



Agony of rural women and their empowerment through skill trainings

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ABSTRACT

Unless and until one understands the problems faced by rural women in agriculture and allied sector, the welfare policies cannot be formulated to empower them. About two third of manual labour in farming is constituted by rural women. They provide 14-18 hours of productive physical labour everyday in agriculture, allied and domestic chores. Despite of that women are paid low wages. Also many of the operations in agriculture do not suit to women and inconvenient due to which they suffer from physical and mental fatigue, hardship, exploitation, pain, stress etc. In addition, women are also exposed to several occupational diseases while performing certain operations like spraying of insecticides, using fertilizer without sufficient safeguards causing intoxication and in some cases death. Heavy work during crop cultivation and harvesting can have a high incidence of stillbirths, premature births and death of the child or the mother. KVK's are key source of technological empowerment of rural women. These rural women can be equipped with trainings on various aspects of foods and nutrition, child development, clothing and textile, family resource management etc. Significant gain in knowledge point out the fact that majority of the respondents were successful in acquiring knowledge at post exposure level in various garments construction and maintenance of sewing machine. If these people are empowered, the society will be empowered and agony of rural women can be addressed.

INTRODUCTION

Women play a multidimensional role in agriculture and allied sector. Their role includes crop production (sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.), domestic (cooking, child rearing, water collection, fuel wood gathering, household maintenance etc.), livestock production (cattle management, fodder collection, milking etc.), horticulture, post-harvest operations, agro-forestry, fishery etc. In the man dominated society their involvement is taken granted but

at the same time empowerment of women is neglected. But time has changed because women contribute about 60-70 per cent of the labour required for agricultural activities, thus playing a pivotal role in sustaining economy in present circumstances. Present trends in agricultural open marketing liberalization and in the recognition of farm work, as well as the rise of environmental and sustainability concern are redefining the links between gender and development. Hence nation cannot progress unless and until women is empowered along with man and for that effective policies have to be formulated. Women's role in sustaining agriculture and food security

confirmed that they need to be empowered to undertake their tasks effectively.

Women in agriculture and their agony :

A majority of women in rural India are associated directly or indirectly with agricultural production, processing and distribution. The farm and home are inseparable in India and the closest associate of the farmer is his life. About two third of manual labour in farming is constituted by rural women. Irrespective of their degree of affluence, they provide 14-18 hours of productive physical labour everyday in a wide variety of activities directly connected with agriculture, allied and domestic chores.

Ironically, women farmers are least likely to benefit from agricultural extension service, and technologies that could improve their production. At the same time, the "invisibility" of women in agriculture has meant that researchers and other people involved in crop management issues have not been able to tap the rich experience and knowledge of women farmers. It is often assumed that men are farmers while women are farmer's wives and helpers. In some cases, such assumption has led to the failure of targeting programmes effectively or achieving programs objectives. In the last fifteen years, however, these agencies have realized that the important role of women in agriculture should not be over looked.

Intergender wages differential :

Labour market returns are lower for women than men. Either the labour market is neutral with respect to gender and labour market participation by women is residual and necessarily confined to work of low productivity or the labour market is as patriarchal as the household and women are paid low wages not as a result of their productivity but as a result of ideologies associating female gender with inferiority. Men always prefer heavier and other such activities which are treated as prestigious and more paying while women continue to perform tedious, monotonous and menial jobs. Women provide a source of cheap labour for rice cultivation. In spite of the fact that most, if not all, Government have passed legislation stipulating equal rights for men and women in the field at work, including that of equal remuneration, the principle at equal pay for equal work has been difficult to implement, especially with respect to women working in rural areas.

Referring to the pay disparity between men and women labourers working in paddy cultivation, employers always prefer to hire women due to their low wages. Women working in equal conditions on paddy fields earn two third less than men workers (Yasari, 2005). A review of country papers also reveal that women in Cyprus, received average monthly salary of 51.2 per cent less than man. In Morocco, women earn 71 per cent of men's wages for casual work. In Iran, they receive 46 per cent less and in Turkey, 42-71 per cent less wages for casual labour. Wage differentials varied according to season and region (Anonymous, 2005b).

Health hazardous and farm women :

Agriculture ranks among one of the most hazardous industries. Perhaps more than any other occupational group agricultural workers are exposed to tremendous variety of environmental hazardous that is potentially harmful to their health and well being. Even the families who often share the work and live on the premises are also at risk of injuries, illness and death. While many of the determinants of health are same for both men and women but because of interaction of these determinants with gender in a world in which access to resources and allocation of power is usually in favour of men, experience of health and illness may be very different for men and women.

Women suffer more as compare to men. First, because women work for longer hours, second, women on an average, have a smaller stature and have less physical strength; their vital capacity is 11 per cent less; their hemoglobin is approximately 20 per cent less; their skin area is larger as compared to circulating volume; they have larger body fat content, lower heat tolerance and greater cold tolerance. Job insecurity, poor access to health care and multiple roles further aggravated stress among women farm workers.

Most of the works performed by farm women are tedious as well as time-consuming. As most of these operations are done manually or by using traditional tools, they cause considerable fatigue and drudgery. Also many of these operations are traditionally done in varying body posture, some of which if done for long duration are not only inconvenient but also cause body pain. All these factors result in physical and mental fatigue, hardship, exploitation, pain, stress etc. In addition, women are also exposed to several occupational diseases while

performing certain operations like spraying of insecticides, using fertilizer without sufficient safeguards, standing continuously in water while transplanting paddy seedling etc. Many women in the agricultural labour end up doing jobs that nobody else would do, such as the mixing or application of harmful pesticides without adequate protection and information, suffering from intoxication and in some cases death. Heavy work during crop cultivation and harvesting can have a high incidence of stillbirths, premature births and death of the child or the mother.

Agony of farm women forces us to understand their problems and find the solutions to empower them through imparting trainings so that they can self sustain in the society. In this direction we have to find out their training needs which suit to them. Training needs of rural women are discussed in the sub-heads :

Training needs of rural women in home science and agriculture :

Education and training are essential components of any strategy to improve agricultural and non-farm productivity and pull households out of poverty. Learning about improved production technologies and methods, new products and markets, business and life skills (such as health management, decision making, self confidence, or conflict management) can make a big difference (ILO Report, 2008). Skills development is particularly important to rural women who are more likely to be contributing family workers, subsistence farmers or home-based micro entrepreneurs in the informal sector, or performing low-paid, unskilled work as seasonal workers (Jutting and Morrisson, 2009). Women often have different training needs than men, linked to their domestic work and care

responsibilities, as well as to gender based divisions of labour for managing or undertaking specific tasks in crop, livestock, forestry or fish production and processing.

Training provides a systematic knowledge and skills which in turn helps the trainees to function effectively and efficiently. The best way to make optimum use of human resources is to provide them opportunities for self development through trainings, which improves their existing knowledge and skills, and enhance their capabilities. In order to make training programme more effective and purposeful, it should be based on felt needs, which vary from place to place. Considering these facts the study was conducted with objectives to ascertain the components of training need in household activities for rural women.

Training needs for crop production activities :

Data presented in Table 1 regarding agricultural activities reveal that farm women perceived high level of (2.50 m.s., rank 1st) of training needs in seed treatment and use of drudgery reduction implements followed by crop selection (m.s. 2.49) ranked IInd and insect pest control (2.47) and IIIrd, threshing (2.28) and harvesting (2.27) got ranked VI and V. The results further indicated that rural women have low perception in different activities like irrigation application, weed control management, storage and marketing of products and they are not interested in getting training in these areas.

This may be due to the fact that rural women always do tedious, monotonous and labour intensive work which is done by manually. On the other hand man performed all the activities which is mechanized hence women perceived that after getting training they can reduce their

Sr. No.	Agricultural activities	Responses			Weighted mean score	Mean score	Rank
		Most needed	Needed	No. need			
1.	Crop selection	516	210	23	749	2.49	II
2.	Seed treatment	504	228	18	750	2.50	I
3.	Fertilizer application	462	260	16	738	2.46	IV
4.	Insect pest management	477	248	17	742	2.47	III
5.	Irrigation application	192	212	150	534	1.78	X
6.	Weed management	258	230	99	587	1.95	VII
7.	Harvesting	426	194	61	681	2.27	VI
8.	Threshing	435	192	59	686	2.28	V
9.	Storage	213	212	123	548	1.82	IX
10.	Marketing	210	208	126	544	1.81	VIII
11.	Drudgery reduction	522	204	24	750	2.50	I

drudgery. Similar results were observed by Singh *et al.* (2002). Malagi *et al.* (1998) found in their study that training programme for pest control was less useful (49%).

Training needs for clothing and textiles :

Women in rural areas is involved in different clothing related activities like purchasing clothes for the family members, their care and maintenance, stitching of garments, knitting etc. But with the passage of time these women need to acquire new knowledge and skills to keep up with the changing scenario for which training is essential for development. Moreover, the stitching of garments, knitting of articles and preparation of soaps and detergents at home can contribute to the income of the family and reduce the heavy expenditure of the family. Training needs act as a motivating force for positive impact of training on its beneficiaries.

Kaur *et al.* (2011) revealed that highest mean scores were found for stain removing, preparation of soaps and detergents, identification of different types of fabrics and their dyeing methods. Highest mean score indicated that rural women required more training in these sub areas of clothing and textiles. Lowest mean scores were observed in knitting, stitching and crocheting. The low mean scores in these areas may be due to the reason that rural women had already engaged in preparation of these articles. So, it is suggested that trainings may be imparted in the different subareas *viz.*, preparation of soaps and detergents, identification of different fabrics and their dyeing methods, so that they can adopt these as an enterprise. Malagi *et al.* (1998) also revealed in their study that training need for stain removing (81%) and washing and care of fabric (76%) was very useful (Table 2). Rural women should be involved in identifying their learning needs that would at the end of the program empower them to improve on their livelihoods (Emmanuel and Stella-Marris, 2013).

The Clothing and Textile has focused attention on apparel design for family, different embellishment of clothing, dye techniques and clothing for special children etc. The economic empowerment is also being assured by transferring technologies of natural dyes to rural women for preparing textile handicrafts.

Training needs for food and nutrition :

IFAD stressed the importance of nutrition-sensitive

agriculture rises on the global development agenda. As a result, there is an increasing demand for experts who understand the links between agriculture and nutrition. In the coming years, they will be called upon to design nutrition-sensitive agricultural and rural development projects that effectively contribute to ending hunger and malnutrition in poor and vulnerable communities (IFAD, 2014). Because malnutrition is prevalent among all segments of the population, poor nutrition among women begins infancy and continues throughout their lifetime (Desai, 1994). Malagi *et al.* (1998) also revealed in their study that training need for weaning of food preparation was very useful. Mallikharjuna Rao *et al.* (2010) revealed inadequate dietary intake, especially hidden hunger during pregnancy and lactation period among women.

Food and Nutrition department of CCS HAU, Hisar laid emphasis on nutritional security for human health in agrarian ecosystem. The component focused attention on documenting uncommon foods for its wider acceptability by determining nutritional quality of identified food sources, development of recipes and nutrition guide. The nutrition component has also strived to identify micro-nutrient deficiencies with the aim to suggest diet modifications and establish nutrition gardens as approaches to health and nutrition security.

Training needs for family resource management :

The ergonomic management of drudgery undertaken by Family Resource Management aims at introducing women- friendly drudgery reducing technologies related to farm, home and allied activities. Only one project for empowerment of farm women and drudgery reduction was implemented in Haryana state under NATP scheme during 2001-2005. It needs to be revived more vigorously. Development and popularization Cot-Bag technology for cotton women farmers is well appreciated in the villages. The ergonomic cost is being calculated for respective tool/ technology as a measure for suggesting improvements in tool/technology that will promote health empowerment. Cotton picking bags could reduce drudgery of cotton farm women if adopted; the bag cost can be realized in single season besides improving personal safety and picking efficiency (Chauhan *et al.*, 2012).

Training needs for child development :

As per 2001 census, Haryana has around 3.26 million children, constituting 15.46 per cent of Haryana's

population, who are below the age of 6 years. A large number of them live in economic and social environment which impede the child's physical and mental development. These conditions include poverty, poor environmental sanitation, disease, infection, inadequate access to primary health care, inappropriate child caring and feeding practices. Government of India proclaimed a National Policy on Children in August 1974 declaring children as, "supremely important asset". The policy provided the required framework for assigning priority to different needs of the child. Results presented in Table 2 reveal that Govt. schemes for girl child was most preferred (m.s. 2.45, Rank I) followed by child rearing

practices (m.s. 2.26, Rank II) and personal hygiene and environmental sanitation (m.s. 2.23, Rank III).

The main focus of Child Development on data generation for developing growth norms of rural children through interventions on scientific child care practices. The establishments of creche for comprehensive child care facilities in supplementary feeding and development of child through creative play materials was done in College of Home Sciences, CCS HAU, Hisar. The training of creche workers through training materials on child care practices empowers them to be efficient caretakers.

Table 2 : Training needs of rural women in household activities

Sr. No.	Household activities	Responses			Weighted mean score	Mean score	Rank
		Most needed	Needed	No. need			
Clothing and textiles							
1.	Cutting and tailoring	627	130	26	783	2.61	II
2.	Maintenance of sewing machine	603	146	26	775	2.60	III
3.	Stain removing	309	300	47	656	2.18	V
4.	Tie and dye	492	210	31	733	2.44	IV
5.	Embellishment of cloths	636	136	20	792	2.64	I
Food and nutritions							
1.	Fruits and vegetable preservation	609	112	41	762	2.54	I
2.	Nutrition for pregnant and lactating mother	462	194	69	725	2.31	III
3.	Importance of balanced diet	324	254	65	643	2.14	IV
4.	Sprouting and fermentation foods	351	178	94	623	2.07	V
5.	Value added products of pearl millet	438	220	44	702	2.34	II
Family resource management							
1.	Improved grain storage	372	312	20	704	2.31	II
2.	Drudgery reduction technology	477	272	05	754	2.51	I
3.	Time and energy saving devices	309	256	09	634	2.11	III
4.	Saving schemes	300	248	76	624	2.08	IV
5.	Nutritional gardening	120	186	147	453	1.51	V
Child development							
1.	Child rearing practices	363	276	41	6.80	2.26	II
2.	Personal hygiene and environmental sanitation	312	326	33	671	2.23	III
3.	Govt. schemes for girl child	456	242	37	735	2.45	I
4.	Immunization	336	214	81	631	2.10	IV
Income generating activities							
1.	Bakery	480	254	13	747	2.49	I
2.	Papad and wadi making	474	262	11	747	2.49	I
3.	Milk products making	402	224	54	680	2.23	II
4.	Fabric painting and block printing	375	220	65	660	2.20	III
5.	Hand embroidery	273	232	93	598	1.99	IV
6.	Soft toy making	252	228	102	582	1.60	V
7.	Detergent making	309	256	09	634	2.11	VI
8.	Candle making	324	254	65	643	2.14	V

Training needs for income generating activities :

Tuteja (2007) revealed in her study that women entrepreneurs have limited access to capital, market, education, skill and training. These bottlenecks should be gradually removed to improve their empowerment. But, level of income from these trades is low to have any major impact on overall performance regarding income poverty of rural women. However, capacity building through training and involvement in economic activities has helped surveyed women entrepreneurs to gain some respect in the family and society. These are important elements for achieving autonomy in the long run. Table 2 show that Bakery and papad and vadi making are the main income generation activities (m.s. 2.49, Rank I) followed by milk products making (m.s. 2.23, Rank II) and fabric painting and block painting (m.s. 2.20, Rank III).

Rana *et al.* (2013) also revealed in their study that overall gain in knowledge and skill regarding baking products was found to be high. Level of satisfaction regarding training was found to be high. Majority of the respondents who were not inclined to start bakery as income generating activity, after training, considered that below dignity of family status. Training environment before, during and after training was indicated to be highly satisfactory by majority of the respondents. Marital status and education were found to be significantly associated

with gain in knowledge.

Krishi Vigyan Kendras – Key source of Technological empowerment :

Technological empowerment of women will lay foundation for a strong economic upliftment of society as a whole. Krishi Vigyan Kendras play a significant role in imparting income generation trainings for economic self-sufficiency of women which leads to empowerment of women particularly in rural areas. The condition of women in rural areas is very pathetic as compared to urban women. There is also a big gap of literacy level, awareness and knowledge level in urban and rural areas. KVKs are good source to bridge this wide gap through skill/vocational trainings and making an attempt in that direction to make rural women self sufficient through various skill training programmes.

Krishi Vigyan Kendras trained nearly 0.2 million farm women, girls and women extension workers (Anonymous, 2004). After getting the trainings women can start their small enterprise at household level without affecting their domestic chores. Hence women are very important to empower and can only be a factor of social change through economic upliftment at the grass root level. In the beginning major emphasis was given on exploring information for providing health security, food security, economic security and livelihood security. With

Table 3 : Gain in knowledge of rural women regarding garment construction					
Sr. No.	Components	Pre-exposure (mean score)	Post-exposure (Mean score)	Gain in knowledge	't' Value
Basic information					
1.	General information regarding clothing selection	8.72	20.04	11.32	27.7*
2.	Taking body measurement	9.81	17.66	7.85	21.6*
3.	Care of sewing machine	4.96	9.21	4.25	11.3
4.	Repair of sewing machine	5.34	19.12	13.78	28.4*
5.	Availability of clothing and accessories	5.41	10.02	4.61	11.9
6.	Availability of machine accessories	5.22	9.00	3.78	12.5
Specific information (Cutting and Stitching of garments)					
1.	Simple suit (women)	7.21	19.24	12.03	18.9*
2.	Designer suit (women)	3.79	24.66	20.87	28.3*
3.	Pyjjami	3.33	7.27	3.94	14.5
4.	Blouse	4.02	13.56	9.54	23.4*
5.	Petticot	2.01	9.21	7.20	13.9
6.	Mens' Shirt	3.66	19.27	15.61	26.4*
7.	Mens' Trouser	2.10	20.08	17.98	30.01*
8.	Mens' Kurta Pyjama	5.24	13.47	8.23	19.5*

* indicate significance of value at P=0.05

the passage of time thrust shifted towards integrated and participatory approaches for working with rural women in their own context.

A case study was conducted to deal with the imparting skills/ vocational trainings to downtrodden women flock of the society *i.e.*, scheduled castes of Jind district of Haryana state. Women should be organized and strengthened at the grass root level to end their subordination. KVK's are making an attempt in this direction to make rural women self sufficient through various skill training programmes. During training programme motivational lectures, demonstration, and kit for self employment assistance like machine and accessories were also provided to trainees. Significant gain in knowledge point out the fact that majority of the respondents were successful in acquiring knowledge at post exposure level in various garments construction and maintenance of sewing machine (Table 3). These results are in consonance with those of Yadav *et al.* (2010), Dahiya and Yadav (2013).

Strengthening through skill trainings :

Training for Rural Economic Empowerment is an ILO community-based training programme implemented in Asia and Africa. It promotes income generation and employment opportunities for disadvantaged women and men by providing them with skills and knowledge they can use in their communities. Its strategy involves planning with local partner institutions; careful identification of economic opportunities and training needs assessment in the community; designing and delivering relevant skills training; and post-training support to facilitate trainees' access to wage or self employment (Anonymous, 2010).

Women now make up the majority of the agricultural sector in developing countries, but recent evidence suggests that not only is their productivity constrained by a lack of appropriate skills training (Danida, 2004), but also that they are particularly vulnerable to a range of changes including economic and environmental changes. Integrating agricultural training with enterprise training can help women smallholders to manage and market their farm production more effectively, to take advantage of new agricultural opportunities. Enterprise training can help farmers take – and manage – the risks involved in introducing progressive production technologies. It can also help women diversify their productive activities by branching out into non-farm enterprises, an important

mechanism in reducing susceptibility to crisis and developing a more stable year-round income (Collett and Gale, 2009).

The KVKs also disseminate knowledge through imparting skill training because the women need vocational training or skills to uplift their status. They should be able to stand on their feet and provide for their families. The discussions with women revealed that they are also interested in learning some skill to supplement their household income (Sabharwal, 2012). They showed interest in learning stitching and tailoring.

Conclusion :

As far as agricultural activities are concerned rural women perceived high level of training needs in seed treatment and use of drudgery reduction implements followed by crop selection and insect pest control, threshing and harvesting. Most preferred training needs of rural women in Home Science activities are embellishments of cloths, cutting and tailoring, fruits and vegetable preservation, value added products of pearl millet, drudgery reduction technology, improved grain technology, Govt. schemes for girl child, child rearing practices, bakery and papad and vadi making and milk products.

KVK's are key source of technological empowerment of rural women. These rural women can be equipped with trainings on various aspects of foods and nutrition, child development, clothing and textile, family resource management etc. Significant gain in knowledge point out the fact that majority of the respondents were successful in acquiring knowledge at post exposure level in various garments construction and maintenance of sewing machine. This will make the rural women economically strong and deal with the money by them. This will further help in taking care of health of their family and certainly improve the decision making level of this neglected flock of society. The key issues lie in women empowerment through economic self-sufficiency and higher awareness levels on social, political and legal issues through mobilization. If these people are empowered, the society will be empowered and can change the face of India.

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