



Organic Farming and Women's Role in Sustainable Agriculture

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Women have a long history of involvement in agriculture, and they are familiar with food, seed storage, and farm-level advances. Organic farming is an appropriate reaction to the chemical agriculture system. In rural areas, such as Haryana, women have propelled sustainability through new ways of preserving ecological balance and sustainable incomes. This article draws on the interface of organic farming, women's participation and sustainable development through a sociological lens, and underscores women's contributions, challenges and the importance of inclusive policies.

Keywords: Organic farming, women farmers, sustainable agriculture, Haryana, rural women, ecological farming, gender and agriculture.

Introduction

Traditionally, India's agrarian economy has relied on women to provide labour and know-how at the farm level, but their efforts have become invisible in the economic records and policy developments; rural women in Haryana - and elsewhere in India - are engaged in sowing, weeding, composting, managing livestock, and processing harvests. Additionally, as India's agricultural system is also facing issues stemming from a reliance on chemical farming and agricultural productivity, including soil fertility decrease, water scarcity, and pesticide residues, there has been a shift, albeit slowly, towards the practice of organic farming for some rural women. Organic farming is a naturally aligned system of farming, particularly utilising women's traditional knowledge and experience. In Haryana, which is often associated with the green revolution way of farming, rural women are not contributing to but are quietly leading a revolution towards sustainability.

Characteristics of organic farming

- Natural Inputs: The use of cow dung, green manure, and pesticides based on neem is quite common for women farmers in the villages of Haryana.
- Traditional Seeds: Women have saved indigenous seeds, which we can find in rural homes over generations. These seeds have climate-adapted characteristics and provide genetic diversity.
- Mixed Farming: Intercropping and kitchen gardening - often undertaken by women - provide the basis of food security for the household.
- collect dung/urine as an important element for composting or organic fertilisation.
- Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF): In the state of Haryana, ZBNF is promoted under the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) policy. Women can find that this farming technique resonates with their previous experiences of low-cost farming.

Women in Organic Agriculture

- Seed Preservers: The responsibility of keeping desi (native) seeds - Bansi wheat, desi cotton, indigenous pulses, etc - that is the basis of organic agriculture in Haryana, is mostly of women.

- Home-Gardeners: Women are growing food (vegetables/herbs, medicinal plants) in the home without using chemicals and helping to buffer the household from the market.
- Eco-practitioners: Women use neem, garlic sprays, cow urine, etc., you could say they provide a traditional pest controlling structure that has always happened.
- Change Agents: Women-led Self Help Groups (SHGs) in districts such as Kurukshetra and Hisar are changing the entire village to organic farming.
- Health Advocates: The health of their families is paramount to women, who actively reject agro-chemicals in favour of nutritious and safe foods.

Benefits of Being Female in Organic Farming

- Soil and Water Conservation: Methods such as composting, mulching, and crop rotation enhance fertility and minimise the use of water.
- Food security and household nutrition: Organic home production provides better nutrition for families and decreases health costs.
- Economic stability: Organic produce can be sold at a premium price at mandis, haats and through direct-to-consumer logistical models.
- Empowerment through SHGs: In Rohtak and Karnal, women have developed collectives to market organic grains, honey and pickles.
- Resiliency: Women contextualise agriculture within climate change and can protect family incomes during industrial agrarian crises.

Challenges for Women in Organic Agriculture in Haryana

- Land Tenure Problems: For most rural women engaging in agriculture, although they may work the land, they do not own it, which excludes them from credit and subsidies.
- Access to Knowledge: Agricultural extension service programs often ignore women, and the extension service is often male dominated.
- Certification Hurdles: Organic certification through the PKVY and NPOP programs is intensive in terms of paperwork and costly for individual women farmers.
- Market Access: When there are no direct market linkages, rural women cannot be paid equitable wages.
- Patriarchal Constraints: Gender prescribed roles restrict women's movement and decision-making involvement both inside and outside family farming enterprises.

Government Schemes and Policy Interventions

- ✓ Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY): Supported the development of organic clusters and training for farmers. The inclusion of women's self-help groups (SHGs) is a welcome development.
- ✓ Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP): Specifically supports women farmers as part of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM).
- ✓ National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD): Provides financial support for cooperatives led by women

Recommendations

- Legal Land Holdings: Recognising and recording women on land revenue records as joint owners will ensure they have access to formal credit.
- Gender-sensitive Extension Services: Extension will need to consider gender, local dialects and times of delivery for training on how to farm.
- Streamlining Certification Approvals: Consider models for group certification for SHGs and cooperative societies.
- Market Linkages and Accessibility: Facilitate the establishment of women-led organic outlets at the block-level or fitting in local mandis to enable direct customer sales.
- Inclusive policy processes: rural women should play an active role in planning and decision-making at the panchayat(s) and district-level and influence agricultural policy development.

Conclusion

The narrative of organic agriculture in India, particularly in Haryana, is not complete without honouring the contributions of rural women. Women are not merely the labourers; they are the thinkers, innovators, and stewards of agricultural futures. Women can take ownership of the organic agriculture movement to transform it into an equitable, nutrient-dense and ecologically sustainable agriculture system, if they have access to the right support (land rights, training, certification, market) to promote their work. Supporting women in agriculture is more than a gender justice issue; it is the backbone of sustainable food systems.

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