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 Jawaharlal 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.

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.