Agriculture - A Tool for Women Empowerment

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‘Woman’ is a key for success of any human being. This phrase is an everlasting principle of the universe. The unique reason behind this is that, if we consider any personality there must be a direct or indirect influence of woman for his/her achievement. But from the period known, the role of women is always in a dependent position in spite of her strong support or impact on men. Women shoulder almost all responsibility for meeting basic needs of the family, yet are systematically ignored for utilization of the resources, information and freedom of action required for them to fulfill this responsibility. Several studies revealed that, when the women are involved, supported and empowered in the society then entire society will flourish and the communities become more resilient. Agriculture is the backbone of our country. More than 70 percent of the people engaged in agriculture and it is the livelihood occupation for majority of the people. The role of women in this field is highly substantial. More than eighty percent of the work has to be performed by women. They are working as labourers in involved in different agricultural operations. Women have a bright future in the field of agriculture as it is the evergreen profession and involves much scope for future. Science and technology in agriculture is of very noteworthy dimension and will strengthen the women in performing agriculture. Education is going to play a crucial role to utilize science and technology in a proficient manner. Hence there is an indispensable need to focus on women education for their empowerment. Keeping in view the past and the present status of the women in agriculture and also the growth and development of science and technology in the field of agriculture, a strategic model was designed for empowerment of women through agriculture. The strategy consists of the two ways of empowerment women in agriculture viz Employment and entrepreneurship. The different avenues in these two areas of agriculture were projected in the model and also the challenges to be faced by women in performing these activities were also presented in the paper.

Key words: Agriculture; Women employment; Entrepreneurship;

Progressive development of the nation is the ultimate goal of any country. The economic, social, cultural development among the people can be achieved through designing appropriate strategies suitable to the conditions existing in the country. A thorough analysis of the existing situation and projecting the desired and expected situation is indispensable for any strategy. The past experiences revealed that, the women are the powerful tools for development but their potentialities were not been properly tapped. So many studies were taken up to in this dimension and accordingly the efforts were made to implement the same and achieved success. The present paper is also one of the studies in the lines of women empowerment focuses on

- Women as powerful resource of the society
- Women and agriculture
- Women Empowerment
- Agriculture and women Empowerment
- Strategic model for Women Empowerment through Agriculture

Objectives of the paper
1. To analyze the role of women as development tool
2. To enlighten the women contribution to agriculture
3. To focus the concept of empowerment & its dimensions
4. To project the scope of agriculture as a tool of women empowerment
5. To design a strategic model for women empowerment through agriculture

METHODOLOGY

- Women, agriculture and empowerment were conceptualized by integrating all the three domains
- Scope & opportunities of women in agriculture were explored through critical analysis of pros and cons
Strategic model was designed keeping in view the
review of the study.

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women as potential productive workers instead
of reproductive mothers. Because of the five potential
features of women
- Good managers
- Maintain cordial affiliation
- Hard workers
- Patience
- Convincing capacity

On the other side the scenario of women in the
world reveals the following facts.

- *Women work two-thirds of the world’s working hours:* according to the United Nations Millennium
Campaign to halve world poverty by the year 2015.
The overwhelming majority of the labor that
sustains life – growing food, cooking, raising
children, caring for the elderly, maintaining a house,
hauling water – is done by women, and universally
this work is accorded low status and no pay. The
ceaseless cycle of labor rarely shows up in
economic analyses of a society’s production and
value.

- *Women earn only 10 percent of the world’s income.* Where women work for money, they may
be limited to a set of jobs deemed suitable for
women – invariably low-pay, low-status positions.

- *Women own less than 1 percent of the world’s property.* Where laws or customs prevent women
from owning land or other productive assets, from
getting loans or credit, or from having the right to
inheritance or to own their home, they have no
assets to leverage for economic stability and cannot
invest in their own or their children’s futures.

- *Women make up two-thirds of the estimated 876 million adults worldwide who cannot read or
write; and girls make up 60 percent of the 77 million
children not attending primary school. Education
is among the most important drivers of human
development.*

Agriculture is the back bone of our country. More
than 70 percent of the people engaged in agriculture
and it is the livelihood occupation for majority of the
people. Agriculture in India has a significant history.
Today, India ranks second worldwide in farm output.
Agriculture and allied sectors accounted for 16.6% of
the GDP in 2007. About 50% of the total workforce and
despite a steady decline of its share in the GDP is still
demographically the broadest economic sector and plays
a significant role in the overall social-economic
development of India.

Women are a vital part of Indian economy. Over
the years, there is a gradual realization of the key role
of women in agricultural development and their vital
contribution in the field of agriculture, food security,
horticulture, processing, nutrition, sericulture, fisheries,
and other allied sectors.

In rural India, agriculture and allied industrial sectors
employ as much as 89.5% of the total female labour. In
overall farm production, women’s average contribution
is estimated at 55% to 66% of the total labour.
According to a 1991 World Bank report, women
accounted for 94% of total employment in dairy
production in India. Women constitute 51% of the total
employed in forest-based small-scale enterprises.

Women’s tremendous role in growing the world’s
food supply means their participation should be central
in any program to improve farming techniques or natural
resource management. Yet much work in this arena
involves technological approaches—mechanized farming,
emphasis on cash crops over family consumption—
assumed to be in the male realm. Women around the
world are left to work harder to grow the crops and
raise the animals that sustain their families.

**Empowerment** refers to increasing the spiritual,
political, social, racial, educational, gender or economic
strength of individuals and communities. It often involves
the empowered developing confidence in their own
capacities.

**Empowerment includes:**

- Ability to make decisions about personal/collective
circumstances
• Ability to access information and resources for decision-making
• Ability to consider a range of options from which to choose (not just yes/no, either/or)
• Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making
• Having positive-thinking about the ability to make change
• Ability to learn and access skills for improving personal/collective circumstance.
• Ability to inform others’ perceptions though exchange, education and engagement.
• Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated
• Increasing one’s positive self-image and overcoming stigma
• Increasing one’s ability in discreet thinking to sort out right and wrong

Dimensions of women empowerment

Socio-Cultural: Women’s freedom of movement; lack of discrimination against daughters; commitment to educating daughters Women’s visibility in and access to social spaces; access to modern transportation; participation in extra-familial groups and social networks; shift in patriarchal norms (such as son preference); symbolic representation of the female in myth and ritual Women’s literacy and access to a broad range of educational options; Positive media images of women, their roles and contributions

Economic : Women’s control over income; relative contribution to family support; access to and control of family resources Women’s access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement and/or representation in local trade associations; access to markets Women’s representation in high paying jobs; women CEO’s; representation of women’s economic interests in macro-economic policies, state and federal budgets

Familial/ Interpersonal : Participation in domestic decision-making; control over sexual relations; ability to make childbearing decisions, use contraception, access abortion; control over spouse selection and marriage timing; freedom from domestic violence Shifts in marriage and kinship systems indicating greater value and autonomy for women (e.g. later marriages, self selection of spouses, reduction in the practice of dowry; acceptability of divorce); local campaigns against domestic violence Regional/national trends in timing of marriage, options for divorce; political, legal, religious support for (or lack of active opposition to) such shifts; systems providing easy access to contraception, safe abortion, reproductive health services

Legal : Knowledge of legal rights; domestic support for exercising rights Community mobilization for rights; campaigns for rights awareness; effective local enforcement of legal rights Laws supporting women’s rights, access to resources and options; Advocacy for rights and legislation; use of judicial system to redress rights violations

Political : Knowledge of political system and means of access to it; domestic support for political engagement; exercising the right to vote Women’s involvement or mobilization in the local political system/campaigns; support for specific candidates or legislation; representation in local bodies of government Women’s representation in regional and national bodies of government; strength as a voting bloc; representation of women’s interests in effective lobbies and interest groups

Psychological : Self-esteem; self-efficacy; psychological well-being Collective awareness of injustice, potential of mobilization Women’s sense of inclusion and entitlement; systemic acceptance of women’s entitlement and inclusion

The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women’s Empowerment (Swashakti).The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women came was passed in 2001. In 2010 March 9, one day after International Women’s day, Rajyasabha passed Women’s Reservation Bill, ensuring 33% reservation to women in Parliament and state legislative bodies. Empowerment of women through agriculture : Agriculture is one of the oldest occupations of women. Their contribution to agriculture development continues to be very crucial to the National Economy. Many women in the agricultural sector are still in the informal sector and remain invisible in the official national statistics. India is predominantly an agricultural country with 82% of the households still in the rural sector. Women constitute 50.7% of the population and is considered to be a valuable resource potential needed to be meaningfully organized and recognized in the field of entrepreneurship, especially in the rural agricultural sector of India. In India, the empowerment of women in Agriculture has already begun.
We are now witnessing a steady improvement in the enrollment of women in schools, colleges and Agriculture profession institutes. In this decade, women are entering into the massive agriculture job markets in increasing numbers in both private and public. In banks, NGOs, Educational Institutions, Research Institutions, Extension systems, Agro-based civil services women are dominating their performance. As entrepreneurs, women are taking lead in establishing their own Agro-based industries and providing employment for their fellow women. Being farmers, women are becoming very active in improving their farm productivity as well as their net income. To have better access to all the basic amenities, women are entering in to the field of administration, politics and helping their gender for equality.

Agripreneurship: Some of the areas of successes were

- Fish/prawn farming,
- Cultivation of vegetables and fruits,
- Livestock management,
- Mushroom cultivation,
- Poultry farming and
- Horticulture
- Floriculture
- Dairy
- Landscaping

Marketing is the most critical aspect of entrepreneurship

Focal areas to empower women in agriculture:

EDUCATION: Women have a bright future in the field of agriculture as it is the evergreen profession and involves much scope for future. Science and technology in agriculture is of very noteworthy dimension and will strengthen the women in performing agriculture. Education is going to play a crucial role to utilize science and technology in a proficient manner. Hence there is an indispensable need to focus on women education for their empowerment

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It could be solved to the maximum extent by providing minimum education for all the women farmers. This is the preliminary requirement for any women farmers. So there is a need to start functional literacy programmes intensively for those target groups of women farmers so that they can read, write, calculate and understand the concept of agricultural technology.

This concept should be deeply disseminated to each and every women and try to create awareness among the women farming community and stress on the importance of literacy. Several massive awareness camps should be started in all the villages and start campaigns on the functional literacy programmes involving all the women. The Krishi Vigyan Kendras and Adult Education Centers should take the lead in providing minimum education for the women farmers to run their farming systematically and economically. Government should provide enough funds for the purpose and encourage the women to participate in the programme.

Land rights: In most Indian families, women do not own any property in their own names, and do not get a share of parental property. Due to weak enforcement of laws protecting them; women continue to have little access to land and property. In fact, some of the laws discriminate against women, when it comes to land and property rights.

A recent legislation of the Central Government, the Hindu succession Amendment Act 2005 has also moved towards women’s equality in property rights. It makes Hindu women’s inheritance rights in agricultural land legally equal to those of men. All daughters including married daughters age Co-larceners in joint family properly daughters now have the right to claim partition and to become ‘Karta’. All daughters, married or unmarried can reside, seek partition of the parental dwelling place.

Capacity building: It is another important area which needs to be focused through organizing training programmes, exposure visits, vocational trainings, group discussions, involving them in national and international trade fairs etc… which will help in developing their technical skills and also builds self confidence. The Non Governmental Organizations and voluntary leaders in...
the society need to be identified and through their help all such programmes needs to be organized. Special training programmes also be designed to the remote and deprived women keeping in view of their locally available and demand oriented enterprises.

**Self help groups:** This approach already witnessed excellent results in India. Further it needs to be sustained and improved the performance by way of encouraging the women Self-help groups have emerges as an important strategy for empowering women and alleviating poverty. SHG’s are based on idea of dialogic small groups, which shall function at developing collective consciousness. Linked with micro credit these groups are able to access credit and subsidy to meet crisis needs as well as developmental needs reducing their dependence on money lenders.

**Access to ICT tools:** Women have a bright future in the field of agriculture as it is the evergreen profession and involves much scope for future. Science and technology in agriculture is of very noteworthy dimension and will strengthen the women in performing agriculture. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is playing major role in developing the communication and human relation skills among women in turn leads to better performance of their activities.

Establishment of community radio in the underdeveloped areas in villages which speaks on the problems. The women speakers can talk to women in the villages on common problems for their upliftment.

Utilisation of internet facilities for rural upliftment of rural people basically women who are the backbone to men. There are many successful initiatives for successful use of internet one of such initiative is establishment of GAU satellite Krushi Gosthi by Gujarat Agricultural University to provide satellite linkage to agriculture. The scientists will meet one place and rural women and farmers will be at another place and their queries will be answered there by the constraint of lack of mobility will be solved.

Online browsing can be done by rural women to get the information on various agricultural operations. Various services from Ministry of Agriculture. Some of them are Mandi Prices online –AGMARKNET, Coconut Industry Directory website, Insecticide Product Directory and Online registration Form for Coir Entrepreneurs and so on. There can be trained personnel to help the rural women to interact with the computer.

Establishment of Information kiosk or information booths related to crop specific and problem centered at the villages in local languages which are self directive. Presently they are information Kiosks operating successful in KVK Ahmednagar, KVK Baramati in maharastra.
Establishment of expert systems on Crop Pests and Diseases and on various specific problems related problems. Expert systems can be used both in online and offline mode. In online mode the users can interact with the Research organizations expert systems to diagnose the field problems and can offer advice to farmers to farmers and fisherman.

Establishing state of the art two way videoconferencing facility at the villages headquarters. Many agricultural universities were establishing video conferencing facility at their universities where the agricultural officers and women counselors are interacting with the rural women. Training will be given to the rural women and men through videoconference who are far at remote places and to cover more number of people.

Establishing community owned low cost rural self sustainable intranet projects which will help the rural people and farmers to get abundant information on various which develop women and ultimately rural development can take place. Some of the examples of such initiatives are: Gyanoot project in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh, Waana wired project in Sangli and Kolhapur districts of Maharashtra.

Management training: Management is the art of getting things done from others. No person on the earth is independent. We all must depend on others to complete our tasks. Women are good in this field. But still there is need to train them in specified areas such as group dynamics, group goal achievement, task management, stress management, conflict management, efficient utilization of available natural resources, designing and implementing sound programme plans etc… simulated exercises and practical experiences needs to be incorporated in the curriculum of the course.

Strengthening family support: The men also should support the family responsibility along with women so as to share the home activities. Hence there is a need for more support and encouragement from their parents to the offspring including government to encourage women either for employment or for taking up any income generation activities by providing necessary moral support, financial assistance and also help in designing appropriate policies to uplift the women in both in the areas of employment and entrepreneurship. The outlook of the society towards agriculture should also be changed and the importance of women in different areas of agricultural development must be identified so as to utilize the potentialities of women at appropriate places.

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