

Women in agriculture: Key developments under eleventh five year plan and thrust areas of the twelfth plan

AMTUL WARIS

ICAR-Indian Institute of Rice Research, HYDERABAD (TELANGANA) INDIA
(Email : amtul.waris@gmail.com)

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INTRODUCTION

Women play a pivotal role in agriculture not only as agricultural labourers, co-farmers and family labourers but as managers of the farm and farm entrepreneurs. Women constitute a large number of the agricultural workforce, NSSO data for 2011-12 shows that only 59 per cent of all rural male workers are in agriculture, but 75 per cent of all rural female workers are in agriculture. Moreover, the involvement of women in the agriculture sector is more even in the urban areas. It is 11 per cent as against that of 6 per cent for men. However, women in agriculture face several challenges of low or no land rights, authority, access to or control over resources required for enhancing production and household income. It is thus essential to look at the gender dimensions in agriculture. Several forward looking initiatives were taken up in the preceding five year plans of the country. This article envisages to summarise the initiatives of the Eleventh Five Year Plan and also highlight the initiatives and programs planned in the Twelfth Five Year Plan

(2012-17) for addressing the issues of women in agriculture.

Participation in economy :

The workforce participation rate for women at the national level as per Census 2011 was 25.51 per cent compared with 53.26 per cent for men. In the rural sector, the workforce participation rate for women was 30.02 per cent compared to 53.03 per cent for men. In the urban sector, it is 15.44 per cent for women and 53.76 per cent for men. As per Census 2011, 41.1 per cent of women main and marginal workers are engaged as agricultural labourers, 24.0 per cent are cultivators, 5.7 per cent are household industry workers and 29.2 per cent are engaged in other works. Moreover, in 2011-12, the worker population ratio for females in rural sector was 24.8 and for males it was 54.3. In Urban sector, it was 14.7 for females and 54.6 for males. In the rural sector, 59.3 per cent females were self-employed, 5.6 per cent females had regular wage/salaried employment and 35.1 per cent females were casual labours compared

with 54.5 per cent, 10.0 per cent and 35.5 per cent males in the same categories, respectively in 2011-12.

Participation in decision making :

The participation of women in decision making according to the National Sample Survey (68th Round), indicated that in the age group of 15-19 years, 46 per cent of women were not involved in any kind of decision making. In the rural sector, 23.4 per cent females were not involved in any decision-making while, in the urban sector the position is little better wherein, only 13.9 per cent of urban resident women were not involved in any decision making. It was found that 32.7 per cent illiterate women, 21.6 per cent unemployed women were not involved in any decision making indicating that improving the educational status and the employability of women would enable them a greater say in the household decision making. Moreover, for the country as a whole, 59.6 per cent had access to money.

Key developments in the eleventh five year plan:

The 11th five year plan (2007–12) emphasised 'Inclusive growth' to achieve a target growth of 4 per cent per annum in GDP from agriculture and allied services. In the Eleventh Plan, the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, took various measures under the National Policy of Farmers, 2007, for empowering women in farming and allied areas to improve their access to land, credit and other services, such as joint pattas for both homestead and agricultural land, Kisan Credit Cards, etc. The Mahila Kisan Shashtikaran Yojana under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) was launched recently (2010-11). As a part of its Gender Budgeting initiatives, the Ministry of Agriculture is allocating at least 30 per cent of the fund flow to women in agriculture. In order to improve the status of women agriculture workers several recommendations were made to improve the land ownership, access to credit, skill up- gradation, overhaul of extension services and engendering media and ICT initiatives. These would also be addressed in the twelfth five year plan along with other important initiatives to empower women in agriculture.

Women and ownership of land: recommendations of the eleventh plan :

In an effort to improve the women's ownership of land the specific recommendations put forth under the

eleventh five year plan period were: Land survey should be done periodically and inheritance records updated. Computerization of land records and revenue maps should be taken up on priority, particularly in tribal sub-plan areas. It should be ensured that the records of ownership of land are maintained by sex to ensure availability of sex disaggregated data. It is important to identify cases where widows and single women have informal ownership over land and get it recorded. In order to ensure that women who have entitlement get land registered in their names, separate inheritance camps for women can be conducted by the State Governments in a campaign mode. To promote awareness regarding women's land rights, mass media campaigns particularly with reference to amendment in Hindu Succession Act needs to be undertaken. Women SHGs should be encouraged to develop available common lands, given to them on a long term lease, through watershed development approach. It has been seen that even after women have access to land, they face problems in having access to improved agriculture practices. There needs to be a special package scheme designed under Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) to meet the needs of women farmers with titles.

Women's access to credit :

The specific recommendations with respect to improving provision of credit to women farmers were; Ministry of Finance, NABARD and RBI are to analyze the problem of credit delivery at State Level and issue appropriate guidelines to remove the bottlenecks faced by women farmers and also the Ministry of Finance is to give specific target for issue of Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) to women farmers. More productive loans should be provided to women's SHGs and federations recognizing the importance of collective collateral. The KCC scheme can also be extended to cover women SHGs. The Ministry of Agriculture should facilitate the setting up of credit counselling centres need to be set up in each block to counsel to assess the credit needs of women farmers and to advise them.

Extension services and up-gradation of farming skills of women :

Extension policy needs to explicitly target women in agriculture. Promote a group approach to extension services for women farmers. Women farmers' should be represented as major stakeholders in all decision

making bodies of public and private extension services. All programmes in the field should be planned and implemented through farmers' groups which have at least 33 per cent women in both general body and executive committees. Agricultural policy and programmes should adopt an integrated farming systems approach with special focus to reach out to small and marginal women farmer. All programmes providing facilities such as distribution of agricultural inputs, subsidies on inputs, training and extension, should have 50 per cent reservation for women beneficiaries, irrespective of whether they own land or not. All productive assets provided under these schemes should be given in the name of woman. Steps need to be taken to involve women in on-farm participatory research for agricultural technology and development of women friendly implements/ tools. The gender friendly tools should be popularized through training and demonstrations in KVKs, Agri-clinics, gram sabhas, etc. Develop a database of women friendly technologies/equipments available for all stages in the agriculture value chain for bulk purchase with list of manufacturers. Institutional and funding support for the formation of women producers associations and existing women's federations/co-operatives to process, store, transport and market farm produce, milk, fish, crops etc. should be provided.

Engendering skill development initiatives :

In order to empower all individuals through improved skills and knowledge during the XI Plan, the Government launched a National Skill Development Mission, under the National Policy on Skill Development to gain access to decent employment and ensure India's competitiveness in the global market. National Policy on Skill Development has set a target to ensure 33 per cent coverage of women. The focus of skill development would be on improving employability and capacity building in marketing and administration for self and collective managed enterprises would also be included. Skill development would be seen as a vehicle to improve lives and not just livelihoods of women to enable them assert individually and collectively.

Media and ICT initiatives for women :

Special efforts are needed for ensuring that the benefits of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) flow to women for both knowledge acquisition and sharing. It is essential to reduce the gender digital

divide as ICTs can provide unlimited opportunities for economic development and social growth. The Government is to take up initiatives to ensure promotion and meeting of the women specific targets to promote ICTs for women in agriculture.

Women's farmers entitlement bill, 2012: when approved :

The women's farmers entitlement Bill, 2012 acknowledges the increasing feminization of India's agricultural labour force, with women constituting over 50 per cent of Indian farmers and about 60 per cent of the farming sector workforce. The bill intends to "provide for the gender specific needs of women farmers, to protect their legitimate needs and entitlements and to empower them with rights over agricultural land, water resources and other related right and for other functions relating thereto and for matters connected therewith." This bill would eliminate the handicaps faced by women farmers, such as title to land, and access to credit, inputs, insurance, technology and market.

Way forward: thrust areas of the twelfth plan for women in agriculture :

The key elements for gender equity which would be addressed in the twelfth plan are, economic empowerment, social and physical infrastructure, enabling legislations, women's participation in Governance, Inclusiveness of all categories of vulnerable women, Engendering National Policies/Programmes and Mainstreaming Gender through Gender Budgeting.

Economic empowerment :

The twelfth five year plan endeavours to increase women's employability in the formal sector as well as their asset base. It aims to improve the conditions of self employed women. The main focus would be on women's workforce participation particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, ensuring decent work for them, reaching out to women in agriculture and manufacturing, financial inclusion, and extending land and property rights to women.

Schemes under twelfth five year plan :

Women's access to the various agriculture schemes being implemented by the government will be ensured. A quota for women will be incorporated by modifying the guidelines of agriculture related schemes like

Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY). Further involvement of women can be ensured by providing financial and infrastructural support to SHGs for seed production, storage, preservation, and distribution. Women friendly technology to reduce drudgery which leads to better health and productivity would be designed and measures would be taken to ensure their access to women farmers. Technology transfer to women would be prioritised in all aspects of farming and farm management, including dry land farming technologies, animal husbandry, forestry, sustainable natural resource management, enterprise development, financial management and leadership development. They would be provided training in pre and postharvest technologies. Special Resource Centres would be provided to train women farmers in new technologies and practices, gain access to information on schemes and subsidies, specially designed for their benefit. In order to sustain development interventions, women and young girls will be given training in the use and repair of bore wells with special focus on promoting low cost irrigation.

Access to land :

To enhance women's access to land a range of initiatives have been designed, joint land titles in all government land transfers, credit support to poor women to purchase or lease land from the market, increase in legal awareness and legal support for women's inheritance rights, supportive government schemes and recording of women's inheritance shares etc. Women will also be helped to purchase land in groups for group cultivation by a loan cum-grant scheme with 50 per cent of the loan as a low interest loan and the remaining 50 per cent as a grant. Incentives will be provided to women farmers/SHGs, for group farming on leased or owned land through financial support for group formation; credit subsidy and access to technology.

Schemes and programs for women farmers :

Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) :

Micro-finance services to bring about the socio-economic upliftment of poor women are provided through the RMK. Credit is provided to the poor women beneficiaries through Intermediary Microfinancing Organisations (IMOs) working at grass root level such as NGOs, Women Federations, Co-operatives, not for profit companies registered under Section 25 of the Companies Act and other Voluntary/Civil society

organisations etc. by following a client friendly, simple collateral free, for livelihood and income generation activities, housing and micro-enterprises.

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) :

Government of India launched the "Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana" (MKSP), as a sub component of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) during 2010-11 to improve the status of women in agriculture, and to enhance the opportunities for their empowerment. The programme envisages empowering women in agriculture by making systematic investments to enhance their participation and productivity, and also create and sustain agriculture based livelihoods of rural women. The program is being implemented by NRLM in partnership with State Departments/CSOs as implementing partners (PIAs) across the country. The central to state share in funding for MKSP stands at 75:25 ratio. MKSP will be implemented as a sub-component of NRLM through specially formulated projects. The scheme works for support activities in four major themes, sustainable agriculture, non-timber forest produce, livestock and fisheries with the following specific objectives.

Specific objectives of MKSP :

- To enhance the productive participation of women in agriculture;
- To create sustainable agricultural livelihood opportunities for women in agriculture;
- To improve the skills and capabilities of women in agriculture to support farm and non-farm-based activities;
- To ensure food and nutrition security at the household and the community level;
- To enable women to have better access to inputs and services of the government and other agencies;
- To enhance the managerial capacities of women in agriculture for better management of bio-diversity;
- To improve the capacities of women in agriculture to access the resources of other institutions and schemes within a convergence framework.

Expected outcomes :

The outcomes being envisaged from the scheme are (a) an increase in the incomes of women in agriculture on a sustainable basis; (b) Improvement in food and nutritional security of women in agriculture and their families; (c) Increase in area under cultivation,

cropping intensity and food production by women; (d) Increased levels of skills and performance by women in agriculture; (e) Increased access of women in agriculture to productive land, inputs, credit, technology and information; (f) Drudgery reduction for women in agriculture through use of gender friendly tools / technologies; (g) Increased access to market and market information for better marketing of their products; (h) Increased soil health and fertility to sustain agriculture based livelihoods; (i) Increased visibility of women in agriculture as an interest group in terms of increased number of women institutions and increase in their entrepreneurship.

Collective action: key to economic and social empowerment :

Women derive significant benefits from joining collective action groups. Groups can be especially empowering for women, providing opportunities to participate in decision-making and take on leadership roles. Collective action (CA) has advantages for improving the position of small-scale farmers in markets by improving the efficiency in the delivery of inputs and training, economies of scale and increased bargaining power. With appropriate capacity building efforts the well established SHGs can be transformed into larger community based organizations. These organizations can operate on a bigger scale and therefore take advantage of their economies of scale to bring down costs and become more competitive in the markets.

Recommendations for strengthening women's agricultural capacities :

The working group on empowerment of women for the eleventh five year plan was constituted by the planning commission and made the following recommendations for strengthening women's agricultural capacities with a strong premise that for the holistic empowerment of women, effective convergence of social, economic and political aspects impacting a woman's life is highly

essential.

- Agricultural extension services and other infrastructural support for women farmers should be made available to women farmers.

- Policies should be designed to ensure women's control over complementary resources including irrigation, credit, water, forest, fuel, fodder, information and training.

- Design women friendly technologies that are safe for workers *i.e.* reduced use of pesticides and also ensure that occupational safety and health measures are in place.

- Training programs covering areas such as land surveying, resource mapping, resource management, use of technology, marketing, financial management, cooperative management and organic farming should be made available to women.

- Where possible women farmers should be given financial support to create assets either as individuals or as a group, including for investing in small irrigation systems, etc.

- Measures should be taken to remove middlemen in the sale of non-timber forest products and women's co-operatives for directly marketing these products should be formed.

- Resource pooling and group investment in capital equipment; cooperative marketing.

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