

Women empowerment in agriculture: a case study of village Kangoo in Hamirpur district of Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment plays a very important role in the agricultural growth particularly in developing countries; however the nature and extent of women's role in farming vary from region to region, culture to culture and even from crop to crop. The role of women in agriculture cannot be belittled but irony is that the barriers to empowerment such as credit, access to inputs, extension services, land ownership rights etc limit their production and they face persistent obstacles and economic constraints limiting further inclusion in agriculture. The present study was attempted to assess the level of women empowerment in agriculture; further the differences in women empowerment with respect to age, marital status and education of the women in women empowerment have also been investigated. The respondents in the present study were 121 women of village Kangoo of Hamirpur district of Himachal Pradesh. The findings showed that the mean value range was between 3 to 4 for all the components of women empowerment indicating higher agreement with the same and implying higher empowerment of women in agriculture in the study area. The effect of demographic variables on women empowerment yielded mixed results pointing to the significant mean difference for few components of women empowerment.

Keywords: Women empowerment; agriculture; sustainable development; WEAI

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment in agriculture has a direct impact on agricultural productivity and household food security (Sraboni et al 2014, Harper et al 2013). Anon (2011) estimated that if women were provided the same productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30 per cent which could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by up to 4 per cent thereby reducing the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17 per cent. Women have been noted to play a very important role in the agricultural growth particularly in developing countries. They make up to half of the agricultural labour force in many developing countries however the nature and extent of men and women farmers' role in farming vary from region to region, culture to culture and even from crop to crop. Women contribute in the household as well as agricultural activities (Majumder and Shah 2017). They perform roles as farmers, as

business women in smallholder agricultural production, are mothers who efficiently manage household nutrition, innovators and educators (Abebe et al 2016). Women are seen performing multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs and laborers in agriculture (Sally 2018). The indigenous knowledge and skills possessed by women are vitally necessary for food production and sustainable agriculture (Singh and Arora 2017). The studies have reported that women invest as much as 10 times more of their earnings as compared to men in areas such as child health, education and nutrition (Duflo 2012, Maertens and Verhofstadt 2013).

However the women's ability to generate income in the agricultural sector is severely constrained by their limited use, ownership and control of productive physical and human capital. Men are the main decision takers and women merely the followers of the decisions; even the farm produce is marketed commonly by males which makes them controllers of household finance (Patel 2012). The studies have

reported that many women participate in agricultural work as unpaid subsistence labour (Khyade and Khyade 2016). There are number of barriers for women empowerment in agriculture such as women education, customs, beliefs etc (Ogunlela and Mukhtar 2009). Empowerment in agriculture is generally defined as one's ability to make decisions on matters related to agriculture as well as one's access to the material and social resources needed to carry out those decisions (Alkire et al 2013). Empowerment focuses on issues of gaining power and control over decisions and resources that determine one's quality of life (Narayan 2002). Alsop et al (2007) defined empowerment as the capacity to translate choices into desired actions and outcomes. Improving the role of women in agriculture has been at the forefront of a Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute's research for the past 15 years. The women's empowerment in agriculture index (WEAI) developed by USAID measures the empowerment, agency and inclusion of women in the agriculture sector through five dimensions viz production, resources, income, leadership and time (Anon 2012). It is widely being realized throughout the world that women empowerment is absolutely essential for human, national and real global development (Ackerly 1995). Since the significant contribution of women in agriculture cannot be ignored; empowering women in agriculture needs serious attention. The present study was conducted to provide insights into levels of women empowerment and association of women empowerment with some demographic factors to examine the level of women empowerment in agriculture and the difference in level of women empowerment with respect to age, marital status and educational qualification.

METHODOLOGY

The participants in the present study were 121 women selected from the village Kangoo in Hamirpur district of Himachal Pradesh. The opinions of these women respondents were collected personally through a pre-tested interview scheduled. The statements of women empowerment were taken from the list given in the women empowerment in agriculture index (WEAI).

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics

It is evident from the data (Table 1) that out of total, majority of the sampled respondents were young

(20.-30 years) (48.76%) while percentage (18.18) of older group (40-50 years) was lowest. There was higher number of married women (59.50%) as compared to unmarried (40.50%). Most of them (45.45%) were postgraduates followed by graduates (33.05%) while illiterate respondents were the lowest (3.33%) in number.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristic	Respondents	
	Number	Percentage
Age (years)		
20-30	59	48.76
30-40	40	33.06
40-50	22	18.18
Marital status		
Married	72	59.50
Unmarried	49	40.50
Educational status		
Illiterate	4	3.33
Matriculate	10	8.26
Undergraduate	12	9.91
Graduate	40	33.05
Postgraduate	55	45.45

The data given in Table 2 reveal that out of the total sampled respondents majority agreed to all the statements about perception pertaining to women empowerment in agriculture while minimum number of them strongly disagreed with them. Majority agreed that they made decision concerning crop production (48.8%), were free to choose what to produce on their plots (58.7%), were involved in purchasing, sale and transfer of agricultural assets (36.4%), had access to and make their own decision on credit (38.0%), had control over use of household income (42.1%), were satisfied with the time available for leisure activities (38.8%), their agricultural work was not affected by the workload in domestic tasks (41.3%) and customary laws did not govern their ability to acquire and use agricultural resources (37.2%). A look at the mean values ranging between 3 and 4 shows that the respondents agreed with all the components of women empowerment thus implying higher empowerment of women in agriculture in the study area. The highest degree of agreement pertained to freedom to choose what to produce on their plots as inferred from the highest mean value (M= 3.83).

The findings (Table 3) on mean difference among different age groups of respondents on components of women empowerment in agriculture

Table 2. Women's perception pertaining to women empowerment in agriculture

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Can't say	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	SD
I make decision concerning crop production	3 (2.5)	27 (22.3)	10 (8.3)	59 (48.8)	22 (18.2)	3.58	1.10
I am free to choose what to produce on my plot	1 (0.8)	6 (5.0)	24 (19.8)	71 (58.7)	19 (15.7)	3.83	0.77
I am involved in purchasing, sale and transfer of agricultural assets	9 (7.4)	10 (8.3)	39 (32.2)	44 (36.4)	19 (15.7)	3.45	1.08
I have access to and make my own decision on credit	1 (0.8)	8 (6.6)	43 (35.5)	46 (38.0)	23 (19.0)	3.68	0.88
I have control over use of household income	3 (2.5)	9 (7.4)	36 (29.8)	51 (42.1)	22 (18.2)	3.66	0.94
I am satisfied with the time available for leisure activities	7 (5.8)	17 (14.0)	24 (19.8)	47 (38.8)	26 (21.5)	3.56	1.14
My agricultural work is not affected by the workload in my domestic tasks	5 (4.1)	8 (6.6)	47 (38.8)	50 (41.3)	11 (9.1)	3.45	0.90
Customary laws do not govern my ability to acquire and use of agricultural resources	3 (2.5)	5 (4.1)	43 (35.5)	45 (37.2)	25 (20.7)	3.69	0.93

Figures in parentheses show per cent values

showed that the age group of 30-40 years emerged to be higher than other groups on almost statements thereby indicating more empowerment as compared to other age groups. The effect of age on mean difference among different age groups was found to be significant only for the statement "my agricultural work is not affected by the workload in my domestic tasks" ($F= 3.07$, $p < 0.05$).

On comparing the mean difference on components of women empowerment between married

and unmarried, the findings (Table 4) revealed that the married women were higher than the unmarried women on majority of the statements implying higher degree of empowerment in agriculture. The findings also showed that highest mean value by both the groups was for the component "I am free to choose what to produce on my plot" with mean value 3.90 for married and 3.73 for unmarried females. The married group was found to be lowest on the component "my agricultural work is not affected by the workload in my domestic tasks" (mean value= 3.56) and unmarried

Table 3. Mean difference analysis of women empowerment in agriculture with respect to age

Component	Respondents age (years)						F
	20-30		30-40		40-50		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
I make decision concerning crop production	3.64	1.01	3.60	1.06	3.36	1.22	0.52
I am free to choose what to produce on my plot	3.81	0.71	3.98	0.84	3.64	0.85	1.39
I am involved in purchasing, sale and transfer of agricultural assets	3.37	0.99	3.60	1.06	3.45	1.13	0.59
I have access to and make my own decision on credit	3.56	0.71	3.80	0.97	3.77	0.98	1.03
I have control over use of household income	3.58	0.75	3.90	1.09	3.45	1.11	2.07
I am satisfied with the time available for leisure activities	3.41	1.11	3.90	1.28	3.36	0.91	2.68
My agricultural work is not affected by the workload in my domestic tasks	3.34	0.87	3.73	0.78	3.23	1.12	3.07**
Customary laws do not govern my ability to acquire and use of agricultural resources	3.66	0.85	3.88	1.14	3.45	0.68	1.53

**Significant at 5% level of significance

on the component “I am involved in purchasing, sale and transfer of agricultural assets” (mean value= 3.18). The effect of marital status was found significant for mean difference wrt the statements “I am involved in purchasing, sale and transfer of agricultural assets” ($t= 2.22$; $p < 0.05$) and “I have access to and make my own decision on credit” ($t= 1.94$; $p < 0.05$).

The findings given in Table 5 pertaining to mean difference of women empowerment attributed to educational qualification revealed a mixed pattern. The groups varied largely on their response to different components of women empowerment depending on their education level. It was found that comparatively

lowest mean values on majority of the components of women empowerment by the illiterate group implied lesser empowerment as compared to other groups. The effect of education was found to be significant for mean difference for the components “I have control over use of household income” ($F= 2.76$; $p < 0.05$) and “I have access to and make my own decision on credit” ($F= 2.01$; $p < 0.05$).

CONCLUSION

The respondents showed higher mean values on the statements corresponding to women empowerment in agriculture indicating that the

Table 4. Mean difference analysis of women empowerment in agriculture with respect to marital status

Component	Marital status				F
	Married		Unmarried		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
I make decision concerning crop production	3.68	1.02	3.43	1.21	1.23
I am free to choose what to produce on my plot	3.90	0.81	3.73	0.74	1.16
I am involved in purchasing, sale and transfer of agricultural assets	3.63	1.12	3.18	0.91	2.22**
I have access to and make my own decision on credit	3.81	0.92	3.49	0.83	1.94**
I have control over use of household income	3.78	0.96	3.49	0.92	1.65
I am satisfied with the time available for leisure activities	3.71	1.16	3.35	1.12	1.71
My agricultural work is not affected by the workload in my domestic tasks	3.56	0.89	3.29	0.92	1.62
Customary laws do not govern my ability to acquire and use of agricultural resources	3.78	1.03	3.57	0.77	1.20

**Significant at 5% level of significance

women in the study area felt empowered. However the picture may not be very encouraging in other areas. Since the crucial role of women in agriculture cannot be denied, the obstacles confronted by women pertaining to the important decisions and contribution towards agriculture have to be seriously looked upon. The efforts have to be made by various stakeholders in promoting and enhancing the role of women in agriculture. There is need for the strong commitment of the government to empower women and utilize all the potentials of the country to bring about sustainable development.

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Table 5. Mean difference analysis of women empowerment in agriculture with respect to educational status

Component	Educational status										F
	Undergraduate		Graduate		Postgraduate		Matriculate		Illiterate		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
I make decision concerning crop production	3.50	1.00	3.58	1.03	3.67	1.10	3.60	1.43	2.50	1.00	1.07
I am free to choose what to produce on my plot	4.00	0.60	3.83	0.81	3.82	0.77	4.00	0.66	3.20	1.25	0.81
I am involved in purchasing, sale and transfer of agricultural assets	3.00	1.27	3.60	1.08	3.49	1.05	3.60	0.51	3.22	1.50	2.05
I have access to and make my own decision on credit	3.67	0.88	3.45	0.81	3.85	0.87	3.90	1.10	3.00	0.81	2.01**
I have control over use of household income	3.92	0.28	3.60	0.92	3.73	0.97	3.80	1.03	2.25	0.95	2.76**
I am satisfied with the time available for leisure activities	3.08	0.99	3.65	1.12	3.60	1.13	3.60	1.50	3.50	1.29	0.59
My agricultural work is not affected by the workload in my domestic tasks	3.33	0.98	3.30	0.85	3.55	0.89	3.90	0.73	2.75	1.25	1.74
Customary laws do not govern my ability to acquire and use of agricultural resources	3.50	0.79	3.53	1.08	3.82	0.86	4.00	0.81	3.50	0.57	1.02

**Significant at 5% level of significance

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