

Empowerment of women in agriculture

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“Empowerment with women” is the central issue that has been pervading the development debate after the 80s. Improving their status and empowering them would go a long way in accomplishing egalitarian gender relations in society. Women who are *hitherto* constrained by their social structure for their self-expression constitute the target of most of the development programmes, which aim at bringing them into the mainstream of the development process.

What is empowerment?:

Empowerment implies an overall positive change in the physical quality of life, this positive change for the better encompasses economic as well as social aspect.

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The status of women in India:

Public Information Centre of World Bank Group (No. 97/ 1292 SAS), Women are a vital part of the Indian economy, constituting one-third of the national labor force and a major contributor to the survival of the family the poorer the family, the greater its dependence on women's income. Despite progress in several key indicators, a gender analysis of most social and economic data demonstrates that women in India continue to be relatively disadvantaged in matters of survival, health, nutrition, literacy, and productivity. More than 90 per cent of rural women in India are unskilled, restricting them to low-paid occupations. Women generally have no control over land and other productive assets, which largely excludes them from access to institutional credit and renders them dependent on high-cost informal sources of credit to secure capital for consumption and/or productive purposes. Women form the backbone of agriculture, comprising the majority of agricultural laborers in India. Gender divisions in agriculture are stark, with all activities involving manual labor assigned to women, while all operations involving

machinery and men generally perform drought animals. Female agricultural laborers are among the poorest sections of Indian society. Agricultural wages for women are on average 30-50 per cent less than those for men.

Women in Agricultural families perform many farm-related activities, both within and outside the household, in most parts of the country. They constitute a large part of the total work force in agriculture. Although the pattern of division of labour between men and women varies greatly from region to region, women are involved in most of the operations in agriculture, including subsidiary enterprises like dairy, poultry, beekeeping, mushroom cultivation, sericulture, fish culture, rabbit rearing, social forestry, etc. (Bajwa, 1983; Prasad and Chandra, 1991).

So far as crop husbandry is concerned, women participate in almost all activities, right from preparatory tillage to harvest, and even in post-harvest tasks like processing, storage and marketing. Ploughing is perhaps the only exception. There is a general taboo on women engaging in ploughing, but in exceptional circumstances even ploughing is done by them. In some regions like Garhwal, a hilly region of Uttar Pradesh, such taboo is quite less.

Women in rural India play major role in shaping the country's economy through their active participation in agriculture. At present, the women work force in agriculture and allied sector is estimated at about 61 million, which amounts to about 30 per cent of the total rural workers in the country. They actively participate in different crop production activities such as seed cleaning, seed grading, sowing, dibbling, transplanting, weeding, thinning, gap filling, interculturing, harvesting, threshing, shelling, hulling, winnowing, feeding cattle, and looking after milch animals and poultry birds are the main jobs for women. Activities such as processing and storage at home are performed exclusively by women. It may, however, be mentioned that regardless

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