

Frontier technologies for empowering farm women

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ABSTRACT

In agriculture sector, the farm women are assigned secondary roles with insignificant powers. Their significant contribution as labour input has generally remained unaccounted. They are far behind and need to be adequately empowered to take up future challenges. The nature and extent of women involvement in agriculture varies greatly from region to region, ecological sub-zones, caste, class and stages in the family cycle. Empowering farm women for better quality of life is an important and burning issue today. Knowledge coupled with efficient resource management is considered one of the most important factors for development. Extension approaches and strategies followed for transfer of technology to farm women are required to satisfy their specific needs and problems. Thrust needs to be given on cultivation technologies, improved agricultural tools and implements, institutional approach for empowerment and inculcating entrepreneurship skill in them. Coordination is to be made among technology generation, technology dissemination and technology receiving system. The empowering strategies would need to be further sharpened to make them effective and result oriented.

Keywords: Farm women, agriculture, involvement, gender issues

INTRODUCTION

Women constitute about 49 per cent of our population and play multiple roles and responsibilities not only for food production and processing but also for their household duties. In agriculture they are mainly assigned secondary roles with insignificant powers. Their significant contribution as labour input has generally remained unaccounted. In the present era of agriculture farm women take up a proactive role in farming, higher farm production and productivity through farm

animals, horticultural crops, aquaculture etc by making appropriate decision and with proper insight into the present agriculture prospects. Yet they are far behind and need to be adequately empowered to take up future challenges.

Women in Agriculture

Approximately 1.3 million people worldwide are living in poverty out of which 70 per cent are women. The feminisation of poverty has become influential in the development of

policy and identification of practical solutions and this has resulted in the development and implementation of several programs focussing only on women (Rasheed et al 2003).

The work participation of female has increased from 19.7 per cent in 1981 to 25.7 per cent in 2001. They are now important partners in agriculture work force since 89.3 per cent of female work force is concentrated in agriculture sector. More than 80 per cent female workers are engaged in the agriculture sector in rural India. Independent participation of women was found to be very marginal in major crop production (1%), postharvest activity (2%), livestock management (6%) and entrepreneurial activity (0%) (Anon 2009). The utilization of time in agriculture by the farm women varied from 3.5 h to 7.3 h during lean to active season with an average of 5.3 h/day in agricultural activities. Maximum involvement of farm women was in drying and storage (77.3%) followed by intercultural practices (73.9%) and harvesting (72.1%) (Anon 2005).

The nature and extent of women involvement in agriculture varies greatly from region to region, ecological sub-zones, caste, class and stages in the family cycle. The overall contribution of women in farm operations amounts to 61 per cent whereas in livestock farming they contribute about 71 per cent. The work profile of Indian farm women is that they put manual work daily

on farming operation, live stock raising, collecting and carrying fodder, fuel, water from distant places etc. They are involved in operations like feeding, breeding, management, health care and marketing of animal produce under live stock farming. They use conventional tools with little efficiency and face drudgery while working in the field or home.

Being generally illiterate and ignorant they have no or very little access to new technologies, scientific achievement and modernization in agriculture. The package of practices for empowering farm women through front line technology must concentrate on:

Empowering women

- Identifying gender issues and providing suitable technologies for promoting gender mainstreaming.
- Enhancing capabilities of farm women in agriculture development through effective technologies and programmes.
- Presentation and refinement of technologies with active participation of farm women.
- Introducing drudgery reducing technologies for decreasing physical stress and increasing work efficiency.
- Sustainable approach for nutritional security and socio-economical empowerment of farm women.

Empowering farm women for better quality of life is an important and burning issue today. In rural setting training in entrepreneurship development coupled with knowledge about market prove to be an effective approach for motivating farm women for their socio-economic empowerment. Knowledge coupled with efficient resource management is considered one of the most important factors for development. So the emphasis must be on:

- Optimization of technology, human resource and energy inputs which are essential for sustainable agriculture production.
- Focus on agriculture and allied knowledge base interventions.
- Mobilizing women through group approach for sustainable livelihood.

Frontline technologies for farm women

Present day challenges are to sustain the development of women in agriculture while pursuing technological empowerment for them. Extension approaches and strategies followed for transfer of technology to farm women are required to satisfy their specific needs and problems. Involvement of women in production-oriented trainings and other extension programmes should not only be as beneficiaries but also as change agents for higher adoption and diffusion of latest home and farm technologies.

Modernization in agriculture has displaced farm women from their traditional roles. Due to this farm women constitute a disproportionate number of rural poor. Access to productive resources such as appropriate technologies, training and credit facilities have always been insufficient to achieve their full potential. Thus thrust be given on the following technologies/approaches for capacity building of farm women agricultural development process.

1. Technological Empowerment

Cultivation technologies – Seed treatment, soil testing, seed germination testing, use of culture, IPM, organic farming, bio-fertilizers, natural resource conservation, improved fodder quality.

Improved agricultural tools and implements – Agricultural tools and implements are usually designed to match the physical requirement and capacities of men and the women have difficulties in operating these tools and implements. With an appropriate set of right tools for work in the field not only her work efficiency will improve but she has less occupational health hazards. Particular attention should be given to the needs of the women farmers while designing the tools and implements. The design should be women friendly and gender compatible, easy to maintain and safe to use. Under an NRCWA project ergonomically evaluation of manually operated cleaner, grader, seed drill, fertilizer

broadcaster and ridger with women worker, fifteen equipments were evaluated out of which 11 equipments namely seed treatment drum, Naveen dibbler, wheel hoe, improved sickle, tubular maize sheller, groundnut decorticator, hanging type cleaner, fertilizer broadcaster, CIAF seed-cum-fertilizer drill, PAU seed drill and hand ridger were found suitable and appreciated by farm women. Such equipments should be popularized/promoted among the farm women.

Institutional approach for empowerment -The village-based institutional approach in empowerment has higher success rate as compared to the individual approach and hence the self help group approaches should be followed for mobilization of farm women for sustainable livelihood.

Inculcating entrepreneurial skill - Employment for farm women is essential not only to increase their status but also to supplement their family income. Women have potentiality for self help and development. But this must be tapped for productive purposes through economically viable projects and activities. We have very good examples of this functioning like Anand Milk Dairy Cooperative, Anand (Gujarat), Mahila Grih Udyog etc. Agro based

enterprises, dairy cooperatives, vermin composting, nursery raising, processing and value addition to horticulture crops, mushroom cultivation, apiculture, sericulture, pisciculture, poultry management have greater potential to empower farm women.

The ICAR and SAUs form a close network for agricultural research and extension education through All India Co-ordinated Research Projects, National Agriculture Research Project, KVks, National Agriculture Extension Projects and deeper intervention of the ICAR have provided an umbrella to develop and demonstrate front line technologies to empower farm women. Coordination is to be made among technology generation, technology dissemination and technology receiving system. The empowering strategies would need to be further sharpened to make them effective and result-oriented.

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