

Empowerment of women through agricultural activities in Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment implies intellectual enlightenment, economic enrichment and social emancipation of women. The core strength of empowerment lies in the ability of a woman to control her own destiny. An empowered woman must have equal opportunities, equal capabilities and equal access to resources. Furthermore she should be enabled to use those rights, capabilities, resources and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions in her life. The concept of women empowerment is associated with gender equality. In India, research conducted indicates that sex ratio is grossly unfavorable for females. Wide disparity exists between male and female literacy rates. Employment and work participation rates are also poor for women. Researches also indicate that this discrimination against females is borne out of cultural and religious values that spring from the patriarchal ethos dominant in most parts of our country. In the food security the rural women over the world play a major role in agricultural production and development but women face a number of constraints in approaching agricultural extension sources especially in developing countries. Rural women along with men play an important role in the agriculture sector like crop production, livestock as well as other farm-related activities. The present study was focused on the role of women in agricultural sector and the constraints which were being faced by them in Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: Women; empowerment; agriculture; distribution; constraints

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowered people have freedom of choice and action. This in turn enables them to better influence the course of their lives and the decisions which affect them (Sherratt 2016). It is estimated that women are responsible for 70 per cent of actual farm work and constitute up to 60 per cent of the farming population (Chayal and Dhaka 2010).

Over the years women cultivators are typically and wrongly characterized as economically inactive and women cultivators play only a supportive role in agriculture as farmers' wives (John and Barker 2015). Rural women have been equal partners in agricultural development; their role and participation have been

more pronounced in the lower socio-economic strata of the rural society.

In Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir majority of the female labour force is engaged in agriculture sector their role being the toughest to all the women folk of our culture. Women play a vital role in agriculture and contribute in all operations related to crop production such as sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, drying etc and livestock as well as poultry works like handling of milk production, animal care, fodder cutting, feeding, care of chicks etc.

Women perform all types of difficult works with great care though are of lesser strength to men. But it is most unfortunate that the role of women in agriculture has not been highlighted much. By and large they have remained invisible workers.

A large group of working women of India is in the rural and unorganized sectors. Socially the majorities of Indian women are still tradition bound and are in disadvantageous position. Women security, decision-making power and mobility are three indicators for women empowerment in India and more so for rural and less educated women. Women's participation in agricultural production and animal rearing is consistently expanding and in the face of this, women continue to face traditional restraints. Women lack access to input supplies, extension advice, credit and the most important agricultural resource- land. Rural women still don't have ownership on land and due to this they can't take independent decisions on various agricultural aspects. Extension services in Jammu region are limited to women because of different reasons. The extension staff professionals are males; our customs are such that they favour the male community; women have domestic responsibilities and lack of mobility. The present study was designed to identify the factors hampering women empowerment in agricultural activities. It is envisaged that the results of the study would be helpful in revealing certain factors with regard to women empowerment which would facilitate the policy makers and the extension workers to make better strategies and policies to bring improvement in the lives of rural women.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted to identify and analyze the factors hampering women empowerment in agricultural activities. Small and scattered landholdings make women involvement more significant as they manage a wide range of farming activities. The investigations were conducted during 2015-2017 and a sample of 250 rural women was selected from ten blocks of Kathua and Jammu districts of Jammu and Kashmir. The respondents were selected by employing multi-stage random sampling technique. The data were collected through pre-tested interview schedule. Focus group discussions were also administered on the basis of objectives of the study. The responses were secured on 3-point scale fitting to the statements as very much (VM) (3) much (M) (2) and not so much (NM) (1). The results were calculated as mean score for each of the constraints (Sharma et al 2011):

$$\text{Mean score} = \frac{(\text{Number of VM} \times 3) + (\text{Number of M} \times 2) + (\text{Number of NM} \times 1)}{\text{Total Number of VM} + \text{M} + \text{NM}}$$

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The data in Table 1 Indicate that the most of the respondents (42.80%) belonged to middle age group followed by 35.20 and 22.00 per cent who were young and old respectively. Sharma et al (2011) in a study conducted on the need for agricultural extension services for rural women in Jammu region reported that most (51.30%) of the respondents were in middle age group. The results indicated that the young, energized and talented women were involved in agriculture for want of other more remunerative and economically variable ventures in the villages. Similar findings have been reported by Sreenivasulu and Rao (2005) and Chayal and Dhaka (2010). The data also show that about one-fourth (25.60%) of the respondents were illiterate followed by having primary education (24.00%) and very less were graduates and above (4.80%). Education is a potent strategic instrument that can impact socio-economic status of women. It can empower women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence to ensure their participation in the development process. It would also enhance their capacity for participation in an increasingly knowledge-based global economy. Thus education is a sine qua non for augmenting and expanding opportunities for women to step into the world of productive work and participate in overwhelming number in development activities to change their lives (Afzal et al 2009).

Majority of the population of the district belonged to lower caste (41.20%) followed by upper (33.60%) and backward (25.20%) classes. The main occupation of the respondents was agriculture (51.60%). A majority (50.00%) of the respondents had small landholdings whereas only 16.80 per cent had large farms. Majority of the respondents (70.00%) had annual family income less than one lakh. This situation indicates that a majority of the respondents were financially not well off. These findings are in agreement with those of Kaur et al (2007) and Sharma et al (2011).

Data given in Table 2 show that majority of the respondents grew wheat (62.0%) followed by paddy (50.0%) and maize (46.0%). They also grew vegetables (34.4%) and fruits (13.6%). Under livestock, the farmers possessed cows (28.0%), buffaloes

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to socio-personal characteristics (n= 250)

Variable	Respondents		
	Category	Number	Percentage
Age (years)	Young (20-35)	88	35.20
	Middle (36-50)	107	42.80
	Old (>50)	55	22.00
Education	Illiterate	64	25.60
	Primary	60	24.00
	Junior high school	40	16.00
	High school	34	12.16
	Intermediate	40	16.00
	Graduate and above	12	4.80
Caste	Upper	84	33.60
	Backward	63	25.20
	Lower	103	41.20
Occupation	Main agriculture	129	51.60
	Subsidiary	74	29.60
	Service	47	18.80
Landholding	Small	125	50.00
	Medium	83	33.20
	Large	42	16.80
Family income (Rs in lakhs)	<1	175	70.00
	Up to 1	51	20.04
	>1	24	9.6

(24.0%), goats (21.0%), poultry (18.4%) and sheep (8.4%). These findings are substantiated by the findings of Murugan (2017).

The male dominance (92.0%) and lack of time (87.6%) were the major constraints faced by rural women in approaching agricultural extension education services and have been ranked I and II respectively (Table 3). A majority (86.4%) of the respondents indicated lack of access to credit as one of the constraints that was ranked III. Shelly and D'Costa (2000) also indicated the lack of credit facility and lack of resource availability as the main constraints which were being faced by rural women involved in the agricultural development programme in Bangladesh. The authors reported that in Bangladesh social customs/norms were major constraints faced by women. Sadaf et al (2006) and Kaur et al (2007) also reported that less time availability, cultural norms, male dominance etc were the constraints being faced by women farmers. The respondents (84.0%) also indicated lack of mobility as the major constraint in approaching agricultural extension education services. There may be less availability of vehicles especially for rural women to access these agricultural extension services. Similar findings have been reported by Butt et al (2010).

Table 4 reveals that among technical constraints, illiteracy (89.2%), lack of technical training, knowledge and skills (88.8%), lack of female extension staff (88.0%) and lack of SMSs (88.0%) were the major constraints faced by rural women in approaching agricultural extension services. Similar technical constraints were also observed by Sadaf et al (2006), Shelly and D'Costa (2000) and Anon (1995). Olaweye (1993) reported that shortage of qualified female extension staff was also the major constraint which hindered the involvement of rural women in gaining access to agricultural extension education services. Sadaf et al (2006) and Butt et al (2010) also reported that shortage of female extension staff was the major constraint faced by women involved in agriculture sector.

Table 5 gives the information about the imperative suggestions given by the respondents. They (72.0%) suggested that more female extension workers should be produced in the field of agriculture. Seventy per cent suggested that training programmes for women should be organized. Half of the respondents were of the view that government and private organizations should focus more attention on problems of rural women whereas 34.8 per cent said

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to farm production (n= 250)

Component	Respondents		Component	Respondents	
	Number	Percentage		Number	Percentage
Crops grown			Livestock		
Maize	115	46.0	Cows	70	28.0
Wheat	155	62.0	Buffaloes	62	24.0
Paddy	125	50.0	Sheep	21	8.4
Vegetables	86	34.4	Goats	54	21.0
Fruit plants	34	13.6	Backyard poultry	46	18.4

Multiple responses

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to social and economic constraints for approaching agriculture extension services (n= 250)

Constraint	Respondents		Mean score	Rank
	Number	Percentage		
Cultural norms	210	84.0	4.79	IV
Male dominance	225	92.0	4.96	I
Lack of time	219	87.6	4.84	II
Traditional norms	198	79.2	4.70	V
Resistance from family members	190	76	4.60	VI
Mobility	210	84.0	4.79	IV
Lack of access to credit	216	86.4	4.80	III

Multiple responses

Table 4. Distribution of respondents according to technical constraints (n= 250)

Constraint	Respondents		Mean score	Rank
	Number	Percentage		
Illiteracy	223	89.2	4.89	I
Lack of female extension staff	220	88.0	4.86	II
Lack of SMSs for rural women	220	88.0	4.86	II
Lack of technical training, knowledge and skills	222	88.8	4.87	II

Multiple responses

Table 5. Distribution of respondents according to their suggestions for improving the involvement of rural women in extension services (n= 250)

Suggestion	Respondents		Mean score	Rank
	Number	Percentage		
More female extension workers	180	72.0	4.2	I
Training programmes for women	175	70.0	4.0	I
Government and private organizations to give more attention to women extension workers	125	50.0	3.0	II
Training to extension field staff	87	34.8	2.6	III

Multiple responses

that extension field staff should be trained to educate the women engaged in farming. Similar suggestions were given by Butt et al (2010) and (Sadaf et al (2006).

CONCLUSION

Women's role within agriculture sector is different from place to place and distribution of the ownership between men and women is strongly related to social, cultural and economic factors. The cultural norms, male dominance and traditional belief system were the major social constraints faced by rural women in the study area. The major constraints in agriculture extension education services as indicated by the respondents were male dominance, lack of time and lack of access to credit. In technical constraints, Illiteracy, lack of technical training, knowledge and skills, lack of female extension staff and lack of SMSs for rural women were the major constraints.

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