

3. Contribution of Women to the Agricultural Economy

Women play a pivotal role in agriculture, performing a wide range of activities that directly and indirectly impact farm productivity, food security, and rural development. Their contributions span across production, management, processing, and marketing of agricultural resources.

1. Crop Production

Women actively participate in land preparation, sowing seeds, weeding, harvesting, threshing, and post-harvest management. They often carry out labor-intensive operations, ensuring timely cultivation and maintenance of crops. Their involvement is particularly significant in small-scale and subsistence farming systems.

2. Livestock Management

Women are heavily involved in caring for livestock, including cattle, goats, sheep, and poultry. Their responsibilities include feeding, milking, cleaning shelters, and managing breeding cycles. This not only ensures animal health but also contributes to the household economy through milk, eggs, and meat production.

3. Agro-Processing

Women contribute to value addition through food preservation, processing, and cottage industries. Activities such as preparing jams, pickles, dairy products, and handicrafts help extend the shelf life of farm produce, generate additional income, and create employment opportunities in rural areas.

4. Irrigation and Water Management

Women often manage water for crops and livestock, including irrigation scheduling, canal management, and water conservation practices. Efficient water management ensures optimal crop growth and livestock productivity.

5. Seed Selection and Storage

Women are frequently responsible for selecting high-quality seeds, treating them, and storing them for future planting. Their traditional knowledge about local varieties, seed treatment, and storage practices plays a vital role in maintaining genetic diversity and crop resilience.

6. Market Participation

Women engage in selling farm produce in local markets, roadside stalls, and even online platforms. This participation enhances household income, encourages entrepreneurship, and strengthens market linkages.



4. Factors Affecting Women's Role in Agriculture

Women's participation in agriculture is influenced by multiple social, economic, and institutional factors that determine their effectiveness and productivity. Understanding these factors is essential for designing interventions to empower women and enhance their contribution to the agricultural economy.

1. Access to Land

A major constraint for women in agriculture is the lack of legal ownership or control over land. Without ownership, women have limited decision-making power regarding cropping patterns, investments, and resource allocation. Landlessness or insecure tenure restricts their autonomy and access to credit or government support schemes.

2

INTRODUCTION

Women play a critical role in the agricultural economy worldwide, contributing significantly to food production, livestock management, post-harvest processing, and household nutrition. In many developing countries, women constitute 40-60% of the agricultural labor force, performing essential tasks such as sowing, weeding, harvesting, irrigation management, and animal care. Their participation ensures continuous farm operations, food security, and sustenance for rural households.

Despite their immense contribution, women often face multiple challenges that limit their effectiveness and potential. Many lack access to productive resources such as land, credit, modern technology, and training. Social norms and gender biases often restrict their decision-making power in farming activities, limiting their ability to fully utilize their skills and knowledge. Furthermore, women frequently balance agricultural work with household responsibilities, adding to their workload and stress.

Recognizing women as key stakeholders in agriculture is essential for sustainable development. Empowering women through education, skill development, access to financial resources, and participation in decision-making processes enhances productivity, promotes innovation, and improves rural livelihoods. Policies and programs that support women farmers contribute to economic growth, food security, and poverty reduction, making agriculture more efficient and inclusive.

2. Definition of Women in Agriculture

Women in agriculture are those who actively engage in farm and allied activities, including crop cultivation, horticulture, forestry, animal husbandry, fisheries, agro-processing, and marketing of farm produce. Their role is both productive and reproductive, as they combine farm labor with household and caregiving responsibilities.

Key Points:

- Women are involved in both manual labor and farm management decisions.
- They participate in income-generating activities alongside subsistence farming, contributing to household economy.
- Women play an essential role in rural development, food security, and nutrition, often influencing the well-being of entire communities.

By acknowledging and supporting the contributions of women in agriculture, societies can achieve higher productivity, inclusive economic growth, and sustainable rural development. Empowering women ensures that agricultural resources are used efficiently, innovations are adopted more widely, and livelihoods are strengthened across rural areas.



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/>

1

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Women's Role in Agricultural Economy

संकलन

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2. Access to Credit and Inputs

Limited financial resources prevent women from purchasing modern inputs such as high-quality seeds, fertilizers, machinery, and irrigation equipment. Restricted access to institutional credit also hampers their ability to adopt advanced farming practices or start entrepreneurial ventures, reducing productivity and income potential.

3. Education and Training

Education and technical knowledge are crucial for improving agricultural efficiency. Women often lack access to training programs, workshops, and extension services, which limits their ability to use modern tools, machinery, and innovative practices. Training in marketing, digital technologies, and financial management further enhances their effectiveness.

4. Social Norms

Cultural expectations and gender norms can restrict women's mobility, decision-making authority, and participation in formal agricultural activities. In some communities, women's work is undervalued, and they may be excluded from leadership roles or cooperative societies, limiting their influence in farm-related decisions.

5. Infrastructure

Poor infrastructure, including inadequate irrigation systems, storage facilities, transportation, and access to markets, reduces the efficiency and profitability of women's agricultural activities. Lack of proper roads and cold storage facilities leads to post-harvest losses and limits market access.

Addressing these factors—through legal reforms, financial inclusion, education, training, social awareness, and infrastructure development—is critical to empowering women in agriculture and maximizing their contribution to rural development and the overall economy.

Governments worldwide recognize the vital role of women in agriculture and have implemented programs to empower them. These schemes aim to enhance women's financial independence, technical skills, access to resources, and entrepreneurial capabilities, thereby strengthening their contribution to the agricultural economy.

1. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)

RMK provides microfinance support to women entrepreneurs, enabling them to invest in farming, allied activities, and small enterprises. The scheme focuses on improving income-generation opportunities for rural women and fostering financial inclusion.

2. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY)

MSY encourages women to save and participate in self-employment programs. It supports income-generating activities in agriculture, dairy, poultry, and small-scale agro-processing ventures, helping women achieve economic independence.

3. Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

SHGs promote collective action, savings, credit access, and cooperative entrepreneurship. By working in groups, women can pool resources, reduce risk, and gain better access to inputs, markets, and government support programs.

4. Integrated Tribal Development Program (ITDP)

ITDP targets women in tribal areas, providing support in agriculture, horticulture, livestock, and allied sectors. It facilitates capacity building, resource access, and market linkages for women living in remote and underserved regions.

5. Skill Development and Training Programs

Governments conduct training programs to enhance technical knowledge, agricultural practices, financial literacy, marketing skills, and business management for women. These programs equip women with the tools necessary to adopt modern technology and run successful enterprises.

6. Role of Women in Sustainable Agriculture

Women are often at the forefront of sustainable agriculture, applying both traditional knowledge and modern practices to ensure long-term productivity, environmental conservation, and rural livelihoods. Their participation is crucial for maintaining ecological balance while increasing farm efficiency.

1. Organic and Chemical-Free Farming

Women frequently engage in organic farming, using compost, bio-fertilizers, and natural pest control methods. This reduces dependency on chemical inputs, enhances soil health, and produces safe, high-quality food for households and local markets.

2. Traditional Knowledge for Seed and Soil Management

Women often preserve local seed varieties and use indigenous knowledge for crop rotation, intercropping, and soil fertility management. Such practices maintain genetic diversity, improve resilience to pests and climate variations, and reduce input costs.

3. Water Conservation and Efficient Irrigation

Women play an active role in water management, employing efficient irrigation practices such as drip irrigation, rainwater harvesting, and canal management. Proper water conservation ensures better crop yields and sustainable use of resources.

4. Agroforestry and Biodiversity Conservation

Women contribute to agroforestry initiatives by planting trees alongside crops and managing community forests. They also help conserve biodiversity through seed banks, nurseries, and protection of local flora and fauna, supporting ecosystem health.

7. Challenges Faced by Women in Agriculture

Despite their significant contributions to agriculture, women face several challenges that limit their productivity, participation, and empowerment in the sector.

Limited Ownership of Resources: Many women do not own land, livestock, or farm machinery, which restricts their autonomy and ability to make key decisions in production and marketing. Without ownership, women also face difficulties accessing credit or government support programs designed for farmers.

Workload and Time Constraints: Women often juggle multiple responsibilities, including household chores, childcare, and farm work. This double burden reduces the time and energy they can devote to adopting modern practices or entrepreneurial activities, limiting efficiency and productivity.

Limited Access to Technology: Adoption of modern tools, machinery, and information and communication technology (ICT) platforms is low among women farmers. This restricts their ability to implement precision farming, mechanization, and other productivity-enhancing methods.

Gender Bias and Social Constraints: Cultural norms and social expectations often prevent women from participating in decision-making or leadership roles in cooperatives, farmer groups, or community-based organizations. This exclusion diminishes their influence in agricultural planning and resource allocation.

Inadequate Market Linkages: Women frequently face challenges in accessing markets directly, obtaining fair prices, and participating in value chains. Limited mobility, lack of transport facilities, and reliance on middlemen reduce their income potential and entrepreneurial opportunities.

8. Future Scope and Empowerment

Empowering women in agriculture holds immense potential for rural development, economic growth, and sustainable farming.

Capacity Building: Training programs on modern agricultural techniques, financial management, marketing, and ICT tools enable women to adopt innovative practices and increase productivity.

Access to Credit and Subsidies: Providing financial support through loans, grants, and subsidies allows women to invest in high-value crops, livestock, machinery, and agro-processing units, promoting entrepreneurship.

Technology Adoption: Encouraging the use of mechanization, digital platforms, precision farming, and mobile-based advisory services enhances efficiency, reduces labor burden, and improves profitability.

Leadership Development: Inclusion in farmer organizations, cooperatives, and community decision-making bodies strengthens women's influence, promotes gender equality, and encourages active participation in agricultural policy and planning.

Entrepreneurship Opportunities: Women can venture into agro-processing, dairy, poultry, organic farming, and allied businesses, adding value to farm produce and generating employment in rural areas.

Promoting gender equality and empowering women ensures inclusive growth, higher productivity, stronger rural economies, and long-term sustainability in agriculture. Supporting women in agriculture is therefore essential for achieving resilient, equitable, and profitable farming systems.

CONCLUSION

Women are indispensable to the agricultural economy, contributing to production, processing, and marketing. Empowering women through training, financial support, access to technology, and policy initiatives not only improves agricultural productivity but also promotes rural development, food security, and sustainable farming practices. Recognizing and enhancing women's role in agriculture is critical for achieving equitable and prosperous rural economies in the future.