

Women in Agriculture and Post Harvest Management- Approaches and Strategy for Women Development

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ABSTRACT

National averages of female workers in the agricultural labour force vary, but globally women have a principal role in agribusiness, food processing, and consumer-related activities. In India only 8 to 10 per cent of the small scale manufacturing units are run exclusively by women entrepreneur that is proportionately very small as compared to other developed or developing countries. Although good amount of work is being carried out on the overall research strategies by various Agricultural Universities in India, relatively little attention has been given to women's post harvest activities. Rural and small scale cottage industries have potentialities to absorb women on several jobs. Women's participation in post harvest management is a common practice. It starts from harvesting/picking, threshing, winnowing, curing etc. and continues till its storage and preservation. Strategies should be evolved to disseminate to farm women the ideas, information and appropriate technologies developed for reduction of drudgeries on the farm and in the home. A sound feed back mechanism based on systematic monitoring and evaluation of such dissemination and implementation needs to be established.

Keywords: Women, Post harvest management, Approaches, strategies

INTRODUCTION

Women form the backbone of agriculture comprising the majority of agricultural labourer in India. Gender divisions in agriculture are stark, with all activities involving manual labour assigned to women. There is strong relationship between gender and agriculture in developing countries. Women are twice as likely as men to be involved in agriculture-related activity, according to the 2000 United Nations report on the status of women. National averages of female workers in the agricultural labour force vary, but globally women have a principal role in agribusiness, food processing, and consumer-related activities (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd,2006>). There is an intense need to free women from gender related shackles, build up their capacity, empower them with information and knowledge and allow them to emerge as leaders with confidence to guide their own destinies. This is relevant all the more in agriculture and allied sectors. According to official estimates, one-third of agriculture labour force and nearly half of self employed farmers are women. Of the total; female work force in rural areas 90 per cent are employed in agriculture and allied industrial sectors.

Women community though equal men in population, it is really unfortunate to note that, yet in this modern sophisticated world, many a times she is treated as the second class citizen or subordinate to men. Many development efforts fail women in particular because planners have a poor understanding of the role women play in farming and household food security(<http://www.fao.org/Gender/en/educ-e.htm,2006>). Women constitute at least one third of country's economically active population, particularly in the unorganized sector and specifically in the agrarian sector. Low literacy levels (40%), skill based and knowledge grounded technologies along with patriarchal social control, lack of access to and control over resources like land, credit, marketing and management; gender biased extension services and limited access to training, lack of support services to play the multiple roles expected of them, gender biased wage differentials, occupational hazard to health; social restraint which might not enable them to equip themselves to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities provided by the new economic policy (Sobha,2001). In India only 8 to 10 per cent of the small scale manufacturing units are run exclusively by women entrepreneur that is proportionately

very small as compared to other developed or developing countries. In USA alone, about 50 per cent of the business is owned by women (Naik, 2003).

Still it is fact that throughout the world, women's participation in economic activities is increasing. The role of women entrepreneur is also spreading its dimension. In India too, women are participating in almost all the spheres of economic activities. From village to city, we can see large number of women entrepreneur contributing towards the national income of the country.

In India traditionally women have been mentioned as the provider of food. But, socially, women's role has mostly perceived as the one who serves, rather than one who grows the food, as business of growing food has been recognized as a male domain for centuries but women play a crucial role in all farm related activities from land preparation to post harvest management and In marketing also. They contribute higher proportion of labour in agricultural and horticultural sectors than men. However, they are not active in decision making. (Nitu Sindhu and Joginder Malik 2014) But, the shift in cultural attitudes towards women is yet to happen. It also comes up with future strategies to make women a more active part of important farm decisions both at the household and legislature level. This study includes following objectives.

OBJECTIVES

- (i) Role and participation of women in agriculture and post harvest management
- (ii) Women Employment generation through value addition techniques
- (iii) Priorities and challenges for women empowerment

Role and participation of women in agriculture and post harvest management

Agriculture plays an important role in the economic development of the country by creating rural employment and on farm income generation. There is commonly held belief that women play a marginal role in agriculture. It was found, for instance, that women produced most of the food in Africa. Official statistics recognize that women now make up about 40 per cent of the agricultural labour force worldwide, and about 67 per cent in developing countries.

Women as custodian of food grain and other agricultural produce have following basic role to play:

- Minimisation of harvest and post harvest losses.
- Value addition to agricultural produce and by-products for increasing family income.
- Meeting family requirement of food, feed, fibre and fuel through economical options.
- Within economic resources provide nutritional security to the family.

Although good amount of work is being carried out on the overall research strategies by various Agricultural Universities in India, relatively little attention has been given to women's post harvest activities. Low cost improved techniques which uses local material, renewable energy sources and easy to construct and maintain structures are needed for on farm crop drying, winnowing, parboiling, husking, storage, handling, processing and preservation of grains, vegetables, fruits and fish.

Fruit and vegetables are important ingredients of the human diet as they contain much needed vitamins and micronutrients. Export of horticultural produce and products bring valuable foreign exchange to the country. India with its varied agroclimatic conditions produces a large number of diversified horticultural crops. But unfortunately a considerable amount of the produce is just wasted as a result of poor post harvest management. Most of the horticultural produces are highly perishable in nature because of high moisture content(70 to 95 per cent), soft texture and due to their richness in constituents like carbohydrates, fats, proteins and vitamins, etc., micro-organisms survive on them and may easily extract their requisite nutrition. Most of them are valuable crops having great potential for generating income and employment in rural areas and also high export values provided proper and scientific tools of efficient post harvest managements are taken care of. Considerable degradation in their quality starts immediately after harvest, which tends to increase cumulatively as the produce moves downwards from production to post harvest. Losses of perishables vary widely from product to product and from place to place and it become more complex due to lack of storage facility and marketing problems.

Women's participation in post harvest management is a common practice. It starts from harvesting/picking, threshing, winnowing, curing etc. and continues till its storage and preservation. For post harvest management of floricultural crops also, they play significant roles. Although some of the post harvest operations like harvesting of crops from

tall trees, most of the machines operated activities, transportation, marketing etc are generally predominated by men. However, harvesting and post harvest operations carried out by women varies from country as well as region. In Bangladesh women are relatively restricted to do food processing and homeland but hand pounding of paddy was socially accepted form of employment, while harvesting in West Bengal and Bangladesh is mainly men's work. In Indonesia, it is traditionally women's work. In Philippines, harvesting is done mostly by women. Threshing varies from region to region in terms of women's participation. But winnowing, drying, storing, milling and food preservation is mostly done by women. Thus in most Asian countries, the rural women are largely responsible for harvesting, on farm handling, storage and processing of food grains.

Women Employment generation through value addition techniques

India has a rich biodiversity of horticultural crops growing in its varied agro-climatic regions, fruits, vegetables, flowers, ornamentals and spices are perishable in nature and their shelf life is limited, depending upon environmental and handling conditions. Due to poor post-harvest management practices, and lack of infrastructure facilities, huge losses (20 to 40 %) occur which cause an annual estimated loss of ₹ 23,000 crores and more.

Rural and small scale cottage industries have potentialities to absorb women on several jobs. Development in the agricultural and processing sector, especially the growth of agro based industries employment opportunities are there in the following field :

- Post Harvest Management of perishables for extending shelf life.
- Cut flower preservation and preparing flower decorations, ornaments, and floral arrangements.
- Food preservation and packaging of prepared products.
- Dehydration of flower and preparation of floral arrangements with dry flowers.
- Utilization of agricultural wastes.
- Marketing of fresh as well as prepared products.

Food processing and preservation is an area offering immense scope for income generation and prevention of post harvest losses to farm families. The seasonal availability of

perishable foods especially fruits and vegetables need to be given utmost attention. During peak harvest season, the farmers sell their perishables at very low cost which are not commensurate with the cost of their inputs and labour. If small scale preservation units of fruits and vegetables could be established on a cooperative basis including village or blocks, this would go in a long way in agricultural marketing and nutritional balance throughout the year. Pickles, juices, jams, jellies, ketchup and sauces can be prepared and sold through the net work of Government stores and Institutions. These net works of preservation projects can easily be managed by farm women provided they are given the technical and managerial expertise.

However, success of any value adding activity depends upon the capacity building for its appropriate manufacturing and marketing the products at remunerative prices. Since agricultural produce and products are usually perishable and semi-perishable in nature, ability to retain without excessive quantitative and qualitative losses is pre-requisite for successful marketing operations. Marketing is a competitive job. Laws of demand and supply, compatibility between the product and consumer's preference, purchasing power, packaging, handling, distribution, motivation and sales promotion etc. govern it. Talents required for marketing are not the same as required for production and processing. Women power sometimes superseded men successfully in this field.

Priorities and challenges for women empowerment

Efforts to enable women to contribute more effectively to agricultural development, we must recognize women as farmers and agents of economic change. Following are the priorities and challenges are required to state for women empowerment.

- (1) **Access to resources** – finance(micro-credit), irrigation, integrated crop management suitable for smallholders, indigenous seed of fruits and vegetable crops

Challenges

- Access to finance- women have no collateral
 - Limited knowledge of nutritive food
 - No access to land strategies
 - Support or create women cooperatives
 - Provide more information and dissemination of nutritive foods
 - Develop appropriate policies
- (2) **Go local and think globally-** maintaining nutritional

food security of local food resources, acquisition and dissemination of indigenous knowledge

Challenges

- Lack of intergenerational transfer of knowledge
 - Profitable or marketable activities strategies
 - a Community level training in local language- community asset mapping, tapping information from elders, blend traditional and new practices
 - b To blend scientific and local knowledge to ensure integrated cropping systems are profitable and environmentally sustainable and high nutrition value
- (3) **Equitable opportunities for women (empowerment)**
– increased participation in extension (providing and receiving), women leadership positions at community level/cooperatives, horticultural capacity building of women

Challenges

- Few role models in agricultural research and extension
- Limited knowledge of business plan formulation
- Few women in leadership position

Farm women must be trained to continue themselves in farm operations using the technologies to their best advantages. Strategies need to be evolved for generating newer appropriate technologies to forecast and realistically assess the implications of the technologies and suitably train the farm women in other alternative pursuits for economic independence.

Farm women are confronted with the triple burden of work, household duties and child rearing. Considering this and keeping in mind the potential areas as well as limitations of farm women, the technologies will have to be;

- Simple without involving highly complicated procedures
- Introducing the machineries with the ease of handling, operating and maintaining which encourages the users to get experience and realize its utility and potency.
- Low cost
- Inland/internally generated technologies have added advantages over those imported

- User friendly
- Interesting to the users

Strategies should be evolved to disseminate to farm women the ideas, information and appropriate technologies developed for reduction of drudgeries on the farm and in the home. A sound feed back mechanism based on systematic monitoring and evaluation of such dissemination and implementation needs to be established.

Extension professionals will need to exercise more proactive and participatory role serve as knowledge information agents, initiating and facilitating mutually meaningful and equitable knowledge based transaction among the agricultural researchers, extension workers and farm women.

CONCLUSION

Women's face significant barriers in agriculture, especially inequalities in access to and control over crucial resources and inputs such as land, labour, fertilizers and finance. If women's had better access over the barriers along with agricultural training, technology, education and market access women could increase agricultural production and reduce the number of hungry people worldwide.

Women farmers' access to extension services must lead to concrete improvements for rural women themselves, as well as enhance the productivity of the agricultural sector and national food security through increasing marketed outputs.

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