



Role of women in agriculture: Problems and solutions

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Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy. Women play a vital role in building this economy. Over the years, there is a gradual realization of the key role of women in agricultural development and their vital contribution in the field of agriculture, food security, horticulture, processing, nutrition, sericulture, fisheries and other allied sectors. Agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor but the agricultural sector in many developing countries is under performing, in part because women, who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources.

Multi-dimensional role of women:

– *Agricultural activities*: Sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.

– *Domestic activities*: Cooking, child rearing, water collection, fuel wood gathering, household maintenance etc.

– *Allied activities*: Cattle management, fodder collection, milking etc.

Despite women's extensive and varied participation in agriculture, they continue to have less access than do men to modern agricultural inputs. As a result, their farm work is labour intensive and yields meager economic returns.

Problems faced by rural women: Despite their importance to agricultural production, women face severe handicaps. They are in fact, the largest group of landless labourers with little real security in case of break-up of

the family owing to death or divorce; inheritance laws and customs discriminate against them land reform and settlement programmes usually give sole title and hence the security needed for obtaining production credits to the husband. Agricultural development programmes are usually planned by men and aimed at men. Mechanization, for example alleviates the burden of tasks that are traditionally men's responsibility, leaving women's burdens unrelieved or even increased. The study also noted that majority of the rural women are uneducated, unskilled and tradition bounded, therefore their productive capacities are also low, and counted as unskilled labour. Though rural women also help to produce the staple crops like rice, wheat, and maize, but her contribution is secondary in staple crop production, however, in legumes and vegetables, her role



is instrumental. Rural women have very hectic life. Her work starts from dawn and ends at dusk. The daily routine work begins from house cleaning, fetching drinking water, dish washing, laundry, preparing food for family, care of children, tailoring and sewing clothes. Even though rural women supply food production, yet her own food security is always at risk. Women farmers are frequently ignored in development strategies and policies. In most of the developing countries, both men and women farmers do not have access to adequate resources, but women's are even more constrained because of cultural, traditional and sociological factors.

How to overcome the problems faced by rural women working in agriculture field: The training of rural women is very important, especially with the adoption of modern agricultural techniques that are tailored to local conditions and that use natural resources in a sustainable manner, with a view to achieving economic development

without degrading the environment. It requires the dissemination of the results of research carried out by experts - including those on agro-ecological techniques - with a view to increasing Rural Women's production levels. To this effect, it must be pointed out that agro-ecological practices require the provision of certain public goods, such as extension services, storage facilities, rural infrastructure (roads, electricity and information and communication technologies), access to markets and access to credit, as well as supporting organizations and farmer co-operatives. Governments have a key role to play in relation thereto, as well as supporting the access to land, water and seeds by rural women who are involved in small-scale agriculture.

Giving support to rural women is a way of breaking the vicious cycle that leads to rural poverty and to the expansion of slums in the cities, where the poor get poorer. Development strategies should consider rural women as the epicentre, paying special attention to their social skills both within and without agriculture sector. Policies established for the benefit of rural women should be tested and reassessed by the beneficiaries, using them as a social learning tool and not as individuals on whom political authority is exercised. Rural women - instead of being treated as mere beneficiaries - should, in other words, be viewed as experts who possess knowledge which complement experts' formal knowledge. Participation in

policies that benefit rural women can ensure truthful answers being given to this vulnerable group, since membership empowers impoverished subjects and is a vital step towards poverty alleviation. In order to contribute to an increase in the levels of production and productivity, it is necessary to provide support to those women's organizations and farmers who promote new conceptual and development programmes and who contribute to the implementation of new ideas by women with a view to diversifying income-generating activities and the provision of other services in rural areas. It is extremely important to recognize the role that rural women play and the contribution that they make in networks and co-operatives, giving them greater political and financial support and involving them in the training and conducting of development programmes that enhance women's role in agricultural production. Networks operating in rural areas, especially rural women's organizations are partners to be involved in the conception of development programmes. These organizations must be aware of the local reality. To put it another way, even though global partnerships will always be necessary and useful, such organizations should work towards the empowerment of rural women since actions are always local.

Received : 26.07.2018

Revised : 19.10.2018

Accepted : 29.10.2018



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