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Empowering Women in Agriculture & Allied Sectors: Transforming Rural Economies in India

Sameen Fatima

Abstract:-

This study examines the integral role of women in India's agrarian economy, where they constitute a significant portion of the workforce in agricultural and allied sectors. Despite their critical contributions—making up the majority of economically active women—women in rural areas often face pervasive challenges that hinder their recognition and advancement. This includes assuming primary agricultural responsibilities due to urban male migration and exacerbating existing inequalities in access to education, property rights, markets, and services. The research underscores the necessity of mainstreaming women farmers into developmental frameworks to bolster their socio-economic standing. Key strategies include enhancing healthcare access, ensuring workplace rights, providing robust training and educational opportunities, and facilitating career advancement, crucial for fostering inclusive rural development in India.

Keywords- Women's Empowerment; Gender Equity; Rural Livelihoods; Inclusion; Sustainability

"When women thrive, all of society benefits, and succeeding generations are given a better start in life"- Kofi Annan

Introduction

India's agrarian economy heavily relies on the extensive involvement of women in agriculture and allied sectors, where they constitute a substantial portion of the workforce. Despite their critical role, women in rural areas face pervasive challenges that hinder their recognition and advancement.

This includes assuming primary agricultural responsibilities due to urban male migration and exacerbating existing inequalities. The agriculture sector constitutes **80 percent** of economically active women in India, yet their contributions often go undervalued and unsupported. The workforce participation rate for rural women, standing at **41.8%**, exceeds that of urban women (MoSPI, 2017), highlighting their crucial role in sustaining rural economies.

Sameen Fatima

*Student, B.Sc. (Hons.) Agriculture,
Aligarh Muslim University UP*

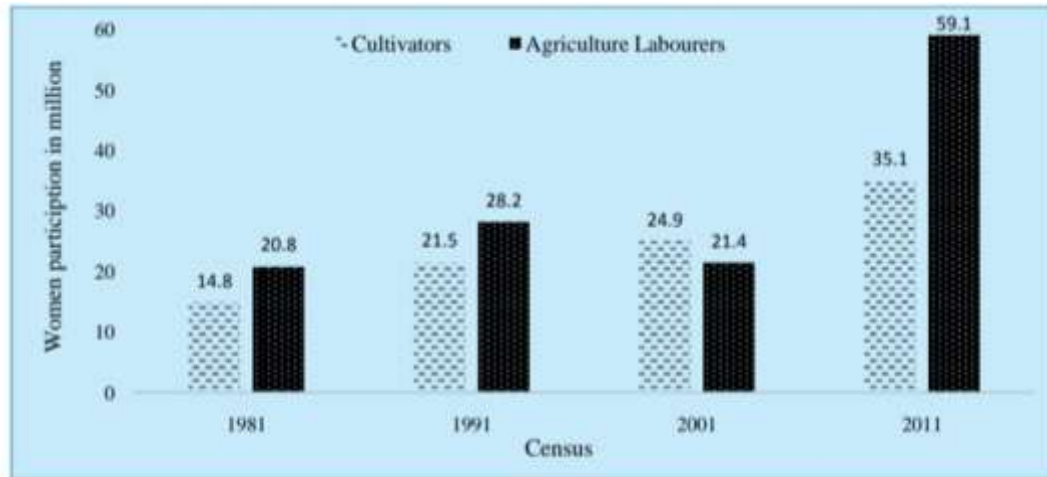


Figure- 1: Women participation in agriculture | Source: Registrar General of India, 2001

However, these women encounter vulnerability to risks, as modern slavery also barriers such as limited access to education and training, lack of acknowledgment from family and society, and restricted access to property rights, markets, and financial services. disproportionately affects women and girls who account for 71 percent of all victims (including forced labor and domestic work). There is a need to ensure agriculture extension at the community level. Initiatives such as self-help groups (SHGs) and women-led Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing the economic and social status of rural women. SHGs, for instance, provide platforms for women to pool resources, access credit, and engage in collective decision-making. Similarly, FPOs enable women to aggregate their produce, negotiate better prices, and gain access to markets that were previously inaccessible to them.

Efforts to empower women in agriculture must address these systemic challenges to enhance their socio-economic status and promote inclusive rural development. Key objectives include expanding healthcare access, ensuring equitable workplace rights, providing robust training and educational opportunities, and facilitating career advancement opportunities for women in rural areas. By mainstreaming women farmers into developmental frameworks, India can bolster their economic contribution and improve overall rural livelihoods. Enhancing women's access to economic opportunities and jobs can reduce

Despite progress, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles within agricultural organizations, hindering their full participation and decision-making capabilities.

There is a clear need to promote gender-sensitive policies and programs that empower women to take on leadership positions and influence agricultural policies and practices.

equitable workplace rights and opportunities, and promoting women's leadership within agricultural organizations.

The significance of women's stature in

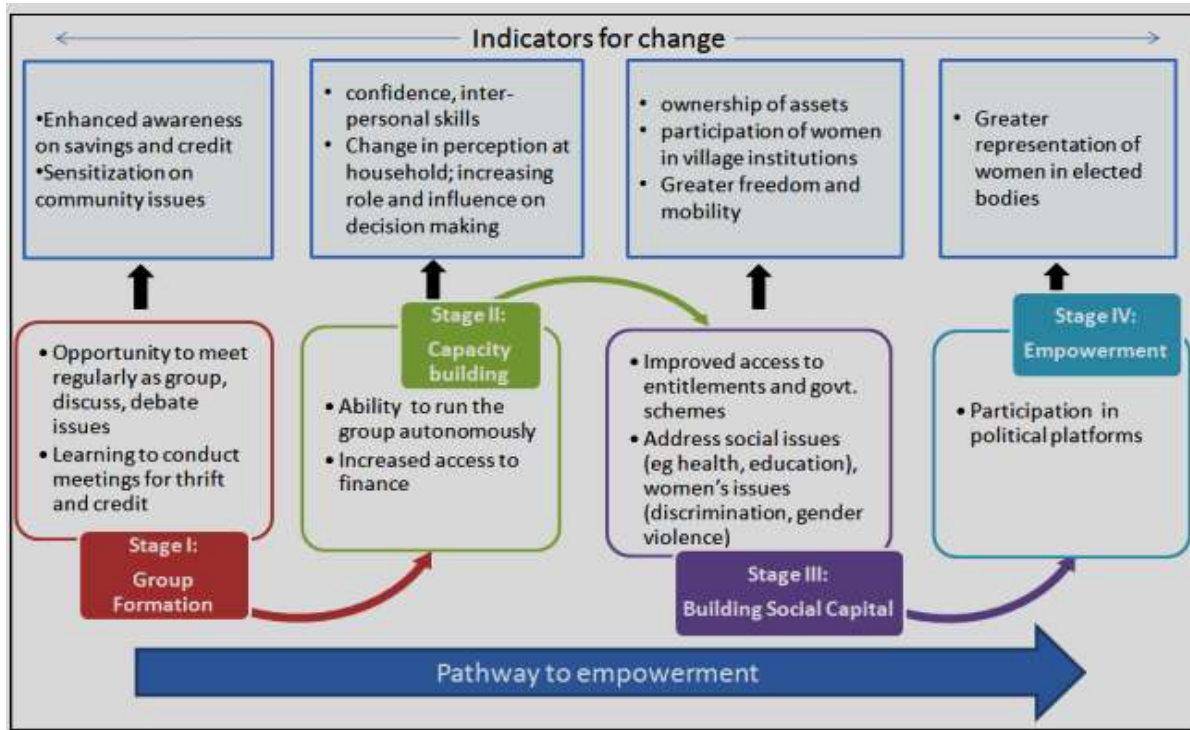


Figure 2 SHGs as a platform for women empowerment | Source: SHGs 2014

In conclusion, empowering women in agriculture extends beyond economic benefits; agriculture is not only a matter of gender equality but also a necessity for sustainable rural development in India. Addressing barriers to women's economic participation and fostering inclusive growth strategies are crucial steps towards harnessing the full potential of India's agrarian workforce. Findings from various studies and initiatives underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to empower women in agriculture. This includes expanding *access to healthcare services* tailored to women's needs, *ensuring*

it contributes to broader social and developmental goals. It requires concerted efforts from policymakers, development agencies, and local communities to address existing challenges and create an enabling environment where women can thrive and contribute effectively to the agrarian economy. By enhancing women's access to resources, education, and leadership roles, India can unlock the agrarian potential of its workforce and promote inclusive rural development. The empowerment of women in agriculture is

critical for achieving sustainable rural development in India. Efforts to mainstream women farmers into developmental frameworks must be accompanied by targeted interventions that address the specific challenges faced by women in rural areas by improving access to productive resources such as land and credit, enhancing their technological skills, and promoting gender-sensitive agricultural extension services.

Overall, the representation of women in agriculture is not just a matter of social justice; it is a strategic imperative for achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development in rural India. By investing in women's empowerment, India can unlock the full potential of its agrarian economy and ensure a brighter future for rural communities.

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Promoting Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) in India.

