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Gender roles in agriculture among small farming families

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted during the year 2014-15 in Hassan district of Karnataka state on 98 men and 98 women belonging to small farm families. Majority of the respondents belonged to middle age group (63.26% male and 58.16% female); more women had received primary education (65.30%) than men (46.93%) and majority of the respondents (66.32%) had been working on others farms. More than joint 80 per cent joint participation was seen in land preparation, seed treatment, weeding and harvesting. The role of women in livestock management ranged only from 10 to 25 per cent. Surplus produce management was confined to male partners. Independent role of women in livestock management ranged from 7 to 31 per cent. Many roles were jointly shouldered in most agricultural operations while men took independent decisions in money matters. Study showed that independent decisions of women ranged between 15 to 31 per cent.

Keywords: Gender; men; women; farm families; role; activity

INTRODUCTION

India is a land of small farmers with over 80 per cent of land holders being in the small land holding category. For small farmers their farms are family farms. A family farming is one that involves all members of the family like men, women and children who contribute collectively for the development and maintenance of their farms. Family farms offer an opportunity for achieving both food and nutritional security. Unlike commercial agriculture which processes only one type of crop, family farmers grow only one or two crops for sale where other crops like pulses, oilseeds, fruits and vegetables are grown for the family. One or two milch animals are maintained; a few poultry birds are also reared. The produce of the farm especially milk, eggs and vegetables are also sold only after meeting the needs of the family.

In rural India the percentage of women who depend on agriculture for their livelihood is quite high (84%). Women

make up about 33 per cent of cultivators and about 47 per cent of agricultural labourers. In 2009, 94 per cent of the female agricultural labour force in crop cultivation was in cereal production while 1.4 per cent worked in vegetable production and 3.72 per cent in fruits, nuts, beverages, and spice crops (Kapur 2009). Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, postharvest operations, agro/social forestry, fisheries etc. Studies on women in agriculture conducted in India and other developing and under-developed countries point to the conclusion that women contribute far more to agricultural production than has generally been acknowledged. Recognition of their crucial role in agriculture should not obscure the fact that farm women continue to be concerned with their primary functions as wives, mothers and homemakers (Behera and Behera 2013).

Although women have been actively participating in almost all agricultural activities the major responsibilities have always been shouldered by men. However this trend seems to be changing and women are now even taking on the responsibilities that were once shouldered by men alone. In this regard the extension component of the All India Coordinated Research Project on Home Science (AICRP-HSc) has developed gender specific database of farm families at the national level. The present paper presents the data which pertain to southern dry zone of Karnataka state. This zone extends over an area of 1.739 million hectares. The annual rainfall ranges from 670-888.6 mm of which more than 50 per cent rain is received in Kharif season. The elevation is 450-900 m and the soils are red sandy loam in major areas and red loamy in the remaining areas. The principal crops grown are rice, ragi, pulses, jowar and tobacco.

The study was conducted to know the socio-personal characteristics of the respondents and their role in various farm activities.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted during the year 2014-15 in Hassan district of Karnataka state from where five villages were randomly selected. Based on proportionate random sampling method 98 small farming families with less than 5 acres of land were selected for the study. Data were collected from 98 men and 98 women actively involved in farming. Based on the objectives of the study a structured interview schedule was developed to elicit the relevant information from the respondents. The data were collected by the personal interview method from the selected respondents.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The personal and socio-economic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1. The data show that majority of the respondents belonged to middle age group (63.26% male and 58.16% female). More women had received primary education (65.30%) than men (46.93%). Illiterates were almost equal (18.36% male and 16.32% female). Majority of the respondents (66.32%) were working on others farms in addition to their own farms as daily wage earners (main occupation) followed by 33.67 per cent respondents exclusively involved in cultivating their own land.

It is clear from Table 2 that most farming activities were carried out jointly by men and women. More than 80 per cent joint participation was seen in land preparation, seed treatment, weeding and harvesting. Seed variety selection, engagement of labour and pest control were male dominated (73-89%). Independent female participation was seen only in weeding

There was no independent role of women in financial matters. About 92 per cent men decided independently the repayment of amount and also mode of repayment. How much to borrow and where to borrow from were independently decided by men (88.77and 79.59% respectively). Data show that role of women in financial matters was negligible.

The role of women in postharvest management ranged only from 10 to 25 per cent with the highest in storage followed by retention for consumption and winnowing. Independent role of men ranged from 21 to 36 per cent with the highest in drying (36.73%) followed by cleaning (35.71%), threshing (30.61%) and winnowing (29.59%). Joint participation was dominant ie >50.00 per cent in all the postharvest activities with highest (78.06%) in retention of seed.

Surplus produce management was also confined to male partners though just 7.65 per cent women were independent in deciding quantity to be kept for household use.

Independent role of women in livestock management ranged from 7 to 31 per cent with highest intervention in grazing of animals (31.12%) followed by care of livestock/poultry (30.61%). On the other hand independent role of men ranged from 20 to 100 per cent. While looking at the joint action, it was found that maximum participation was in case of fresh excreta management (72.45%) followed by processed excreta management (70.92%). The activity breeding of animals was exclusively rested with the men (100.00%).

Table 1. Personal and socio-economic characteristics of small farmers

Parameter	Category	f	%
Age			
	Male		
	Young	12	12.24
	Middle aged	6	63.26
	Old	24	24.48
	Female		
	Young	15	15.30
	Middle aged	57	58.16
	Old	26	26.53
Education			
	Male		
	Illiterate/unlettered	18	18.36
	Can read and write/lettered	5	5.10
	Primary School	46	46.93
	Middle School	12	12.24
	High school	7	7.14
	Post-Matric diploma	9	9.18
	Graduate and above	1	1.02
	Female		
	Illiterate/unlettered	16	16.32
	Can read and write/lettered	8	8.16
	Primary School	64	65.30
	Middle School	5	5.10
	High school	5	5.10
	Post-Matric diploma	-	-
	Graduate and above	-	-
Main occupation of the family			
	Farming	33	33.67
	Service	-	-
	Business	-	-
	Farming + daily wage earner	65	66.32

Table 2. Role of respondents in various activities (n= 196)

Activity	Male (independent)	Female (independent)	Male + female (joint)
Farming			
Land preparation	33 (16.84)	-	163 (83.16)
Seed/variety selection	176 (89.79)	-	20 (10.20)
Seed treatment	36 (18.36)	-	160 (81.63)
Engagement of labour	176 (89.79)	-	20 (10.20)
Chemical pest control	145 (73.97)	-	51 (26.03)
Traditional way of pest management	100 (51.02)		96 (48.97)
Irrigation/water management	92 (46.93)	-	104 (53.06)
Weeding	17 (8.67)	16 (8.16)	163 (83.16)
Application of manures and fertilizers	83 (42.34)	-	113 (57.65)
Harvesting	38 (19.38)	-	158 (80.60)
Financial management			
Credit/loan procuring source	156 (79.59)	-	40 (20.40)
Procuring amount	174 (88.77)	-	22 (11.23)
Repaying amount	181 (92.34)	-	15 (7.65)
Repaying mode	181 (92.34)	-	15 (7.65)
Postharvest management			
Threshing	60 (30.61)	38 (19.38)	98 (50.00)
Winnowing	58 (29.59)	40 (20.40)	98 (50.00)
Cleaning	70 (35.71)	20 (10.20)	106 (54.08)
Drying	72 (36.73)	21 (10.71)	103 (52.55)
Processing of produce at household level	55 (28.06)	38 (19.38)	103 (52.55)
Processing of produce at commercial level	53 (27.04)	30 (15.30)	113 (57.65)
Retention for consumption	50 (25.51)	48 (24.48)	98 (50.00)
Retention for seed	43 (21.93)	-	153 (78.06)
Storage	48 (24.48)	50 (25.50)	98 (50.00)
Surplus produce management			
Quantity to be sold	133 (67.85)	-	63 (32.14)
Quantity to be kept for household use	112 (57.14)	15 (7.65)	69 (35.20)
Mode of marketing	118 (60.20)	-	78 (39.79)
Management of revenue earned from sale	146 (74.48)	-	50 (25.51)
Livestock management			
Growing fodder	45 (22.96)	16 (8.16)	135 (68.88)
Procuring fodder	58 (29.59)	36 (18.36)	102 (52.05)
Fodder storage	53 (27.04)	41 (20.91)	102 (52.05)
Feeding of animals	50 (25.51)	36 (18.37)	110 (56.12)
Grazing of animals	52 (26.53)	61 (31.12)	83 (42.35)
Care of livestock/poultry	61 (31.12)	60 (30.61)	75 (38.27)
Cattle/poultry shed management	59 (30.10)	50 (25.51)	87 (44.39)
Care of sick animals	58 (29.60)	49 (25.00)	89 (45.40)
Breeding of animals	196 (100)	-	-
Fresh excreta management	39 (19.89)	15 (7.66)	142 (72.45)
Processed excreta management	43(21.94)	14 (7.14)	139 (70.92)
Keeping produce for household consumption	57(29.08)	40 (20.40)	99 (50.52)

CONCLUSION

The present study reveals that in small land holding families men and women worked together and not much differentiation was noticed in their roles. Many roles were jointly shouldered in most agricultural operations while men took independent decisions in money matters.

Independent roles of women were almost negligible in farm activities, financial management and management of surplus produce. However their independent decisions ranging between 15 to 31 per cent were seen in postharvest and livestock management. Women had been performing almost all activities on an equal footing with men and sometimes even higher except ploughing.

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