

## EMPOWERING WOMEN FARMERS

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**A**s an agrarian economy, India derives 18 per cent of its GDP from the agriculture sector. Almost 50 per cent of the national workforce is directly or indirectly employed in this sector. It is a sector which is indispensable to not only the economy of the nation as it plays a major role in the employment generation and revenue from foreign exchange but it also ensures food security to India's large population. The production of food grain during the crop year 2017-18 alone was estimated to be at a whopping 284.83 million tonnes. Ushering in of the Green Revolution in 1960s and its subsequent spread brought with itself an array of developmental transformations in the agriculture sector. From providing the High Yielding Variety of crops to improved and more streamlined irrigation facilities along with mechanised farming, Green Revolution enhanced agricultural productivity and made way for India to become self-reliant in terms of food production. The infrastructural developments in the rural regions as well as financial services provided in form of price support gave a fillip to agricultural productivity as a result of which India in the present

time is not only self-sufficient in food production but also occupies the seventh position as the net exporter of agri-products worldwide.

Women's role in agriculture has been verily vital in the production, processing and distribution sector. Domestically, women play an important role in the management and rearing of livestock and other activities like fodder collection, post-harvest activities and farm cleaning activities. According to the 2011 Census, the total number of female workers engaged in agricultural activities in India stood at 65 per cent, with 30.3 per cent of the total cultivators and 42.6 per cent of total agricultural labourers being women. Furthermore, the Agriculture Census conducted every five years by the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, established that the 12.78 per cent of the female operational holdings in agriculture during the year 2010-11 have increased to 13.78 per cent during 2015-16. This shows that women participation in the organised agricultural sector is increasing and

therefore, support and thrust on the part of the government becomes quite necessary to empower them and provide them with further opportunities to encourage their larger involvement. The DAC&FW dedicatedly implements farmer welfare programmes and schemes. The Women Component Plan requires the state governments to allocate 30 per cent of the funds for welfare initiatives catering to the women farmers. In the rural areas, education and awareness is the fundamental concern that has to be primarily addressed in order to ensure successful implementation of any government policy or scheme. In this respect, it becomes extremely important to enlighten women about the various opportunities that lie ahead of them and to educate them about the technical as well as the financial aspect of farming and other agricultural activities so that they are empowered in a holistic manner.

The glaring dependency of women on the primary sector impels for a need for creating and implementing schemes, programmes etc. for their welfare and development. There have been myriad efforts to bolster women's role in agricultural activities. For instance, the foregrounding, recognizing and mainstreaming of women's role in agriculture as encapsulated within 'The National Policy on Farmers', 2007. It underlined the importance of incorporating 'gender issues' within the agricultural development agenda. The DAC&FW lays emphasis on the 'mainstreaming of gender concerns in agriculture' vis-à-vis the adjoining of 'pro-women initiatives' in various schemes or programmes/missions by allotting at least 30 per cent of benefits and resources for women under all such developmental initiatives.

With a view of creating a women sensitisation module encompassing 'pro woman initiatives' consisting of a compendium of special provisions and a set of assistance that women agriculturists can claim under various on-going missions and schemes, the National Gender Resource Centre in Agriculture (NGRCA) was setup in the DAC&FW in 2005–06. The "Women Farmer Friendly Handbook" enumerates the special provisions that empower women in multifarious ways, some of them include –

1. **Support for Women Food Security Groups (FSGs)** Women farmer groups are recognised under ATMA Cafeteria as a compulsory activity at Rs. 0.10 lakh per group/year for attaining food security at the domestic or the household level, by setting up of kitchen garden, promoting off-farm activities with cattle (activities that otherwise evade the GDP computation).

2. **Procurement of Agricultural Machinery & Equipments (Subsidy Pattern)** Women farmers can avail benefits in tandem with, or over and above the benefits offered to men. For purchasing an essential agricultural equipment, say, tractor (up to 20 PTO HP), women get additional benefits, subsidies and cost reduction, for instance, 35 per cent of the subsidy to the total cost, as compared with 25 per cent of cost for men.
3. **Representation of Women Farmers** It is imperative for women farmers to be included in the decision making bodies – the State, District, Block Farmer Advisory Committees, ATMA governing committees etc.
4. **Promoting Women Groups** Women's groups, Cooperatives, Self Help Groups (SHGs) to be incorporated by the States for the distribution of Certified Seeds (under the aegis of the National Mission on Oilseeds & Oil Palm (NMOOP)).
5. **Integrated Scheme for Agricultural Marketing (ISAM)** Women are endowed with subsidies for storage infrastructure that includes a 33.33 per cent subsidy (on capital cost) for women as compared to 25 per cent for men.
6. **Agricultural Insurance** Safeguarding coverage of women farmers along with a budget allocation and utilization in accordance with the population proportion.

Being mindful of the crucial role that women play in agriculture industry, the Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Ministry established Indian Council of Agricultural Research, ICAR, a Central Institute for Women in Agriculture in Bhubaneshwar, Odisha in the year 1996. The Institute has been undertaking numerous studies on gender implications in the agricultural sector and developing women-centred technology. The condition of women in the unorganised farming sector is also being improved through various research projects of this Institute that mainly cater to the provision of improved



agricultural tools to women so as to reduce the toil they have to put into farm operational activities. It is also working to mobilise the Self-Help Groups with a view to increase the income generation of female participants in agriculture and animal husbandry. Technology has become a crucial part of policy making when it comes to information dissemination and creation of a far-reaching knowledge base. The Institute develops softwares and interfaces to facilitate mass media communication and carries out outreach programmes for educating and empowering rural women. A gender knowledge portal, displaying all the relevant data and information related to women farmers has also been created. With the aim to fortify agricultural research and enhance agricultural productivity to bolster farm income, ICAR has initiated the All India Co-ordinated Research Project (AICRP). Its Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) have successfully trained about 3.1 lakh women agriculturists and besides this, one female scientist in every Kendra has been made mandatory in 668 KVKs across the country. As per the current status, 8.62 lakh women have been benefitted in total in 2017-18. To give an impetus to the research endeavours in the agricultural sector and attend to the gender-based participation in the research and development activities, women agriculturists are provided with ample opportunities to take active part in various programmes conducted by the KVKs like agricultural demo and frontline demonstration. There is also a provision under the National Food Security Mission (NFSM) that provides training based on cropping system to farmers including the SC, ST and women farmers to generate awareness on augmented technology for increasing crop production and yield.

To ensure that women in the agricultural sphere are kept abreast with the latest technological and farm developments, the central government is making special provisions for women under various schemes and policies such as Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana self-employment schemes, organic farming, etc. Acknowledging the prevailing gender disparity in terms of work hours and wages, the Agricultural Ministry has come up with several measures to improve the status of women in the mainstream agricultural sector like focusing on women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in order to connect women to micro-credit via capacity-building activities, ensuring adequate representation of women in decision and policy making bodies, etc. In addition to this, 15th October of every year was marked as the Women Farmer's Day by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare in the year 2016.

Women play an influential role in the framing and sustenance of the familial as well as societal structure. More often than not, their contributions go unnoticed and potential remains unharnessed in the mainstream sectors of the economy. Empowerment for women in an all-round manner can only come about when women are educated about their health, social well-being, financial standing and political partaking. As far as the agricultural sector is concerned, women's role has been well acknowledged. According to the Economic Survey of 2017-18, "with growing rural to urban migration by men, there is 'feminisation' of agriculture sector, with increasing number of women in multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs, and labourers." Even globally women are playing an important role in matters of food security and preserving agro-diversity. The survey rightly suggests for adopting "gender specific interventions" in agriculture to "increase productivity" and enhancing "agricultural value chain". Accordingly, all the necessary measures to provide technical, social as well as financial assistance have been effectively introduced by the government. Great emphasis is being laid on making women self-sufficient and their skill-development by means of various training and demonstration programmes organised consistently from time to time. Women in the agricultural sector have come a long way and an increased participation with whole-hearted practical implementation of the training skills received is the way forward for them. Numerous initiatives and welfare schemes are in the pipeline at the government's end which would further prop up the participation and growth of women workforce in the agricultural sector.

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In Kurukshetra August 2019 issue, an article titled Union Budget 2019-20: Towards a Healthy India published on page no. 42 was jointly written by Shri. Alok Kumar and Ms. Urvashi Prasad. The co-writer name was not published by mistake. We regret the same.