

9. Role of Women in Agricultural Extension

Dr. Neeta Deokate, Dr. Madhavi Jangilwad

Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh Krishi Vidyapeeth,
Akola (MH).

Abstract:

Women play a significant 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. The role of women in agricultural extension is multifaceted and crucial for the development and sustainability of agriculture, especially in rural areas.

Agricultural extension refers to the services that provide farmers with the knowledge and resources they need to improve their agricultural practices, increase productivity, and ensure sustainable farming. Agriculture extension services, when tailored to empower women, cover a range of interventions targeted at augmenting female involvement, expertise, and autonomy in farming techniques. These efforts focus on offering customized training, opportunities to learn contemporary farming methods, knowledge in financial matters, and skills in entrepreneurship. By enabling women to obtain resources, information, and opportunities in agriculture, these programs enhance their position in this field and enhance household food security and economic sustainability. Furthermore, the empowerment of women in agricultural extension goes beyond the scope of farming techniques. It includes the cultivation of leadership skills, active involvement in the community, and the overcoming of cultural obstacles. These initiatives disrupt conventional gender norms, creating a space where women can take on influential roles and make decisions that shape the agriculture industry.

Keywords:

Women, Role, Agricultural Extension, Services.

9.1 Introduction:

Women are critical to the well-being farm households; Women are involved in all aspects of agriculture and allied enterprise from land preparation to processing and marketing. Many households in rural areas are headed by single parent, usually a mother because men migrate with their limited literacy skills to urban areas for secondary job leaving the illiterate women behind with the land and children leading to “feminisation” of agriculture. These women, despite the fact they are performing several farm and allied activities- their roles have been over looked by agriculturists and policy makers. A major reason for all this is the failure of our developmental planning lies in treating women as: end products” rather than “agents of change”, A substantial part of this mystification has occurred because rural women are treated as “farmers wives” and not as “farm women” (Gidda Reddy, 2003).

Agriculture serves as the fundamental basis of India's economy, engaging more than half of the nation's people, with women making substantial contributions to its prosperity. Women's contributions to farming and allied occupations, despite being significant, are frequently devalued and disregarded. The agriculture sector continues to experience gender inequities, which hinder women's access to resources, decision-making positions, and possibilities for advancement. Women, who make up over 50% of the agricultural labour force in India, participate in a wide range of farming tasks, including soil preparation and post-harvest maintenance. However, their involvement is limited by complex and diverse obstacles. The challenges encompass restricted availability of land ownership, financing facilities, markets, technology, and educational resources. Furthermore, cultural norms and societal expectations frequently limit the independence and movement of women, thereby restricting their ability to make a complete contribution to agricultural development. Empowering women in agriculture goes beyond mere inclusion; it requires building an enabling environment that recognises values, and amplifies women's agency, abilities, and contributions. Agricultural extension services play a crucial role in reducing the gaps and promoting gender-inclusive agricultural growth.

9.2 Extension Needs Related to Women:

Randhawa and Chandra (1993) identified some key issues related to women. These are:

1. The Extension service should be gender sensitive so that women have full and appropriate areas to meetings, demonstrations, field days and other activities that can increase their farm production and income.
2. Informal communication networks and channels are frequently gender specific. Therefore, extension personnel need to learn how to use these traditional networks more effectively to disseminate improved technology to women.
3. In some cases, it may be necessary to organise women into functional groups to increase their access to credit, inputs, marketing and agricultural extension services.
4. Extension system will be required to develop new extension training materials that are gender-sensitive and appropriate for women.
5. More attention needs to be given to the employment of women in all aspects of agricultural extension services.
6. Mainly two types of training may be organised for women for effective and efficient utilisation of their potentiality. These are: (i) training in latest advances in agriculture; and (ii) training in leadership to motivate them to play an effective role as change agent and extension worker.

9.3 Feminisation of Agriculture:

With growing rural to urban migration by men, there is 'feminisation' of agriculture sector, with increasing number of women in multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs, and labourers. Globally, there is empirical evidence that women have a decisive role in ensuring food security and preserving local agro-biodiversity. Rural women are responsible for the integrated management and use of diverse natural resources to meet the daily household needs. This requires that women farmers should have enhanced access to resources like land, water, credit, technology, and training which warrants critical analysis in the context of India. In addition, the entitlements of women farmers will be the key to improve

agriculture productivity. The differential access of women to resources like land, credit, water, seeds and markets needs to be addressed. With women predominant at all levels- production, pre-harvest, post-harvest processing, packaging, marketing – of the agricultural value chain, to increase productivity in agriculture, it is imperative to adopt gender specific interventions. An ‘inclusive transformative agricultural policy’ should aim at gender-specific intervention to raise productivity of small farm holdings, integrate women as active agents in rural transformation, and engage men and women in extension services with gender expertise.

9.4 Key Roles Women Play in Agricultural Extension:

1. Extension Workers and Educators:

Direct Training: Women serve as extension agents, providing training and education to other women and men in farming communities.

Gender-Sensitive Approach: Female extension workers can communicate more effectively with women farmers, addressing gender-specific challenges and cultural barriers that male extension workers might not fully understand.

2. Farmers and Producers:

Primary Labour Force: In many regions, women constitute a significant portion of the agricultural labour force. They are directly involved in crop production, livestock care, and other farming activities.

Innovators and Early Adopters: Women farmers often adopt new technologies and practices when they are properly informed and supported.

3. Knowledge Transfer:

Informal Education: Women play a key role in transferring agricultural knowledge and skills within families and communities. This includes teaching children and sharing best practices with peers.

Community Leadership: Women often lead or participate in local farmer groups and cooperatives, where they can disseminate information and mobilize resources.

4. Decision Makers:

Farm Management: Women make crucial decisions about farm management, including crop selection, resource allocation, and marketing strategies.

Financial Management: Women often manage household finances, including farm income, which influences investment in agricultural inputs and technologies.

5. Advocates and Policy Influencers:

Voice in Policy: Women can advocate for policies that address the specific needs of female farmers, such as access to land, credit, and agricultural inputs.

Community Representation: Through participation in local governance and agricultural organizations, women influence decisions that impact agricultural practices and development.

9.5 Strategies to Enhance the Role of Women in Agricultural Extension:

Gender-Sensitive Training Programs: Develop and implement training programs that consider the specific needs and constraints of women farmers.

Recruitment of Female Extension Workers: Increase the number of female extension agents to better reach and support women farmers.

Access to Resources: Ensure that women have equitable access to land, credit, technology, and other agricultural inputs.

Supportive Policies: Advocate for policies that promote gender equality in agriculture and support women's roles in extension services.

Capacity Building: Enhance the skills and knowledge of women farmers through targeted educational programs and resources.

By recognizing and supporting the crucial role of women in agricultural extension, communities can improve agricultural productivity, food security, and overall rural development.

9.6 Role of Women in Agriculture and Its Allied Fields:

Mainly rural women are engaged in agricultural activities in three different ways depending on the socio-economic status of their family and regional factors. They work as: Paid Labourers, Cultivator doing labour on their own land. Managers of certain aspects of agricultural production by way of labour supervision and the participation in post-harvest operations.

The types of agricultural activities taken up by women include-Sowing, Nursery management, Transplanting, Weeding, Irrigation, Fertilizer application, Plant protection, Harvesting, winnowing, storing etc. 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. Moreover, there is concentration of operational holdings (25.7 per cent) by women in the marginal and small holdings categories.

Worker Population Ratio (WPR) of women (24 %) is lower as against men (54.4 %) in the country. The workforce participation rate for rural females is higher at 30.5 percent against urban women participation rate of 20.20 percent (MoSPI, 2022-23). As per the Annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Report 2022-23, agriculture had the highest estimated percentage distribution of female workers, i.e., 64.3 %, with 76.2 % in rural areas and 11.7 % in urban areas.

Rural women perform numerous labour-intensive jobs such as weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, picking, cotton stick collection, separation of seeds from fibre, keeping of livestock and its other associated activities like milking, milk processing, preparation of ghee, etc. Details of activities taken up by women in Agriculture and its allied activities such as fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.

Livestock is the primary livelihood activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm incomes. It is a common practice in the rural areas to give an animal as part of a women's dowry. Studies have revealed rural women earn extra income from the sale of milk and animals. Mostly women are engaged in cattle management activities such as cleaning of animal and sheds, watering of cattle, milking the animals, fodder collection,

preparing dung cakes, collection farm yard manure, except grazing, all other livestock management activities are predominantly performed by women. Men, however, share the responsibility of taking care of sick animals. It is evident that the women are playing a dominant role in the livestock production and management activities. Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. The rate of women participation in poultry farming at household level is central in poultry industry.

Agriculture serves as the fundamental basis of India's economy, engaging more than half of the nation's people, with women making substantial contributions. Women's contributions to farming and allied occupations, despite being significant, are frequently devalued and disregarded. The agriculture sector continues to experience gender inequities, which hinder women's access to resources, decision-making positions, and possibilities for advancement. Women, who make up over 50% of the agricultural labour force in India, participate in a wide range of farming tasks, including soil preparation and post-harvest work. However, their involvement is limited by complex and diverse obstacles. The challenges encompass restricted availability of land ownership, financing facilities, markets, technology, and educational resources. Furthermore, cultural norms and societal expectations frequently limit the independence and movement of women, thereby restricting their ability to make a contribution in agricultural development.

It provides valuable insights and suggestions to policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders who are interested in establishing an inclusive and prosperous agricultural environment. Understanding women's role in Indian agriculture Throughout history, women in India have played crucial roles in agricultural activities, actively participating in many stages of farming, ranging from pre-sowing to post-harvest tasks. Although they make substantial contributions, their jobs frequently go unnoticed and are not given proper recognition within the agriculture industry. Engagement in farming activities: Women play an active role in several agricultural activities, such as land preparation, seed sowing, weed

control, fertilizer and pesticide application, crop care, harvesting, and post-harvest management. Furthermore, they engage in animal husbandry, dairy farming, and the management of household gardens, making substantial contributions. Women's contributions to livelihoods encompass more than just agricultural labour; they also play a crucial role in economically supporting their family. They frequently participate in non-agricultural pursuits such as weaving, handicrafts, and small-scale enterprises, which help to diversify household earnings and strengthen rural economies. Preservation of traditional knowledge: Women hold vital traditional knowledge and indigenous customs about seed selection, water conservation, crop diversity, and soil fertility preservation. The transmission of this knowledge between generations constitutes the fundamental basis of sustainable agriculture operations. Invisible labour and unrecognized contributions: Women's substantial role in agricultural output frequently remains unrecognized and unappreciated, despite its extent. They have obstacles with restricted availability of resources, land ownership, credit opportunities, and authority in making decisions within households and communities. Contribution to nutrition and household well-being: Women are essential in guaranteeing the provision of food and nutrition inside the household. Their participation in the development of kitchen gardens and different crops has a direct impact on the nutritional well-being of the entire family, particularly children and other vulnerable individuals within the home. Community cohesion and resilience: Women residing in rural areas frequently establish self-help associations, cooperatives, and joint agricultural endeavours, promoting community resilience, exchanging expertise, and providing mutual assistance during periods of adversity. Obstacles and difficulties: Women face a range of obstacles, such as restricted opportunities for education, discriminatory cultural expectations, limited control over resources, time limits resulting from many obligations, and inadequate representation in decision-making arenas. These obstacles limit their potential and impede their ability to actively participate in revolutionary agriculture techniques. It is essential to acknowledge and enhance the contributions of women in agriculture in order to promote sustainable and inclusive agricultural progress. To fully unlock the potential of women in India's agricultural industry, it is crucial to make efforts to reduce gender inequities, ensure fair access to resources and opportunities, and recognize the valuable contributions of women. Providing customized agricultural extension services to women can play a crucial role in tackling these issues and unleashing the revolutionary potential of women in Indian agriculture. Challenges faced by women in agriculture

Restricted land and property rights: Women frequently face limitations in owning land or possessing secure land rights, which hinders their capacity to get finance, exercise autonomy in decision-making, and engage in agricultural investments. Gender-based social conventions and conventional inheritance practices frequently give preference to male successors, resulting in the marginalization of women with regards to landownership. Financial constraints and limited access to credit: Women face challenges in obtaining financial resources and credit facilities due to strict collateral requirements, insufficient financial knowledge, and inadequate representation in official banking organizations. This impedes their capacity to allocate resources towards agricultural inputs, technology, and infrastructure. Limited access to resources and inputs: Women farmers encounter difficulties in obtaining high-quality seeds, fertilizers, insecticides, and state-of-the-art farming equipment. This constraint adversely affects the productivity and quality of crops, hence limiting their capacity to compete in markets and enhance the well-being of farmers. Restricted access to educational and training programs: The disparity in access to education and training exacerbates the gender disparity in agricultural knowledge and skills. Women

frequently lack sufficient access to contemporary farming methodologies, scientific expertise, and agricultural advancements, impeding their ability to embrace more effective and environmentally-friendly farming methods. Time constraints and multiple responsibilities: Women residing in rural areas face the challenge of managing various responsibilities simultaneously, such as agricultural labour, household tasks, childcare, and other unpaid domestic duties, due to limited time availability. Their ability to engage in capacity-building activities, attend training programs, or participate in community projects is limited by these time constraints. Technological barriers and digital divide: Technological barriers and the digital divide hinder women in rural regions from accessing technology, information, digital tools, and agricultural extension services. . This hinders their capacity to express grievances, obtain resources, and assume leadership positions in agricultural advancement. Climate change and environmental challenges: Climate change poses significant problems to women farmers, who are disproportionately impacted by its effects, including unpredictable weather patterns, limited access to water, soil degradation, and increased vulnerability to natural catastrophes. The environmental conditions pose a threat to agricultural productivity and worsen the vulnerabilities faced by rural women. To tackle these difficulties, a comprehensive strategy is needed that prioritizes the empowerment of women through customized interventions, policy changes, and specific programs. Strategies focused on improving resource accessibility, offering education and training, advancing financial inclusivity, advocating for gender-responsive policies, and establishing supportive environments are crucial for empowering women to overcome these obstacles and actively engage in and contribute to agricultural development in India. Agricultural extension services are essential for executing these policies as they offer customized assistance, dissemination of knowledge, and capacity-building programs specifically suited for women in agriculture.

9.7 Challenges Faced by Women in Agricultural Extension:

Limited Access to Resources: Women often have less access to land, credit, and inputs compared to men.

Cultural Barriers: Gender norms and cultural practices can limit women's participation in extension services and decision-making processes.

Educational Barriers: Lower literacy rates among women in some regions hinder their ability to access and utilize extension services effectively.

Extension Services Bias: Traditional extension services may be male-dominated and not tailored to the specific needs of women farmers.

9.8 References:

1. Bhaduri Amit. 1985. Technological change and Rural Women: A conceptual Analysis in Iftikar Ahmed (ed)*Technology and Rural women; conceptual and empirical Issues*. George Allen and Unwin.

2. Chowdhury S. 2006. Empowering women through Science and Technology, in Pramanik, Rathindra Nath and Adhikary Kumar (eds.) Gender inequality and Women's empowerment. Abhijit Publications, Delhi pp.103-107
3. Krishnaraj and Maithreyl. 1985. Research on women and work in the Seventies, in k. Sardar noni (ed.) Women work and society, ISI. Kolkata
4. Randhawa A and Chandra S. 1993. Changing role of home scientist in transferring farm technologies to women in agriculture. *Paper presented in National Seminar on Women in Agriculture: Developmental issue*, December 28-30, NAARM, Hyderabad.
5. Ray GL. 2003. Extension Communication and Management. Kalyani Publishers; p 343
6. Reddy PG. 2003. Preface. *Farming Performance of Farm Women* Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi p. v.
7. River William M and Corning Susan L. 1990. Empowering Women through Agriculture. *Journal of Extension*: XVII, pp; 26-27
8. Rolling Neles. 1987. Extension Science, Cambridge University Press, U.K
9. Samanta RK. 1994. They Reap less than they sow. *The Hindu*, April 17.