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## Rural women in agricultural and household practices: An overview

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### Abstract

Besides biological need like food, water and sex. There are also some social needs of man. He wants Role of rural women, over of men is more influenced with different economic, social, cultural and ecological factors. Rural women are considered as a noticeable potential in the community either in the agricultural sector or household sector. Their participation in agricultural and household activities is very high. They are the household managers but their work is considered as non-productive, unorganized and undocumented throughout the world. They are deprived off not only in the field of agriculture but also in other fields like education, nutrition and health. The constraints faced by them are lack of training program, less exposure, illiteracy, lack of social mobility etc. consequently training facilities should be provided to rural women for their better participation. Educational ventures must be provided for women to increase the level of participation in agricultural and household activities.

**Keywords:** Adolescent, rural, urban, habits, attitudes, education

### Introduction

The international development community has recognized that agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor. Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Women's contribution to agriculture is seldom recognized in spite of their active role in the agriculture as well as household activities in developed as well as developing world. Women's participation is very much high in various agricultural and household activities. Among livestock activities, their participation was highest in cleaning of animal sheds. Looking after the family members, women's participation was highest in household activities. Estimates from FAO of the United Nations show that women account for more than half of the labour required to produce the food consumed in the developing world. In addition to working in the fields, women not only ensure fuel, fodder, water and food but also have to look after the emotional needs of their families, the children, elders and husbands. The nurturing, caring and reproductive responsibilities are the dimensions that have never been computed economically but are essential and significant aspects of women's work load. Women's role as food producer is related also to their role as mother and nurture and in sustaining their families and communities. Most of the work that women do, such as collecting fuel, fodder and water, growing vegetables and keeping poultry for domestic consumption go unrecorded in the census country. Women constitute 90 per cent of the total marginal workers of the country.

### Status of rural women

The global situation of women's participation in agriculture is typically reflected in most of the countries of the Asia and Pacific region. In this region women also play an important role in marketing of produce. In some West African countries up to 80 per cent of the labour force in all agricultural trades is contributed by women. In many of the Indian markets, women traditionally do the marketing of agricultural produce, women conduct the entire trade in fish and its products. In India women are involved in looking after cattle, poultry, goatary, sheep, collecting fodder and preparing manure for the farm and carrying manure.

In almost all the states of India, women manage cattle and completely look after them. Men take over the management and sales responsibility if the enterprise is on a commercial basis where also the women have to provide labour for manual work.

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Women play a key role in performance of various tasks related to cattle management, feeding, milking and marketing of milk and milk products.

In India, women constitute the bulk of the marine food processing work force. In the marine sector also their role in shrimp farming is significant as around 40 per cent of laborers involved in shrimp farms are women. Based on the literature reviewed the observations on the women's participation in agriculture are:

- Women make significant contributions in the agriculture and allied sectors.
- Women's participation varies with the size of land holding, income, size of family, geographic location and agricultural season, stage of family life cycle and caste.
- Although the division of labour in agriculture is not very strictly on gender basis, yet women exclusively perform certain tasks.
- Cultural factors seem to affect the level of participation of women. The psycho-cultural environment in rural areas acts as an inhibiting factor in utilizing women's potential.
- In tribal culture men and women work alongside and more decision making power rests with women.
- Participation of women varies with the crop. Men tend to grow cash crops whereas women grow crops for sustaining food security.
- Women wage labourers are much higher in number than men.
- Women's economic contribution has been ignored.
- Farm women are greatly burdened with multiple responsibilities of home, farm, animal, reproduction and child rearing.
- Women suffer from resource scarcity – they do not get inputs, credit, in the absence of exclusive policy provisions for them.
- Wage discrimination between men and women affects their economic gains and build poor social image.
- The long hours of work put in by women in fulfilling their multiple roles hardly leave any time for leisure and also have adverse effects on their health both mental and physical.



**Fig 1:** Transplanting of paddy from nursery in a field by the rural women



**Fig 2:** Threshing of wheat on thresher is being done by rural women



**Fig 3:** Preparation of cow-dung cakes by rural woman

### Women in Agriculture

Despite the tremendous contribution of rural women in the world economy they continue to be overlooked, exploited and even further disadvantaged by many development processes. Women constitute the group at the bottom of the ladder in many developing countries in respect of employment, poverty, education, training and status. Women have visibly side tracked in so far as their contribution to agricultural development and access to development resources and services are concerned. Women have tackled some of the most laborious tasks, yet their contribution to farming is not fully appreciated. Their work goes undervalued in an economy, which puts premium on marketable work. World economic profile of women shows that they represent 50 per cent of the population, make up 30 percent of the official labour force, perform 66 per cent of all working hours, receive 10 percent of world income and own even less than 1 percent of the world's property. Everywhere women as a group, enjoy fewer advantages and work long hours than men. Women's work and opinions are undervalued in many countries. Women earn less than men and are prevented from owning land, face numerous obstacles to holding positions of authority and face many threats of violence just because they are women. Women's work and worth are undervalued due to the basic assumptions that women are inferior in capacity to men and that no family runs by the income of women alone, that is, the earnings of women are only supplementary. It has been rightly observed that half of the women's work is unpaid and the other half is underpaid. Whatever work women do at home is unpaid and outside work is underpaid. There is no country where considerable differences are not found between the earnings of men and women. The official statistics do not always reveal fully the actual status and role of women in agriculture. Also the overall data on women's participation in agriculture understates the importance of their work in producing food.

The statistics pertaining to women's participation in the workforce is deceptive as they under-represent the number of women actually engaged in productive work and underestimate the value of their work. The contribution of women in agriculture is less sufficient due to the dual role of farm women on the farm and in the home leading to drudgeries resulting out of inappropriate and cumbersome work methods and practices related to household chores of food preparation, fuel collection, water fetching, resource management and child rearing. Recently a declined trend has been observed in the employment of women labourers. Some of the new technologies have displaced women from many of the traditional activities. The green revolution has led to increased demand for casual labour, dispossession of small

holders from their land consequently pushing out the women from cultivation of such small holdings to become wage earners. Though many of the tasks performed by the men are getting mechanised, the women continue to toil in labour intensive jobs.

### Women in household work-An overview

Women are generally less able than men to participate in economic opportunities because they face a work burden that men do not. In most societies, women are responsible for most of the household and child rearing activities as well as rearing of small livestock, although norms differ by culture and over time. This additional work burden is unpaid and limits women's capacity to engage in income earning activities, which often require a minimum fixed time before being profitable.

Furthermore, the nature of tasks, such as caring for children and elderly household members, requires women to stay near the home, thus limiting options to work for a wage. Time scarcity forces many women to start-up cottage industries, such as handicrafts, which are often characterized by low returns and limited potential for expansion. Gender differences become clearer when looking at women's workloads.

It is estimated that women provide 85 to 90 per cent of the time spent on household, food processing and preparation across a wide range of countries. Women are also usually responsible for child care and household chores. Depending on the household structure and size, these tasks may be extremely time intensive. Time allocation studies have shown that women work significantly. As household chores are generally regarded as female tasks, the current opportunity cost of girls. Schooling time is higher compared to boys, provided that boys do not help out on the farm as much as men. Women spent looking after their families, working in their husbands' garden and producing food for their households as reasons for their inability to expand production in the market. Men, on the other hand, simply noted that they had no money to hire labour.

Women's work continues to differ from men's in the type of work, the pay, the status and the pattern of entering and leaving the workforce. The biggest difference is that women continue to bear the burden of managing the household and caring for the family and that men continue to control the resources for production of income from it. Women have enormous responsibilities at home. Women's role in activities related to home management, childcare, nutrition and health was appreciable. In both developed and developing countries, the responsibility for family food preparation rests almost entirely with women. Women are also actively involved in economically extended activities like fetching of water and fuel, reutilization of worn out clothing, stitching, weaving and knitting for household use.

The activities like fuel, water collection and maintenance of the house were found to be women's responsibility. Women in the hills carried out the fuel collection activity in 95 per cent cases while in plains it is done in 50 per cent of cases. Women perform a variety of tasks both on the farm as well as at home. They participate in allied agricultural works like kitchen-gardening, poultry, milking cattle, washing cattle, cleaning cattle shed and taking care of sick cattle. Women in addition to their domestic duties produce marketable goods, which are sold by the men of the family. Women's work, especially their household work such as processing food, carrying water, collecting fuel, providing child care is unpaid and therefore,

unaccounted for. It is estimated that unpaid and therefore, work by women, if properly evaluated, would add a third to global production even when women are remunerated for their works their contribution is often undervalued. In formal employment also women earn significantly less than men in many of the countries.

Sekar (2003) <sup>[1]</sup> reviewed the dominant role played by rural women in agricultural and household operations. In the case of agricultural operations, most of the activities from field preparation to postharvest operations are done by farm women. The time and energy spent for agricultural and household management activities consume a considerable and significant proportion of women power. Anselm and Amusa (2010) <sup>[2]</sup> studied that women are key players in the agricultural sector of most developing countries of the world. However, despite this major role, men have reportedly continued to dominate farm decision making, even in areas where women are the largest providers of farm labour. This could be counter-productive, because there is bound to be conflict when women, as key players, carry out farm tasks without being part of the decision process, especially when the decision falls to recognize their other peculiar household responsibilities. This paper identified socio-economic factors affecting their contribution to farm decision making.

Women and in particular women from low income groups and living in areas with limited facilities, spend long hours on water and fuel collection, food preparation and other domestic and child care activities to compensate for poor infrastructure. In rural areas, women are fully involved during the whole day in domestic labour activities like looking after the children, cleaning the house, cooking, washing and many other activities. Although their participation in agricultural and household activities are very high, the educational facilities and enrollment of females in primary education is hopeless because their enrollment has stayed roughly the same for the country as a whole at about 30 per cent.

In addition to working as farmers and farm labourers, women shoulder the responsibility of rearing children and looking after the home. Thus, the triple burden of child rearing, farm work and household duties has fallen on them since the time the domestication of crop plants took place about 12,000 years ago. Arshad *et al.* (2010) <sup>[3]</sup> analysed that women play an important role as livestock caretakers in many countries including Pakistan. They undertake various activities of livestock management like fodder cutting, watering and feeding of animals, animal shed cleaning and milking. However, their involvement as decision makers regarding these activities is questionable. Tsegaye *et al.* (2012) <sup>[4]</sup> reported that rural women play a pivotal role in agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. They play key roles by working with full passion in production of crops right from the soil preparation till post-harvest activities. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes.

Aggarwal *et al.* (2013) <sup>[5]</sup> revealed that rural women in J&K are extensively involved in different types of agricultural activities. About 20 to 70 per cent of the rural women are

involved in agricultural production and post-harvest activities. The agricultural activities in which the women play a very leading role in the state are, transplantation, weeding, threshing, reaping, looking after the farm cattle and other livestock (poultry, goat rearing, sheep rearing etc.) collecting fodder, watering fruit plants, preparing and transporting manure and other inputs to the field. They also help in constructing and repairing irrigation channels and storage facilities, women are active partners in farming and undertake management along with men.

VanWey and Vithayathil (2013) [6] analysed rural livelihoods in the Global South by exploring how the opportunity to work off the farm is embedded in social relationships. They additionally differentiate their analysis by type of off-farm work and examine how other characteristics such as human capital, the available labour supply and access to infrastructure vary by work outcome in general, the factors that contribute to more secure, relatively higher-paying work differ from those important in understanding patterns of lower-paying, daily wage work. Social capital plays an important role in providing access to employment and therefore to cash income, but the farm-level social capital does not necessarily provide pathways to stable or high-paying jobs outside agriculture.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

Rural women have been equal partners in agricultural development, their role and participation have been more pronounced in rural society. Paradoxically the contributions of the women have not been quantified, recorded and recognized, with the result they have been neglected from the main stream of development, may it be research, education or extension. Global concern for the emancipation of women in general and rural women in particular has grown. The picture of a farm woman is that of a submissive, illiterate, ignorant, asset-less female who has been trapped in webs of traditions and customs. Women have been the focus of attention of all international and national development programmes. Efforts have been directed at empowering them in all fields of activity. Special programmes have been instituted to improve their social and economic status through provision of education, employment, health-care and involvement in social and economic institutions, including cooperatives. Cooperative institutions and especially the agricultural cooperatives are the agencies which hold enormous potential for the development of women and more particularly the rural women. Rural women are actively involved in the process of food production, processing and marketing still they often lack the legal status which prohibits them having access to credit, education and technology.

Rural women constitute the most important work force in the Indian economy. A good number of economically active women are engaged in agricultural and household sectors. It also showed that women are actively engaged in all major agriculture related activities and household related activities. Majority of the rural women suffered from minor health problems, management problems, social and financial problem. Throughout history, women have generally been restricted to the role of a home maker that of a mother and wife. Despite major changes that have occurred in the status of women in some parts of the world in recent decades, norms that restrict women to the home are still powerful in India, defining activities that are deemed appropriate for women.

- In view of the expressed opinion of respondents, the most important suggestions made are:

- Special emphasis should be laid on eradications of illiteracy and education of women.
- People should be sensitized to recognize the role and contribution of women in nurturing families, crops and animals.
- Developing leadership among the rural women for promotion of self-reliance and group activity.
- Promote collective action and organization by rural women to facilitate their participation to enhance their opportunities to participate in economic and social activities on an equal footing with men.
- Credit facilities should be increased for rural women.
- They should be facilitated by need-based training.
- There should be the formation of women's self-help groups.
- Motivational programmes by GO's and NGO's should also provide regarding women.
- Women's leadership should be developed because it may be very helpful to strengthen rural women's cognitive domain, thereby increasing their bargaining power at household level.
- Promoting rural women's potential through education, skill development, income raising activities, participation in rural development programmes and raising gender awareness may encourage equal participation of rural women in different aspects of decision making processes at household level.
- Introduction of new income raising activities based on local resources, demand and ability of rural women will be helpful to utilize labour forces and to increase household income.
- Government should conduct workshops, seminars and awareness programmes where the rural farm women are acquainted with the modern cost effective agricultural techniques.
- It is recommended that Government and NGO's should launch programmes, such as adult education in order to enable this large flock to read and understand the relevant published and broadcast information.
- More sincere efforts are needed to encourage women and to raise women's knowledge of efficient management practices and implementation of agriculture and household activities.
- Policy makers must realize the constraints experienced by rural women, financial aid and support needs to be provided by the Government to assist the women.
- There is a need to impart training to these women in order to strengthen the knowledge about farm activities.
- These women should be assisted to develop saving and credit mechanisms to become self-reliant.
- In order to improve women's work efficiency, Government and extension workers should plan and to execute need based training programmes.

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