involvement in agribusiness and entrepreneurship creates job opportunities and boosts local economies.
3. **Sustainable Practices:** Women often prioritize sustainable farming practices that promote soil health, biodiversity, and water conservation. Their involvement can lead to more environmentally friendly agriculture.
4. **Gender Equality:** Empowering women in agriculture is a crucial step toward achieving gender equality. It challenges discriminatory norms and promotes women's rights to land, education, and economic opportunities.
5. **Resilience:** Women's diverse roles in agriculture contribute to the resilience of farming communities. They share knowledge, adapt to changing conditions, and ensure food availability in times of crisis.

Conclusion

Women's roles in agriculture are diverse, invaluable, and too often underestimated or overlooked. Recognizing and addressing the challenges they face is essential for achieving sustainable agricultural development and food security. Empowering women in agriculture through access to resources, education, and equal opportunities not only benefits individual women but also strengthens the entire agricultural sector and contributes to global food security and economic growth. It is high time that we acknowledge and celebrate the vital role that women play in feeding the world.