

General Studies – 1; Topic: Role of women

Role of Women in Agriculture

1) Introduction

- In order to awaken the people, it is the woman who has to be awakened. Once she is on move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves - Pandit Jawaharalal Nehru.
- Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization says that if women farmers had the same access to resources as men, they would increase output by 20-30% which would mean a dramatic reduction in hunger.

2) Role of women in farming on India

- Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist describes that it was woman who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming.
- Women make up about 33% of cultivators and about 47% of agricultural labourers in rural India.
- Overall, the percentage of rural women who depend on agriculture for their livelihood is as high as 84%.
- There is an increasing number of women in multiple roles in agriculture sector, as cultivators, entrepreneurs and labourers.
- Maintaining the ancillary branches in this sector, like animal husbandry, fisheries and vegetable cultivation, depends almost solely on women.
- There is empirical evidence that women have a decisive role in ensuring food security and preserving local agro-biodiversity.

3) Women and Nutrition

- Nutrition has been a focal point of the human development efforts in India.
- For women it attains special importance because of the intergenerational carry over of the impacts through children.
- Thereby it can carve a deep furrow on the nation's human resources pool over time.
- National Family Health Survey 2015-16 state that 26.7% of rural women are underweight and 54.2% anaemic.
- A majority of our women agricultural producers and workers are themselves victims of malnutrition.
- Empowered women farmers can help fight malnutrition.
- Providing women with greater autonomy, participation and influence in household decision-making would lead to better food security and nutrition outcomes.
- Evidence suggests that women farmers prefer crops that would contribute to household dietary diversity while promoting food and nutrition security.
- Male farmers, on the other hand, were found to be more inclined to cash crops.

4) Concerns / Challenges

- Systemic barriers to finance, inputs, extension services and land rights have limited their potential and recognition as the mainstay of our agrarian ecosystem.
- Getting loans, participating in mandi panchayats, assessing and deciding the crop patterns, and bargaining for MSPs (minimum support prices), loans and subsidies, remain male activities.

- The potential downside to women managing farms is the increased workload accompanied by no reduction in other duties.
- This could reduce leisure time, which could, in turn, impact their sense of well-being.
- Women have just a dismal 12.8% of land holdings despite being crucial to the whole production chain.
- Example: Women in Uttar Pradesh own a little under 18% of the land, and in Kerala it is just 14%.
- The role of women in farming has got no mention among political parties and very little among policy-makers.
- Women farm workers get less wages than men.
- Even as women laboured in fields, they continued to have and rear children almost single-handedly, a report showed.
- In 2014, according to the National Crime Records Bureau, of 8,007 farmer suicides, 441 were women.

5) Government Interventions

- The government is taking measures to ensure mainstreaming of women in agriculture sector.
- It has earmarked 30% of the budget allocation for women beneficiaries in all ongoing schemes and programmes, and development activities.
- It is focusing on women self-help groups to connect them to micro credit through capacity building activities.
- Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) - Women beneficiaries get assistance for horticulture mechanization along with assistance in procuring agricultural machinery and equipments.
- Agri-Clinics & Agri-Business Centers (ACABC) – Provides 44% back-ended composite subsidy towards cost of project to women as compared to 36% to men.
- National Mission on Oilseeds & Oil Palm (NMOOP) - Promoting Women Groups.

6) Way Forward

- Financial support specifically ensuring availability of institutional credit to women farmers is the key.
- Skill and knowledge transfer in sustainable agriculture techniques, crop varieties and farm management.
- Engaging with existing village level collectives of women for social mobilisation and collective market action.
- The Economic survey 2017-18 said a gender-specific intervention to raise productivity of small farm holdings is required
- Ensure that women farmers get enhanced access to resources such as land, water, credit, technology and training at a time when migration of men from rural to urban areas is growing.
- Crop land holdings must be consolidated to reap the benefits of agricultural mechanisation.
- Integrate women as active agents in rural transformation, and engage men and women in extension services with gender expertise.
- Gender budgeting would assess the quantity and adequacy of allocation of resources for women.
- Agricultural Science Centres (Krishi Vigyan Kendra) can play a significant role in empowering women farmers.
- Provide support to those women's organizations and farmers who promote new conceptual and development programs and who contribute to the implementation of new ideas.
- Projection of contribution of successful women by collecting and analysing data.