



## Empowering Women farmers through Gender Sensitization

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### ABSTRACT

Our society has a long-standing problem with gender discrimination, which affects women in a variety of ways. Therefore, it is essential to spread the word about gender equality in order to decrease prejudice based on gender. In order to create a society devoid of gender bias and where one gender is sensitive and understanding of the other, gender sensitization is essential. With the rise of female farmers in the industry, gendered agriculture is also exhibiting gender inequalities. Women's work is seldom properly addressed, and their contributions to agriculture are not acknowledged as being paid work. Women's empowerment is crucial for the diversity and sustainable growth of agriculture as well as for showcasing the abilities of farm women. This essay will help readers picture a world in which men and women respect one another and understand other other's needs rationally. This will help stop gender conflicts and ensure that women participate fully and equally in decision-making at all levels

**Key words:** Gender Sensitization, Farm women, Empowerment

### Introduction

The term "gender" refers to the set of obligations placed on men and women at the time of birth by our societies, families, and cultures. The idea of gender also encompasses the beliefs that people have about the typical behaviours of both men and women, such as femininity and masculinity, as well as their expected traits, skills, and positions. The concepts of "sex" and "gender" are frequently misunderstood. Sex refers to the inherent and genetically predetermined biological

distinctions between men and women in their anatomy, physiology, and genetic development. Sex encompasses the biological traits that often categorise people as either female or male. Gender is merely a social construction since gender roles and expectations are assigned and taught rather than predetermined by biology or fixed in stone. We might use Margaret Mead's anthropological book, "Sex and Temperament," as an illustration of how

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gender roles develop over time and differ within and between civilizations. Gender is an important subject because it shows how culture and values are used to socially construct women's subjugation or dominance by men.

### Current Status of Women Farmers

Gender has become an important subject in agriculture research and development and also in allied sectors. At a time where our main aim is to take the economy to a path of higher orbit, it is vital that we address various gender issues and gender biases as they have implications in developmental programmes and projects. The various social and economic problems we face today is some way or the other related to gender bias. This gender bias arises because of the presumption that “women are weaker than men” and this ideology (which by its very definition implies partial truth) clouds the minds of the society. There is a global concern to clear the minds of the society with such beliefs because gender bias is not a women’s issue rather it is a people’s issue. Thus, it is vital to take gender oriented approach and action for betterment of women. Women make essential contributions to agriculture and on average comprises 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in the developing countries(FAO,2011).As per the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), 75% of

the rural women are farmers and produce approximately 60%-80% of the food and 90% of dairy products in India. Women farmers in India perform most of the farming operations, from sowing to harvesting, yet their access to resources is less than their male counterparts. About 42 per cent of the agricultural labour force is constituted by women in India yet they own less than 2 per cent of farmland (**National council of Applied Economic Research, 2018**).Not only in India but across the world, contributions made to agriculture by women is commendable and significant as well. It is estimated by The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization that women could increase yields on their farms by 20-30% if they had the same access to productive resources as men. This could raise total the agricultural output in developing countries by up to 4%, which could in turn reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17% - that's 100-150 million people. Thus, it is requisite to take an inclusive approach from policy to implementation, in order to empower women working in agriculture with direct access to knowledge of improved agricultural practices and to bring them into the mainstream.

Migration is yet another important factor which contributes towards redefining the roles of Indian women in agriculture. 70% of all women engaged in agriculture are from households witnessing migration of men.

(Report released in 2014 by IHD, New Delhi). Women have increased roles to play on their farms as a result, and migration has played a significant role in increasing the social mobility of women at the village level. There is feminisation of agricultural sector with increasing number of women in multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs and labourers due to growing rural to urban migration by men (Economic Survey 2017-18).

It has been observed that inspite of remarkable contribution and success of women in agricultural production, the social well-being of women is low and woman have not yet received the position and status deserved by them. The work of women always remain inconspicuous and their contributions are not recognized as paid work and thus they are treated as 'consumers' rather than 'producers'. Scientists of National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture met a group of women of a progressive village Siula, of Khurda district in Orissa to study and analyze their activity. Even though there was initial reluctance, women finally overcame the inhibitions and narrated at length their involvement in household and farm related activities. To the utter surprise of scientists, as compared to their male counterpart, women contributed substantially to the rabi groundnut. Men had more contribution in land preparation

and had very little presence in other activities while women performed most of the on-farm activities like sowing, furrow making, intercultural operations, irrigation, harvesting, stripping, drying, decortication. As such 75-80 per cent of labour requirement in groundnut farming is contributed by the women folk. Later men endorsed the above facts and admitted that women really contributed much more than what was normally presumed and told. It was also revealed that men knowingly suppressed the facts about women's contribution to agriculture so that they were not seen in poor light. This also reflects the kind of gender bias prevalent in our society. It is also to be noted that lack of access to land is the major challenge faced by women in Indian Agriculture. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2011) empowering women through land and ownership rights has the potential of raising total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.2 to 4 per cent and can reduce hunger across the world by 12-17 per cent. In spite of contributing significantly to the food security of the country women are paid 22 per cent less than their male counterparts and this is another bias faced by women which needs serious attention. From the year 2011-17 although the graph showed trends of increase in the wages of both male and female farmers yet the wage disparity continues and

the women farmers continue to earn less. The wage gap was the highest during 2012-14 when women farmers received nearly 27 per cent less than the men during the period. **(Report on agricultural statistics released by the Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare)**. Even though there has been a marginal reduction in wage gap (by 4.43 per cent) between 2012-13 and 2014-15, nothing much seems to have changed. In fact, the wage disparity once again figured prominently during 2015-16 when women farmers received 25.37 per cent less than the male farmers.

All India Annual Average Daily wage rate (In Rs)		
Year	Male	Female
2011-12	149	115
2012-13	183	134
2013-14	214	158
2014-15	229	178
2015-16	268	200
2016-17	281	218

*Source: Directorate of Economics & Statistics*  
*Note: All India annual average daily wage is calculated for 20 major states.*

Empowerment of women in agriculture is of prime importance for diversification and sustainable development of agriculture and such an approach is also significant to improve the socio-economic well-being of women. Therefore, it is highly crucial to create a healthy socio-economic climate free of

gender biases that promotes a more civilized and rational action and behaviour on the part of both men and women. To put an end to gender issues and gender biases the empowerment of Indian women farmers is the need of the hour. This empowerment will not be complete without creating an instrumental and healthy environment- not only to bring women farmers to the mainstream but also to change the gender biased mindset of people that is deep rooted in our society. Thus, to bring into a healthy socio-economic environment 'gender sensitization' is seen as a tool in reforming the socio-structural climate of the society and thereby bringing about empowerment of women farmers in India at all levels.

### What is Gender Sensitization?

**Gender Sensitization** by far is the most effective and non- conflicting approach in re-structuring and reforming the orthodox society. Gender sensitization is the process of changing the stereotypical mindset of people- a mindset that believes in role – play, more specifically the expectations that people have from each other as a male or a female. For example – as a woman of the modern times, she is expected to do the additional shift, that is working and home-making at the same time whereas, men are only expected to bring bread for his family. The process of gender sensitization creates new set of thoughts in the

minds of the people right from grass root level to the level of policy makers for which they become more aware and realize that any form of gender bias is a hurdle in the path for socio-economic development of a country and also that policies are to be made to cease such kind of gender related issues. The roles ascribed to men and women by a society has very systematically led to the domination of women by men who is considered superior on the basis of his anatomy which prevents him from bearing the “burden” of menstruation and parturition. The aim of gender sensitization is to create a value system that respects the wisdom of women and gives recognition to their contribution in agricultural and socio-economic development of the country. The process of gender sensitization seeks to make women realize their hidden potential and provide courage to recognize their own contributions in various fields.

The intensity and form of gender issues and gender biases differ based on socio-cultural and economic context in different communities and societies. Therefore it is necessary to follow a strategy to perform the gender sensitization process. It is essential to study the prevailing belief, attitude, characteristics and composition of the target people and the society before seeking to bring any kind of change in their mental-disposition. Before selecting content and designing the

sensitization programmes it is mandatory to study and have an idea about the perception and attitude of the target group towards the concept of roles of gender as prescribed by society. Sensitization programmes should not only seek to change the perception and impression of men towards women but should also target those women who tend to act against the interest of other women in the name of socio-cultural norms established by the society for some women have the tendency to live under the so-called protection and shelter provided by the men.

Gender Sensitization programmes are designed to change the orientation in the thinking and insight of the individuals especially the men. The process of Gender sensitization consists of four stages- change in notion, acceptance, accommodation and action.

**Change in notion:** In the very first step gender sensitization tends to change the impression of man towards women-“that women are weak and they can be dominated” and also helps in developing confidence in women that they are strong enough to compete in this so called “men dominated” world. It changes the stereotypical image of women prevailing in the society.

**Acceptance:** At this stage the persons exposed to gender sensitization starts to recognize the value and wisdom of women and their



importance in the family as well as in the society. They acknowledge and appreciate the contribution of women in multifarious fields and activities and also provides a comfortable environment to women in their socio-economic participation. Here a loud message is echoed that women do possess wisdom and that they must be involved in decision-making process at community as well as organizational level.

**Accommodation:** The people who stood as hurdles in the socio-economic development of women become their supporters by dissolving their ego as per as gender relations are concerned. At this stage both men and women together take part in sharing dialogues in solving various problems.

**Action:** In the final stage the gender sensitized person behave in a sensible way and they become the gadgets of change in the society.

They take oriented action and approach against negligence and discrimination of women. They provide women an environment of freedom to help them flourish and nurture their ideas and talents. They also take action in the household by sharing the burden and support the efforts of women in doing the household chores. Thus, women tend to feel more empowered and competent both within the family and outside.

#### **Implications of Gender Sensitization:**

- ❖ Gender Sensitization acts as a tool in empowerment of women by dissolving the barriers of the prevailing stereotypes and gender roles in the society.
- ❖ It accelerates the process of free flow of ideas and innovations and thus contributes towards women empowerment.
- ❖ It plays a vital role in removing gender conflicts by helping the men folk in shedding their ego and creates an environment of peace and harmony as per gender relations are concerned.
- ❖ Gender sensitization is an instrument in restructuring and reforming the pre-established norms related to gender roles and helps to transform the orthodox society into a more rational and sensible one.

#### **Some significant efforts for Empowerment of Women Farmers:**

The government has taken some great strides towards empowering women in the agriculture sector. The Government has launched initiatives such as MahilaKisanSashaktikaranPariyojana (MKSP) and DeendayalAntyodayaYojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission aimed at bringing women together to receive training on various aspects of agriculture, business, entrepreneurship and skills development. Samunnati, a non-deposit taking Non-Banking Financial Company registered

under RBI Act have also introduced favorable policies as well as training initiatives for women on topics such as leadership, institutional structures & governance, business management, marketing, etc. The Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) of NITI Aayog, 'Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs and Start-ups by Women' by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) are some of the great initiatives taken by the government. Thus, realizing the need to empower women farmers one recent development has been made by the Government of India by marking the **15<sup>th</sup> October as Women Farmers Day**. If practical assistance is extended to back this concept up then this could bring a positive change of scene to bring women farmers in India into the mainstream. As part of this initiative, the government plans to launch an awareness campaign looking at how Krishi Vigyan Kendra, (KVK) can play an instrumental role in empowering women farmers and shifting existing, biased perceptions of women's roles in agriculture. This acknowledgement of women farmers for their extraordinary contributions will send out a loud, clear and positive message, particularly at a local level, regarding the importance of women to farming in India. Self-help groups i.e the village-based financial organizations, comprised solely of 10-15

women in each group - are playing a crucial role in promoting a shared agenda of gender sensitization around education, health and agriculture. It is not an exaggeration to say that these groups are changing the lives of the women folk at the grassroots level. Self-help groups can act as a positive instigator in the efforts towards closing this agricultural gender gap. In this context women empowerment through Kudumshree gains relevance by creating a sensitized mindset towards gender roles. Kudumshree the largest SHG model at the grass root level by the government of Kerala and NABARD are able to make changes by empowering the rural woman economically, socially and politically by providing 2,34,756 self-employment opportunities to women below poverty line. 'Wingreen Farms' is an example of an entity that has empowered 400 women farmers and given them a means of livelihood in the largely arid and backward region of Nuh District in Haryana. It has encouraged and helped them to grow agricultural commodities that are used to make dips and sauces at its manufacturing facilities on the outskirts of Gurgaon. The Company retails over 103 products through its website, grocery stores and also co-brands its dips with organizations such as Fab India in over 200 cities. Steady growth in the Company's revenues has fostered financial independence for women farmers working

with the Company. More importantly, their income of approximately Rs 15,000-30,000 a month has earned them respect among their family members. Thus, the empowering of women farmers by entities such as Wingreen Farms is call of the hour.

It is worth mentioning about the role of 'Primus', a European fashion retail entity that played an important role in the empowerment of women farmers. Primus brought together a global group of agricultural professionals 'Cotton Connect' and Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a reputed non-governmental organization to create its Sustainable Cotton Program in Gujarat State. The program initially trained over 1200 women farmers and has now been extended to reach an additional 10,000 such farmers. The Program empower the farmers to narrow the gender inequality gap by enabling them the access to formal training

The strategies and programmes of Gender sensitization can be carried out by personnel involved at varied levels such as extension, research and rural development after getting necessary orientation and training. In this way a clear and loud message can be echoed at all levels including economic, social, research and organizational level about the benefits of gender equity. Before develop a blue print of action for gender sensitizing in agriculture extension, it is important to know

the exact goal of gender sensitive extension. The strategy should aim at rendering extension services in a way that both men and women farmers would get equal opportunities to access and use farm advisory services, and participate in extension or other development programmes. The prevailing gender issues in the agricultural system should be reduced by undertaking campaigns related to gender sensitization in order to highlight the gender needs, problems and priorities. One of the basic concerns is how to meet the practical gender needs i.e. the needs that women identify in their socially accepted roles in the society. While delivering extension services different interventions must be considered having long term goal in order to address these gender needs.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus, Gender Sensitization creates a situation where both men and women are aware of their needs and wants and they work together to harness their combined potential. The issue of gender bias is more prevalent in the unreached rural areas as most of the people are illiterate, conservative and stubborn and do not like to change their traditional outlook towards gender roles. Here, Gender Sensitization seeks to make people realize that women are much wise in decision-making process and that their participation in rural developmental programmes is of utmost



importance and therefore gender sensitization programmes should be included in the framework of rural developmental programmes. It may be sensible here to identify the elements which would contribute for strategy development. The National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture have launched several projects and organized national level seminars and workshops on this issue which have led to identifying crucial elements for gender sensitive extension. It is worth mentioning here that while developing extension strategy in gender perspective the basic ingredients of extension models together with the scope of adding gender sensitive features have to be worked out. As data suggest, participation of women in agriculture is immensely increasing, so to create a motivated work force and the strategy to empower them socially, technologically and economically remains the core issue. There is an urgent need for restructuring the extension system and redefining the role of extension system, if needed, to adapt to changing times. As women being the important stakeholders in agriculture who would be playing greater role either under compulsion or motivation, sensitizing of gender concerns should be the given due priority. Although the process has begun to improve the extension delivery mechanism for farmwomen, there is a lot to be done in terms of gender sensitization, gender

balancing in the system, meeting the location specific gender needs and periodic monitoring and evaluation for refinement of programmes and policies. Innovations like encouraging and employing village level social workers with due provision of linkage with extension systems should be tried. A methodology for inter-institutional coordination is of paramount importance for harnessing the coordination in meeting the emerging needs of men and women. In this way we can visualize a situation where both men and women respect each other and perceive each other's needs in a more rational and sensible way and this in turn will help in shedding gender conflicts and in attaining gender equality.

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