



Her Farm, Her Future: Women Leading India's Agricultural Renaissance

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Agriculture has long been the bedrock of rural livelihoods in India. While women are often overlooked in formal records, they play an indispensable role in the agricultural ecosystem—from sowing seeds and tending livestock to processing and marketing farm produce. Despite contributing significantly to food security and rural economies, they continue to face systemic barriers: limited land ownership, restricted access to technology, and exclusion from decision-making roles. To build a just and productive future, we must mainstream gender in agriculture—bringing women's needs, perspectives, and leadership to the heart of agricultural policies, research, and development.

The Invisible Backbone of Indian Agriculture

The land, once tilled predominantly by men, now flourishes under the strategic hands of women. With increasing male migration to urban centres, women are taking charge—not only as farm workers but as farm managers, decision-makers, and entrepreneurs. Yet, their invaluable contributions remain underappreciated. Despite handling labour-intensive tasks like sowing, weeding, harvesting, and post-harvest processing, fewer than 13% of rural women own land, and an even smaller number have access to credit, training, or leadership roles in Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). Addressing this disparity through gender mainstreaming can unlock women's full potential—transforming agriculture into a more inclusive and dignified profession.

What Women Do in Agriculture: Beyond the Plough

According to the 2011 Census, women constitute 30.3% of cultivators and 42.6% of agricultural labourers. But their roles extend far beyond these statistics.

Women actively engage in:

- **Crop Production:** Sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting
- **Post-Harvest Management:** Threshing, winnowing, storage
- **Livestock Care:** Milking, feeding, processing dairy
- **Farm Leadership:** Supervising labour and making decisions

Women are also key players in allied sectors like poultry, fisheries, and agro-processing.

Present Scenario: Progress Amid Challenges

Though many women are now managing farms and agribusinesses, they continue to face constraints: traditional norms, lack of access to finance, and poor visibility in extension services. Government schemes and NGOs are working to change this narrative—but progress needs to be faster and more widespread.

Why Gender Mainstreaming Matters

Mainstreaming gender in agriculture ensures that women receive equal access to land, credit, training, and technology. It involves designing policies and programs that reflect women's realities, needs, and aspirations.

Initiatives like allocating 30% of agricultural scheme benefits to women are a step in the right direction—but more holistic reforms are needed.

From Farmers to Founders: Women at the Helm of Agri-Tech

The rise of women-led Agri-tech startups is redefining what it means to be a woman in agriculture.

Some inspiring changemakers

- **Ritu Verma** – Co-founder of Ankur Capital, investing in grassroots innovations led by women.
- **Suhasini Singh** – Founder of Agrowave, a digital platform connecting farmers to markets.
- **Sonalika Jitendra** – Co-founder of AgriVijay, providing solar pumps and biogas units to rural women.
- **Neetu Yadav** – Co-founder of Animall, a platform for online cattle trading helping women dairy farmers.
- **Aditi Gupta** – Founder of KhetiGaadi, democratizing access to information on agricultural machinery.

Their ventures are not just solving problems—they're making agriculture smarter, greener, and more inclusive.

Policy Push: Government Support for Women in Agriculture

Key initiatives supporting rural women include:

- **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP):** Empowering women farmers under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)
- **Self Help Groups (SHGs):** Facilitating collective farming, micro-enterprises, and financial inclusion
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, DAY-NRLM, and KVK trainings:** Promoting education and skills among rural women

But to truly mainstream gender, we must go further—ensuring land rights, leadership roles, and a say in research and policy.

Conclusion: A Future Rooted in Equality

The story of Indian agriculture is incomplete without its women. They are the cultivators of crops and hope alike. Empowering women in agriculture is not just about fairness—it's a force multiplier for national development. As students, policymakers, and citizens, we must break stereotypes, spotlight women's contributions, and support inclusive innovations. Let us create an India where every woman farmer is seen, respected, and empowered—not just in fields but on leadership boards. As a student researcher observing the present landscape, it's clear that gender mainstreaming in agriculture is no longer just a concept—it is a necessary movement toward inclusive and sustainable rural development. Initiatives like MKSP, SHGs, and targeted resource allocations have laid a foundation, and women are increasingly stepping into roles as decision-makers, innovators, and entrepreneurs. However, the ground reality still reflects persistent inequalities in land ownership, access to credit, training, and representation in policy forums. Mainstreaming gender in agriculture must go beyond token inclusion—it requires a shift in institutional mindsets, increased investments in women-centric extension services, and proactive policy enforcement.

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