

## Empowerment of women for rural livelihood

S.K. SAINI, PRABHJOT KAUR AND SHABANA YASMIN

### ABSTRACT

Agriculture is still the single largest livelihood system in Asia, employing nearly 60 per cent of the work force. It is not only the main source of employment, income and food for over 70 per cent of the population but also the main culture for rural families. Women play a significant and crucial role in agriculture and allied fields. Rural Indian women are extensively involved in agricultural activities. However, the nature and extent of their involvement differs with variations in agro-production. Their roles range from managers to landless labourers. Women are the sole providers of the household food supply. In animal husbandry women have a multiple role. Their activities vary widely ranging from care of animals to processing of milk. Women are typically involved in post harvest processing of food and non-food products. Women's employment in family farms or business is rarely recognized. Access to assets is the single most urgent need for the upliftment of women in general and farm women in particular. Rural women still do not have ownership on land. Due to this they cannot take independent decisions. Education can be an effective tool for empowering women to contribute to social development. Empowering women with economically productive work will enhance their contribution to agricultural development. Women have not an easy access to inputs and credit. Majority of the women remain unemployed. It is necessary to develop entrepreneurship among women and encourage them to take a independent income generating activities so that significant work force of the country may be utilized more efficiently in order to generate more income, reduce unemployment, minimize incidence of poverty etc. But women entrepreneurs have been facing many problems such as twin responsibility, lack of information and experience, scarcity of raw materials, marketing problems, limited mobility, problem of finance, lack of risk bearing capacity etc.

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Women constitute half the world's population, accomplish about the two-third of its working hours, receive one-tenth of the world's income and less than one-hundredth of the world's property. Agriculture employees 4/5<sup>th</sup> of all economically active labour force and 48 per cent of self-employed farmers. Women play a significant and crucial role in agriculture and allied fields. Rural Indian women are extensively involved in agricultural activities. However, the nature and extent of their involvement differs with variations in agro-production. Women are the sole providers of the household food supply. In animal husbandry, women have a multiple role. Their activities vary widely ranging from care of animals to processing of milk. Women are typically involved in post harvest processing of food and non-food products. There are 75 million women against 15 million men in dairying and those engaged in animal husbandry, accounts for 20 million as against 1.5 million men. Because of "low visibility" of their contributions, they are not regarded as equal partners in the developmental process. The gender inequality prevailing in Indian villages adversely affects the development

process of the nation. For the overall development of our nation, it is essential to ensure advancement of women in all spheres of life. Gender equality is possible only by filling the gap between planning and implementation of women friendly government policies. Empowerment of women needs to get utmost priority in any national planning process and its implementation in its true spirit.

"Empowerment" is a multidimensional process which enables women to know their complete identity and powers in all the spheres of life. Although the Ministry of Rural Development is putting efforts through its rural development programmes to improve the status of women but there is a need to intensify the efforts. All government and non-government agencies and rural masses should join hands for this purpose. The women should be empowered in the following areas:

- Educational
- Social
- Economic
- Political
- Technological

### Key words :

Empowerment,  
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**Educational empowerment:**

Education is the key instrument to empower women. Equal access to education for women and girls should be ensured. Special measures should be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create gender sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of occupation/vocational/technical skills of women. Reducing the gender gap should be a focus area. Sectoral time targets in existing policies should be achieved with special focus on girls and women particularly those belonging to weaker and other backward classes/ minorities. In nutshell, women should be empowered by creating awareness on the issues like health, sanitation, social evils, crimes, environment, social justice, rights and responsibilities. Education can liberate women from ignorance and enhance their self-esteem.

**Social empowerment:**

A holistic approach to women's health should include both nutrition and health services. Women should have access to comprehensive, affordable and quality health care. Women need to be educated and made aware of their rights and they should be encouraged to stand united against the biased and discriminating social environment which directly and indirectly affects their psychological and physical self. Education and training for women is one of the major goals of social empowerment of women which needs to be universally made applicable to all parts of the world.

**Economic empowerment:**

Economic empowerment may lead to all kinds of empowerment. Rural women are considered as consumers and not producers with no occupation, property, education or skill. Hence, skill development, income generation and credit availability are main planks of economic empowerment of women. The economic empowerment of women requires transfer of skills of management and control of economic activities to enable women to feel confident and empowered. With women slowly gaining control and being involved in decision-making, real empowerment will emerge in the women's status and position in a larger struggle for social change. Economically empowered women do not remain as objects of social change but become agents of it. If a woman is economically parasite she can never claim an equal status with her counterpart. Economic empowerment of women is possible only when women have full autonomy to spend their income

and also control resources.

The following factors must be considered for economic empowerment of women:

**Access to resources:**

The farm women need to have control over limited resources like land and livestock so that they could take away decisions and implement in any way that is required. Ownership and control over productive assets will create a sense of belonging and owning. It will thus help to take responsibility in family and local group activities.

**Access to credit:**

Access to productive resources is critical for enhancing women's economic choices. Since, formal credit institutions rarely lend to the poor, special institutional arrangements should be made. In order to have access to credit, setting up Self-Help Group (SHG), local banking system by women, Non-governmental organizations and provision of facilities by government need to be established.

**Access to cooperatives and local women's organization:**

Organizational efforts should be made for integrating farm women into development. Organization of Mahila Mandals, cooperative societies and discussions groups will serve this purpose. The control of these organizations should be in the hands of women folk themselves.

**Political empowerment:**

Up till the end of nineteenth century, women were socially weak, economically dependent and politically powerless and were influenced by the male members of the family. The role of rural women in political area was very significant. The 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment providing for one-third of the seats to women members in all the rural local self-government institutions is considered as an attainment towards political empowerment. Though the political situation of women is changed in the constitutional document, it will take time to make rural women politically equal in practice and enhance their status and development. Extension agencies should make constitutional efforts to bring about attitudinal changes among males and elderly women. Political status of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in shaping and sharing of power and in the value by society to this role of women. The Indian constitution guarantees political equality through the adult franchise and right to equality, which prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex. The equal political status will not be realized by mere declaration in the constitution.

Women in politics and decision making positions in government and legislative bodies contribute redefining political bodies placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender-specific concerns, values and experiences and providing new perspectives on mainstream of political issues. Though women become members of political parties, their percentage is very low. They must be required to see themselves and their rights in a new way and they must be helped to help themselves. For this, several Non-Governmental organizations run by women, thousands of Mahila Mandal and lakhs of women members in Panchayati Raj Institutions should work towards sensitizing other women by spreading awareness about their rights and means by which they could be realized. They should mobilize and organize women as a strong pressure group to participate vigorously in the development process and decision making. Further, the local level women's group needs to be strengthened and empowered for the effective implementation of the programme.

#### **Technological empowerment:**

Though women are involved in almost all agricultural operations, yet they have inadequate technical competency due to their limited exposure to outside world. Women should be given equal chance to use technological innovations. New technologies should be developed keeping in mind the gender differences. This will enhance their productivity and reduce drudgery.

#### **Exposure to mass media:**

There is an utmost need to provide adequate coverage to the programmes related to women and they must get exposure to mass media for improving their communication and mediation skills to strengthen their capacity to contact and mediate with external world.

#### **Appropriate training programme:**

Training is an important component of human resource development which enhances knowledge, skill and attitude. For building technical competency among farm women, need-based, skill oriented training programmes to reinforce their role in farm activities need attention. The training programmes should be organized on their felt-needs. To achieve this task, infrastructural facilities in terms of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK's) and Farmers Training Centres (FTC's) should be established in the district on priority basis.

#### **Appropriate technology for women:**

Women specific technologies should be developed.

While evolving agricultural technologies, indigenous practices used by women should be paid due attention for blending with frontier ones for greater adoption. Also there is need to strengthen linkage between various research and extension organizations engaged in transfer of technology.

#### **Training in entrepreneurship development:**

Entrepreneurs can be trained to start up their own industrial unit/enterprise in different fields if proper inputs in the form of training are given. This concept will open a very vast field in giving self-employment. In this field of entrepreneurship, training programmes, Central Government Institutions such as Small Industries Service Institutes, State Government sponsored or aided institutes such as the Centre for Entrepreneurship Development or Non-Governmental Organizations can impart training depending upon the type project on a particular field.

The following are essential prerequisites for women entrepreneurs:

#### **Powerful urge:**

Women entrepreneurs should have a powerful urge to achieve things taken.

#### **Strong determination:**

Only independent and determined persons make successful entrepreneurs

#### **Commitment:**

The women entrepreneur needs ability to stick to her goal through thick and thin and should not get disheartened set backs.

#### **Hard work:**

A women needs to work much harder than man. A total mental and physical involvement is needed especially when the women is a kingpin of her business.

#### **Risk bearing:**

A women entrepreneur should be capable of taking calculated risks and should not gamble or speculate. She should study the market situation, explore profitability in different lines or business, products, machinery, finance etc., before taking a final decision.

#### **Emotional maturity:**

A women entrepreneur should not allow her personal bias and prejudices to influence her business decisions.

#### **Administrative skills:**

A women entrepreneur should develop her leadership

qualities which would not only help her to attract talents but also to retain the talents and also to bring out the best in her team of workers. She should have a fundamental knowledge in all functional areas of business namely, production, marketing, finance, personal accounting etc.

#### Flexibility:

A women entrepreneur should be highly sensitive to changes. She should have the ability to plan and anticipate changes in economy. Accordingly she has to steer the course of her business. So, she should be a versatile person, possess the prudence of finance manager

#### **Problems faced by women entrepreneurs**

The problems faced by women entrepreneurs are discussed as below:

#### Twin responsibility and male dominated society:

Women entrepreneurs need to move away to a certain extent from the traditional roles of home makers and child rearing to more progressive roles where their economic contribution to society is regarded in a positive light. But women have twin responsibility towards family, society and work. Women perform dual role in society related to production and reproduction that is why they are over burdened. Their contribution to the family economy and national economy remains largely invisible and under valued. Women involvement in family leaves little or no energy and time to spend for business. Their success mainly depends upon the support of her husband and other family members.

#### Lack of education, information and experience:

Due to illiteracy, women are unaware of technological and marketing knowledge. Only bookish knowledge is not sufficient to meet challenges of running a business. To select product, location, technology and market etc. practical knowledge is essential. Women have less knowledge about the procedure required. Thus lack of knowledge creates problems at every level *i.e.* family support, banking, licensing and marketing.

#### Shortage of finance:

Women have less access to finance due to various reasons like (1) Women generally do not have property in their name, owing to the lack of confidence in women's ability male members in the family do not like to risk their capital in ventures run by women. (2) Ignorance and lack of experience in formulating bankable projects. (3) Inadequate utilization of credit by women due to lack of marketing, accounting and

management skills further worsen the conditions.

#### Problem of procuring raw material:

Women do not get inputs at desirable place and time. The problem of raw material is intimately related to lack of adequate capital. Sometimes the raw materials are available but the entrepreneurs do not have the working capital to procure them. In other cases, the small scale units do not get the required materials in time for their product plans and delivery schedules.

#### Inadequate marketing facilities:

To market the finished goods, women has to be at the mercy of middle men who take up a big chunk of profit. A lot of money is required for advertisement of products which majority of women entrepreneurs are unable to pay. Due to their small size, small scale industries are not in a position to market the products outside the regional locations. They find it very difficult to get remunerative prices due to their poor distribution network, insufficient advertising and lack of uniform quality.

#### Inadequate training facilities:

New entrepreneurs often suffer from lack of experience and expertise in technical matters or in management due to inadequate training facilities. Small scale entrepreneurs do not interact regularly with the sources of knowledge and information.

#### Inadequate infrastructure:

Insufficient quantity and quality of entrepreneurial infrastructure particularly in the less developed regions is the other problem faced by women entrepreneurs. Infrastructure gap results in under utilization of capacity and wastages.

#### Low mobility:

Women, especially rural women avoid going far away from their families due to many reasons. Their mobility is highly limited. The attitude of society towards them and constraints in which she has to survive and work are hostile. A woman asking for any room or market opportunity is looked upon suspiciously. Women on their own find, it is difficult to get accommodation in smaller towns.

#### Lack of risk bearing capacity:

In spite of working hard women in India hesitate in coming forward to take challenges for better alternatives. Illiteracy, economic and social dependence reduce their ability to bear risks. Inadequate infrastructural facilities,

high cost of production, socio-economic constraints and games of middle-men further discourage them.

Strategies for development of women entrepreneurship

- Women have to be made compatible of both social and economical world and empower them towards self-confidence and self-reliance.

- Access to non-formal education in extension and vocational education in order to improve their entrepreneurial skills.

- Literacy levels of women have to be enhanced and education of women should be made compulsory.

- Enhancing organizational and social leadership skills in community action.

- To motivate women to come out of their traditional perceptions and responsibilities, some psychological and social changes have to be inculcated.

- Women have the need to put more efforts to change people attitude, to aspire women in the society at large, women have to be stimulated to take right kind of action at right time.

- The tendency of women portraying themselves as “Poorane” should be changed.

- Successful women in the field of entrepreneurship have to help other women in starting and sustaining in their business whole heartedly.

- All women entrepreneurs should join together and form co-operative societies to see their industries run effectively.

- Scarce and imported raw materials may be made available to the women entrepreneurs on priority basis. A subsidy may also be given to make the products manufactured by cost competitive.

- Entrepreneurship education and training at all levels have to be introduced.

- Women should be aware of various credit facilities, financial incentives and subsidies etc.

- The government policy makers have to re-evaluate the strategies on women education and their entrepreneurial development and it should be planned and implemented.

- Increasing their access to political power, policy formulation and strategic gender training programme.

- Establishing organizations or Self-Help Groups (SHG's) for their own networking and empowerment through group-building.

- Addressing minimum needs such as nutrition, health, sanitation, housing and education.

- Training programmes should be organized for the rural women in small groups on entrepreneurship development and agri-enterprises for capacity building and

promoting self-employment. There may be better exposure and awareness through field visits to agri-expos, awareness camps and Krishi Vigyan Melas.

- Policy makers have to increase the awareness to the women about various government policies towards their upliftment.

- Banks have to extend their credit facilities to women folk with real spirit and involvement.

- General awareness should be created among women regarding their importance in the society, their social status and legal rights. When they become more and more conscious of their identity, their very self will persuade them to show their mettle in a male dominated society. Camps and campaign should be organized for the purpose.

- The programmes which are already women oriented should be implemented in an improved manner.

- Extension personnel targeting women should put in concerted efforts to promote women access to credit, to increase participation in decision making, to organize them in to self-help groups, to provide entrepreneurial training etc. The training programmes must be designed keeping in mind not only men as farmers and women as farmers' wives but as equal partners in development process.

- There is a need for attitudinal changes among the male members in the families because it is they who can give their women a chance to take part in political activities.

- There is a need to address minimum needs of women such as nutrition, health, sanitation, housing and education.

- All women entrepreneurs should join together and form cooperative societies, Self-Help Groups for the successful running of their enterprises.

- Farm women should be motivated to get organized into small self-help groups in order to provide various organized and well designed interventions for social, psychological and economic empowerment.

- The training programme should be organized for the rural women in small groups on entrepreneurship development for promoting self-employment. There may be better exposure and awareness through field visits, visits to Agri-crops, awareness camps and *Krishi vigyan melas*

### **Consequences of women empowerment:**

Empowerment will enable the rural women to stand on their own feet confidently, stand up to injustice, be in full control of their own lives and become productive members of the society to which they belong. Empowerment of

women will develop full potential of our total human resources. This will lead to self-confidence, a sense of independence and capabilities to resist discrimination imposed by the male dominated society. Thus, women's empowerment is a key to the socio-economic development of the community.

### Case study:

Sangeeta Deol was stricken by polio when she was a child but her determination and strong will did not let it affect her desire to succeed. She is a first generation farmer who had set up and run an enterprise that deals in bee-keeping and dairy farming and deals with some scientific agricultural processes. Her introduction of honey extraction machine has helped sort out problems of small bee-keepers in the area. She helps in extraction of honey and manufacturers of natural honey and herbal products. Sangeeta runs a farm-field school to teach farmers about vermi-composting, mushroom farming, bee-keeping and dairy farming. She has established a market for herself. To encourage women farmers, the government should train them in food processing and small machinery. She received a farmer of the year award in 1999.

Gurdev Kaur is of Ayalli village. She became the member of P.A.U *Kisan* club and attended all the trainings organized by the club. Initially she started with a small unit, producing and selling only honey. Later, with the demand of the customers, she established a permanent processing unit at her home and started processing of raw fruits and vegetables into all types of pickles, chutnies, mixed fruit jam and other value added products. These products were marketed under the name of Global Self-Help Group. In the beginning, there were only five members and now there are sixteen members in this group. She also owned her independent stall in the university market for marketing of products. She is running her unit so successfully and earns about Rs.22000-25000 per month. Besides this, she has been awarded with the first prize of successful entrepreneur in P.A.U *Kisan mela*, September 2009. Case of this successful entrepreneur is an example and motivating factor for other women. So, by making efforts even having the raw materials from the village itself, the women can contribute a lot for the family and ultimately improving the rural livelihood.

### Conclusion:

Women play a significant role in agriculture and allied fields. For the overall development of our nation, it is essential to ensure advancement of women in all spheres of life. Empowerment of women needs to get utmost priority. Women should be empowered in educational, social, economic, political and technological areas. Local women organizations should be strengthened. Successful women entrepreneurs should act as a role model for others and should motivate other women to organize Self-Help Groups of women to help them to start their own enterprises. For promoting self-employment, the training programme for women should be organized. Empowerment will enable the rural women to stand on their feet confidently, to fight against injustice meted out to them and become productive members of the society

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