Empowering the Farm Women for Greening the Upland through Horticultural Crops

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ABSTRACT

As per the report of FAO, women constitute about half of the world’s population which account for 60% of working hours, yet they receive only 10% of world’s income and own less than 1.0% of world’s property. According to 2001 Census of India, there are 495 million women (48.27% of the total population) in India. Out of the total main workers population female workers comprise 22.5% and 68.89% are marginal workers. About one third population of women (out of total population of women) is actively engaged in agricultural activities and play important role in agricultural population. Women do more work than men, is a matter of common observation and population (Manekar, 1990). There is well known fact that women’s work remains largely invisible and under recorded. The real issue, therefore, is more serious i.e. despite their involvement in agricultural work in such a long magnitude, they have not been actively in mainstream of agricultural development and there is hardly any appreciation and their extensive contribution. By and large, they have remained as “invisible workers”.

Key words: Women; Agricultural population;

The horticulture is one of the major disciplines of agriculture where women play a crucial role in production of horticultural crops, particularly, in upland areas of the country. The extent of total area with poor soil with low water retention capacity poor vegetation, very frequently occurrence of drought, famine and frost, difficult to execute agro-techniques, poor transportation, communication and marketing facilities, etc. (Anonymous, 1997).

Despite various bio-physical constraints, unbanded upland Jharkhand offer ample scope for cultivation of various horticultural crops. The horticultural scientists have proved that there are various drought hardly, subtropical fruit and vegetable crops, which can be grown successfully giving very good yields and quality of produce.

However, adoption of these horticultural crops is very poor. Besides, reasons for low adoption of horticultural crops is unawareness and negligible independent involvement of farm women in horticultural production system. The farm women totally depend on their husbands and elder men of their family. They cannot take any decision in farming without consulting husbands or elder members of family, while majority of agricultural/horticultural operation are carried out by female partners of the farmers. The past social studies reveal that female partners do more work than male in farming, specially in different agri-horti cropping system in upland regions. In upland and hilly areas unemployment and food security are typical problems. Therefore, male members go here and there in search of employment and earning money to sustain their livelihood and female members of the family take care of farming system including horticultural crop production. Hence, there is need to create awareness, knowledge among farm women about horticultural and employment them for greening upland.

Empowering Farm Women for Greening the Upland: There is ample scope of horticultural development in upland regions and it is crucial need of the regions. Majority of the male members of the farming families go elsewhere in search of employment and earning money. In such condition female members of the farming families remain at house and take care of agri-horticulture production activities/operation, hence, only female partners of the farming families are real and actual farmers in upland regions.

However, in majority of the farm women are
unemployed or under employed. They have to live according to established customs, traditions, ethos, edos and culture of the society. They cannot take any decision independently. They have to follow the instruction of their husbands or elder person of the family. They do not own land, water resources, seeds, money and other horticultural inputs. Therefore, they cannot use their fields.

As swami Vivekananda said “Just as a bird could not fly with only one wing, a nation would not march forward if women are left behind.” Mahatma Gandhi also said “Women is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental and physical capacities ” hence to exploit full mental and physical potential of upland farm women to greening upland through horticultural crop production, the upland farm women should be empowered to achieve following goals/objectives.

- To involve and connect farm women with main stream of horticultural development particularly, in upland region.
- To acknowledge farm women with their power, potential and influence.
- To make farm women economically self sufficient.
- To motivate them for adoption of horticultural crops.
- To improve their social states and honour.
- To educate and train them to become and self-reliant.
- To create awareness, knowledge and skills among them about advocated innovative horticultural technologies, specially, for upland and hilly regions.
- To increase participation of farm women in decision making and farm management
- To create self-employment and entrepreneurial opportunities among upland farm women through horticultural development.
- To make them resourceful and potential fruit and vegetable producers of the country
- To maintain the nutritional and food security in upland areas.
- To harness insight, vision, knowledge, ideas, and working potential of farm women.
- To promote value-addition in horticulture.
- To harnessing production potential of subtropical horticultural crops.
- To create techno-economic revolution in horticulture.
- To promote export potential of horticultural products
- To make best utilization of natural resources in upland regions.
- To maintain ecological balance in upland regions.
- To promote overall socio-economic development of upland and hilly regions.
- To convert upland into green to evergreen.

Impediments in empowering the farm women: There are several impediments which hinder progress of empowerment of farm women for greening upland lead regions through horticultural crop production and resource management paradigms.

Poverty and illiteracy: Upland and resource poor, occurrence of drought and famines are very regular features of the regions. These lead to cronic poverty, particularly amongst tribal women group of the society. The literacy rate among women is also very low. For example, farm women’s literacy level among major district of Jharkhand state Godda Pakur and Sahibganj are less then 20%. Thus, poverty and low education status of women in upland and hilly regions are major impediments in empowering farm women.

No Self- decision Making Power: Not only in hilly region but also throughout the country, the majority of the farm women do not have the power to take decision for adoption and production of any crop including horticultural crops. They depend exclusively on their husbands/ elder male person of the family. The women are treated as farm labourers. Thus, farm women cannot participate in decision-making of crop production system due to male dominated family system, which leads to backwardness of farm women.

Traditional Belief and Folkways: The traditional belief, folkways, social ethos and ad also play a vital role in backwardness and low status of farm women. Our cultural heritages, social rule and superstitions have provided the higher status to male than female. The participation and leadership of women in any decision making is not considered as a good sign in rural families. Thus, women, particularly, farm women are avoided in socio-economic decision making of the family or society.

Resistance to Social Changes: The social change involve change in existing structure or function of society. The rural societies have their deep faith in well established traditional norms and values. They do not want to change or resist change. The societies have defined functions of male and female separately. The
majority of the decisions related to household are taken by male members of the family as norms and customs of society indicated. Thus, the society does not allow for participations in decision making (Singh, 1997).

Limited Access to Resources (Land): Access to assets is single most urgent need for upliftment women in general and farm women in particular. Though, India legislation permits equal rights of man and women, Women still does not have ownership on land and pattas are allotted in their husband’s name. Therefore, concerted efforts are needed to promote women access to resources.

Limited Access to Inputs and credit : Though women make substantial contribution to horticultural development, their access to most crucial input ‘credit’ is limited. Since, they are not land owners, the credit flow generally goes in the name of the male members (i.e. owners ). The women do not have any properties also in their names that is why they neither can purchase horticultural inputs themselves nor can sell any horticultural produce/input independently.

Inadequate Technical Competency: Though women are involved in almost all horticultural/ agricultural operations, yet, they have inadequate technical competency due to their limited exposure to outside world. This has compelled them to follow age old practices with low efficiency.

Poor Involvement in Research and Extension Work: The India has a very intensive and extensive well developed agricultural research and extension system. But participations of women in this system is negligible. The women are more sincere and hard workers. Hence, there is urgent need of increasing participations of women in horticultural research and extension programmes.

Household Responsibilities and Farm Drudery: Household responsibilities and overloaded farm drugerries also play a vital role in backwardness of farm women. The 90% household works are managed by farm women. Beside these, more than 60% agricultural/ horticultural operations are carried out by female members. In such conditions, the upliftment of farm women is becoming a very challenging and difficult task.

Limited Exposure to Mass Media : Transfer of technology approach which mainly includes mass media is also not paying due attention towards dissemination of adequate and timely agricultural information to farm women. At present coverage of agricultural / horticultural programmes on Doordarshan in only 12% of the total time (in Hindi), out of which, the programme related to women are negligible. A few programme which are meant for women are telecast at a time not suitable for them. The majority of the farm women do not have Television, Radio, and other means of communication. The majority of the women are illiterate, can neither read nor write. Thus, means of the mass media are helpless in empowering the farm women.

Negligible participation of Farm Women in Horticultural Development Programmes: It has been observed that farm women are not involved in horticultural development programmes. Therefore, They do not have any idea, knowledge and interest in these programme.

Untapped Women’s Potential : Though women have many inherent capacities like high determination, séance of responsibility, better managerial ability , yet their potential has not been identified by extension personnel. They are ignored and considered as inferior in knowledge, skill and ability. In ancient times, only women carried out the different operations and management works of the agricultural/ horticultural. Thus, women are mother of agricultural development.

Lack of Organization/ Societies for Upliftment of Farm Women: Farm women provide food for all but nobody provide them support for their upliftment and welfare. There is no organization/ society which is fully dedicated to guide them, to help them and appreciate them.

Limited Access to Independent Social participations: The farm women are the poorest and innocent group of the Indian society. They are most bounded and dependent. They can not participate independently in social work /activities. They neither can meet nor can go any where without prior the permission of elder member of the family or their husbands.

Psychological Fear and Inferiority Complex : The farm women have several kinds of psychological fear, hesitation and inferiority complex in their mind. They think themselves as feeble and poor, the men are more intelligent and no more then us. We can not does men can ? We are uneducated and we do not know much more? The male persons are superior to us ? Such kind of thinking of farm women leads to underdevelopment and backwardness among them.

Strategic Intervention to Empowering Farm Women: The strategic interventions for empowering farm women
for greening uplands through horticultural crop production may be divided in short term, and long term strategic interventions. These interventions may be of paramount importance for empowering farmwomen, particularly, in uplands amongst these strategic interventions, some important ones are mentioned.

**Short-term Strategic Interventions:**
- Emphasis in this phase is to fulfill their basic needs.
- Rapport building with farm women by econo-technocrats
- Popularizing horticultural technologies among farm women
- Creating awareness and knowledge and confidence
- Family planning programmes and health education
- Make ready the farm women for direct and independent involvement in horticultural development programmes
- Nutrition programme for mother and children
- Programme to eradicate gender among rural societies
- Portable water and appropriate fuel for cooking
- Access to input resources for horticultural crop production
- Access to household technology
- Introduction and training on horticultural crop technologies
- Programmes for income generation in short term

**Long-term Strategic Interventions:** Social and political mainstream are important components of empowerment of farm women at high level. Some strategies which can be applied at this phase are as follows.

**Increasing Literacy of Farm Women:** Literacy programme is very important in the process of women’s empowerment. It is a base for any educational programme. It enables farm women to acquire new knowledge and technology required for improving and developing their tasks in all fields. Literacy helps farm women to bring up their children and carry out responsibility of motherhood.

**Efficient Extension Approaches:** Farm women would benefit immensely from modern scientific knowledge, technology and skills. Till recent times, horticultural policies and programme in most developing countries have generally ignored women’s need and concerns as farmers. Only over the last decade, there has been increasing awareness of the extent and significance of women’s activities in horticultural. Most developing countries have now started trainings for farm women to upgrade their knowledge, attitude and skill to adopt horticultural new technologies.

- The following extension educational approaches may be helpful and effective in empowering farm women.
- Mobile courses instead of farmer’s training centre
- Utilization of educated girls and widows as female extension worker
- Education of women through negotiation between husband and wife or inter spouse communication.
- Tours and visits organized women’s group or organization (cooperatives etc.)
- Set up separately organization for farm women
- Encourage extension agents to work with women’s group
- Post female extensionists in pairs (husband and wife as extension workers)
- Encourage and support establishment of women local groups and organizations to take up responsibility of communicating new science and technology to farm women

**Promoting Alternative Source of Employment and Income:**
- Farming on marginal piece of land
- Encouraging livestock raising with horticultural crops. Creating horti- livestock based value-addition entrepreneurship for farm women
- Collection of natural produces available in localities
- Encouraging participatory agri-business activities for among farm women.
- Manufacturing at home or in sheds.
- Hawking, vending, trading.
- Appropriate strategies for utilization of extra hours of farm women.

One of the important means of achieving empowerment in status of women is to promote additional avenues for employment.

**Ownership and control over Resources:** They need to have control over limited resources, like land and livestock, so that they could make decisions and implement them in the way required. It well thus help to take responsibility in family and local group activities.

**Access to Co-operatives and Local Women’s Organisation:** Collectivization has been recognized as a tenant of women’s empowerment. It has been defined
as a process of bringing a group of women together at a base to become an integral part of an economic activity. Some impact of collectivization on farm women are as follows.

- Bring about identities the group.
- Facilitating their responsibilities through sharing their information, knowledge, experience –skills, time farmer’s spaces and other resources like money.

Other Strategies and Actions for Empowering Farm Women:

- Increasing their access to new information, credit, labour markets and growing sector of economy.
- Furthering their social and political participation at all levels and overcoming structural barriers to exploit women’s full potential.
- Increasing Government assistance for family unit (child care, health care, F.P.P)
- Facilitating establishment of organizational structures like farm women’s group and organizing them gender sensitivity at all level of planning and implementation of development programmes.
- Increase economic self- sufficiency of women through self- employment.
- Increase their power of negotiation about redistribution of power resources within households, civil society and state.
- Strengthening educational and training programmes.
- Increasing their access to an appropriate technology that can reduce the work burden.
- Encourage direct involvement of farm women in horticultural programming, planning and management.
- Effective collaboration with community organisations.
- Organizing and strengthening women’s groups Sensitisation and advocacy for gender just society.
- Support for increasing farm women’s income and employment.
- Open training –cum –employment –cum – production centre at local level.
- Strengthening supporting services for working farm women.
- Explaining farm women, economic and other benefits of horticultural crops production.
- Explaining them correct method of cultivation and benefit from timely completion of essential operations.

CONCLUSION

Gender sensitivity and systematic approach are two important factors for rural development programme targeted either at women or both women and men. Empowerment is a complicated process, which comprises short-term and long term strategies. Under each strategy, several projects need to be formulated and carried out seriously. The process of farm women’s empowerment is conceptualized in terms of personal assertions confidence and ability to project themselves as women, attaining economic independence, ownership of productive assets, ability to handle capital and assets and provide leadership in both women and community related issues at all levels. All strategies suggested in this article if followed properly, will definitely help in empowering farm women leading into greening upland of Jharkhand state.