

Women in Agriculture and Their Role in Extension Education

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Introduction:

Agriculture is the backbone of rural India, and women constitute an indispensable part of this sector. Despite their critical role, women in agriculture have often remained invisible in policies, programs, and institutional support systems. They are not just laborers but also decision-makers, entrepreneurs, and knowledge-holders in various agricultural operations. Their involvement in **Extension Education** is equally vital, as they bridge traditional knowledge with modern innovations, contributing to sustainable development.

Role of Women in Agriculture

Women contribute significantly across all domains of agriculture:

- 1. Crop Production:** From sowing to harvesting, women actively participate in every phase of crop production.
- 2. Livestock Management:** In rural India, women take the lead in animal husbandry—feeding, cleaning, milking, and caring for sick animals.
- 3. Horticulture:** Women manage kitchen gardens and commercial fruit/vegetable

farming, often serving as a source of family nutrition and income.

- 4. Post-Harvest Processing:** Tasks like cleaning, drying, storage, and value addition are predominantly done by women.
- 5. Seed Preservation:** Indigenous seed saving and exchange are traditionally women-led practices.
- 6. Agri-Entrepreneurship:** Women are emerging as entrepreneurs in dairy, poultry, mushroom cultivation, and food processing units.

Challenges Faced by Women in Agriculture

Despite their deep involvement, women face multiple barriers:

- Limited Land Ownership:** A very small percentage of women legally own agricultural land.
- Lack of Access to Credit & Inputs:** Due to absence of collateral and awareness, they face difficulty accessing financial and agricultural inputs.
- Underrepresentation in Extension**

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Services: Extension programs are largely male-oriented, ignoring the unique needs and constraints of women farmers.

☞ **Workload and Time Poverty:** The dual burden of household and field work leaves women with little time for training and capacity building.

☞ **Social and Cultural Barriers:** Patriarchal norms restrict their participation in decision-making and extension meetings.

➤ Women extension workers (Krishi Sakhis, SHG leaders, agri-volunteers) can effectively reach and train other women farmers.

➤ They play a crucial role in **farmer-to-farmer dissemination** of knowledge, particularly in conservative rural settings.

➤ Their empathetic communication style and understanding of community dynamics make them effective educators.

Women in Extension Education

Extension education involves transferring knowledge, skills, and technologies to the farming community. The role of women in this system can be understood from three angles:

1. As Beneficiaries of Extension Services

- Women require access to targeted extension programs addressing their specific roles and needs.
- Trainings on kitchen gardening, nutrition, livestock care, and micro-enterprise development can empower them socio-economically.
- Use of ICT tools like mobile apps, videos, and radio programs in local languages makes extension more accessible to rural women.

2. As Change Agents or Extension Workers

3. As Innovators and Knowledge Holders

- Rural women possess deep indigenous knowledge about crops, weather patterns, pest control, and traditional medicine.
- Extension education must recognize and integrate this local wisdom with modern practices.
- Women can serve as “knowledge banks” within their communities.

Strategies to Strengthen Women's Role in Extension

To enhance women’s participation and impact in extension education, the following strategies can be adopted:

1. Gender-Sensitive Extension

Programs: Designing training modules and schedules that consider women’s availability, literacy, and responsibilities.

2. Women-Only Groups & Training

Centers: These promote confidence, peer learning, and active participation.

3. Capacity Building of Women

Extension Workers: Recruitment and training of women in formal extension roles should be prioritized.

4. Use of ICT and Media:

Community radio, WhatsApp groups, mobile-based advisories can help overcome mobility and literacy barriers.

5. Policy Support and Incentives:

Enabling policies that promote women-friendly technology, subsidies, and credit.

6. Involving SHGs and FPOs:

These platforms can be used to train, mobilize, and empower women farmers collectively.

Conclusion

Women are the silent yet powerful engines of agricultural growth in India. Recognizing and strengthening their role in **Extension Education** is not just about equity but also about enhancing agricultural productivity, food security, and rural development. A gender-inclusive extension system can lead to a more resilient, sustainable, and empowered farming community.

References

1. Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India
2. National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), MKSP Guidelines
3. FAO (2011). The Role of Women in Agriculture
4. ICAR - Gender in Agriculture
5. SEWA Annual Reports.

Case Studies and Success Stories

Self Employed Women's Association

(SEWA) in Gujarat trains women in agri-processing and market linkages.

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran

Pariyojana (MKSP) under NRLM empowers women farmers through capacity building and collectivization.

Krishi Sakhi model in Maharashtra

engages trained rural women to deliver doorstep extension services.