



## Empowering Women in Agriculture: A Cornerstone of Gender Equality

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### Abstract

Gender relations, integral to societal dynamics, are undergoing a transformative shift influenced by social, cultural, and historical factors. It is incumbent upon us to confront historical disparities and collectively foster respect, empathy, and inclusivity. Exploring history, intersectionality, media influence, legal aspects, and global perspectives, we strive for an equitable society where everyone thrives irrespective of gender identity. In the realm of agriculture, acknowledging the pivotal role women play is essential for achieving gender equality. Despite their vital contributions, women encounter systemic challenges, necessitating initiatives such as access to resources, education, and decision-making power. Empowering women in agriculture is not only a matter of justice but also a key step towards a sustainable future. By addressing these challenges and ensuring women's participation in shaping policies, we unlock their potential to drive positive change and contribute to a more just and equitable world.

**Key words:** gender relations, women empowerment, gender equality, women in agriculture

### Introduction

Empowering women in agriculture is underscored by compelling data that highlights the pivotal role women play in food production and rural economies. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), women represent approximately 43% of the global agricultural workforce, with their contributions extending across various facets of farming, from labour-intensive activities to crucial decision-making processes. Furthermore, studies indicate that when women have access to the same resources as men, agricultural yields could increase by up to 30%, significantly impacting global food security. Economic Survey 2017-18, with becoming country to metropolitan relocation by men, there is 'feminization' of farming area' with expanding the number of women in different jobs as cultivators, businesspeople, and workers. Despite their essential role in agriculture, women face numerous challenges in accessing key assets.

**Table 1: Occupational distribution of Women and Men in different sectors**

Type of worker	Occupational distribution (%)	
	Women	Men
Professional	7	7
Service	7	5
Production	22	37
<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>33</b>
Other	2	4

## Role of women in agriculture

The role of women in agriculture is crucial and multifaceted, contributing significantly to the global food supply and rural economies. While the specific roles and responsibilities of women in agriculture can vary across regions and cultures, some common aspects highlight their importance:

**Farm Labor:** Women actively participate in various farm activities, including planting, weeding, harvesting, and processing crops. They often provide a substantial portion of the labour force in agricultural production.

**Livestock Management:** Women play a key role in the care and management of livestock, including feeding, milking, and taking care of animals. This is particularly prevalent in small-scale and subsistence farming.

**Seed Saving and Crop Diversity:** Traditionally, women have been the custodians of seed diversity. They play a crucial role in seed selection, preservation, and exchange, contributing to agricultural biodiversity and resilience.

**Post-Harvest Activities:** Women are involved in post-harvest activities such as sorting, cleaning, processing, and packaging of agricultural products. They may also engage in food preservation techniques like drying, canning, and fermenting.

**Family Nutrition:** Women often manage household food security and nutrition, making decisions about what to grow and what to consume. Their knowledge of local food traditions and nutrition is essential for family well-being.

**Water Management:** In many agricultural communities, women are responsible for water-related activities, including fetching water for irrigation, household use, and livestock. Efficient water management is critical for sustainable agriculture.

**Community Development:** Women contribute to the social and economic development of rural communities. They may be involved in community organizations, cooperatives, and other groups that address issues such as agricultural practices, healthcare, and education.

**Environmental Stewardship:** Women often have a close connection to the environment and natural resources. Their knowledge and practices contribute to sustainable and environmentally friendly agricultural methods.

Recognizing and supporting the role of women in agriculture is essential for achieving food security, reducing poverty, and promoting sustainable development.

### Challenges faced by Women in Agriculture:

Constraint / Focus area	Key Strategies
Women's weak property and contractual rights to LAND. In India 83% of agricultural land is inherited by males and only 25% of the women own the land. And this makes them ineligible for a majority of bank loans.	Strengthen property & contractual rights of women and increase knowledge of these rights
Women are the main users of WATER; but have restricted rights	Develop & disseminate small scale water management technologies; integration between irrigation and domestic water use
Gender inequality in access to, or ability to adopt, methods of improving SOIL FERTILITY	Fertilizer and improved seed vouchers; Fertilizer-for-work program; Microcredit for fertilizer, smaller bag sizes; Introduce a cash crop into women's cropping systems so they can pay for fertilizer use; Disseminate soil fertility replenishment techniques like biological nitrogen fixation, grain legumes, biomass transfer

Gender inequality in development & access to Improved varieties and technologies.	Involve women at all levels in priority-setting and research
Lack of recognition of how women receive, process information.	Organize Farmers Field School, experiential learning; Understand how social networks spread information, link with women groups
Low productivity of women's labour in agriculture including food processing.	Introduce labour-saving technologies that reduce women's time and energy, but design should respect and enhance women's roles
Lack of access to MARKETS and infrastructure.	Invest in market-oriented interventions that facilitate women's market access, strengthen their asset base.

### Need for Women Empowerment

The FAO of UN estimates that if women were to have the same access to productive resources as men, they would increase the yields on their farms by 20-30% and this would end up adding 2.5-4% to total agricultural output in developing countries. Women empowerment in agriculture is crucial for various reasons, and addressing this need can lead to numerous positive outcomes at individual, community, and societal levels.

Here are some key reasons highlighting the need for women empowerment in agriculture:

1. **Economic Development:** Empowering women in agriculture enhances their economic contribution. When women have access to resources, decision-making power, and income control, they can significantly contribute to the economic development of their households and communities.
2. **Food Security:** Women play a central role in food production and distribution, especially in many developing countries. Empowering women in agriculture ensures that they can actively participate in food security initiatives, leading to improved overall nutrition and well-being.
3. **Sustainable Agriculture:** Women often have a deep understanding of traditional and sustainable agricultural practices. Empowering them allows for the preservation and promotion of such practices, contributing to sustainable and environmentally friendly farming methods.
4. **Social Equality:** Women's empowerment promotes gender equality in agricultural communities. By providing women with equal opportunities in decision-making, resource control, leadership roles, social norms can shift towards a more equitable and just society.
5. **Community Development:** When women are empowered in agriculture, the benefits extend to the entire community. Women often reinvest their income in their families, contributing to improved healthcare, education, and overall community development.
6. **Innovation and Productivity:** Diverse perspectives and experiences contribute to innovation in agriculture. By empowering women and encouraging their active participation, the agricultural sector can benefit from a broader range of ideas and approaches, leading to increased productivity.
7. **Resilience to Climate Change:** Women are often more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Empowering women in agriculture involves providing them with the knowledge and resources to adapt to changing environmental conditions, making communities more resilient.
8. **Health and Nutrition:** Women's empowerment is linked to better health outcomes for both women and their families. When women have control over resources and decision-making, they can make choices that positively impact the health and nutrition of their households.



9. **Decision-making power in agricultural processes:** Women's involvement in decision-making processes within agricultural activities is crucial for their empowerment. This includes participation in crop selection, land use planning, and overall farm management decisions. Empowering women in decision-making ensures that their perspectives and needs are considered, leading to more sustainable and productive agricultural practices.
10. **Control over productive resources:** Land, water, seeds, and other productive resources are essential in agriculture. Women's control over these resources is vital for their empowerment. Secure land tenure for women can enhance their economic stability and decision-making capabilities, contributing to improved agricultural productivity.
11. **Control over the use of income:** Women's control over the income generated from agricultural activities is crucial for their economic independence. This involves the ability to make decisions on how the income is spent or invested. Financial literacy programs can empower women to manage income effectively and contribute to their households' well-being.
12. **Social capital and leadership in the community:** Building social capital involves fostering networks and relationships within the community. Women's leadership roles in community organizations and agricultural cooperatives can strengthen their influence. Encouraging and supporting women to participate in community decision-making processes can enhance their overall empowerment.
13. **Time use/Time Poverty:** Addressing time poverty involves recognizing and reducing the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and caregiving work on women. Introducing labour-saving technologies, improving infrastructure, and promoting equitable distribution of household responsibilities can help alleviate time poverty, enabling women to engage more actively in agriculture and other activities.
14. **Access to and use of technologies:** Bridging the gender gap in access to agricultural technologies is critical. This includes access to modern farming tools, information and communication technologies (ICTs), and efficient irrigation systems. Providing training on the use of agricultural technologies and ensuring that women have equal access can lead to increased productivity and income in the agricultural sector.

Empowering women in agriculture is not only a matter of social justice but also a strategic imperative for achieving sustainable and inclusive agricultural development. It leads to more resilient communities, improved food security, and overall progress towards achieving broader development goals.

### **National Policy for Farmers (NPF)**

The NPF announced by the Government in 2007 envisages the following measures aimed at women's empowerment:

- Asset reforms under land, water and livestock for an equitable share to women farmers.
- Better access to inputs and services, science and technology, implements, credit and support services like creches, child care centres, nutrition, health and training.
- Encouragement to women for participating in group activities aimed at achieving economies of scale through farming groups.
- Involvement of women in conservation and development of bio-resources.

The policy involves comprehensive measures such as asset reforms for land, water, livestock, fisheries, and bio-resources, integrating cutting-edge technologies and agricultural bio-security systems. It prioritizes high-quality seeds, disease-free planting material, and initiatives for soil fertility improvement and integrated pest management. Support services for women, including crèches, childcare centers, and training, are emphasized. The policy underscores timely and accessible institutional credit, farmer-friendly insurance, and nationwide implementation of Minimum Support Price. Furthermore, it integrates

Information and Communication Technology (ICT), farmer schools, and initiatives for rural non-farm employment, addressing rural energy needs through schemes across various Central Government Departments and Ministries.

## Conclusion

Empowering women in agriculture is a fundamental pillar in the pursuit of gender equality. The agricultural sector's pivotal role in the global economy underscores the significance of ensuring women's equal access to resources and opportunities. Beyond contributing to increased productivity and food security, women's empowerment in agriculture catalyzes economic growth, poverty reduction, and improved overall well-being. Efforts to bridge the gender gap in agriculture are crucial for fostering inclusivity and breaking the cycle of poverty within families and communities. Achieving gender equality requires collaborative efforts from governments, NGOs, and the private sector to eliminate discrimination, provide education and training, and ensure equal access to resources and markets. Recognizing women as key contributors to agricultural development is both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity, promising a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

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