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**AN ANALYSIS UPON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN
AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT: WOMEN
EMPOWERMENT IN AGRARIAN SOCIETIES**

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An Analysis upon the Role of Women in Agriculture Development: Women Empowerment in Agrarian Societies

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Abstract – Agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. But the sector is underperforming in many countries in part because women, who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity. In this paper we draw on the available empirical evidence to study in which areas and to what degree women participate in agriculture. The contribution of women to agricultural is significant but it is impossible to verify empirically the share produced by women. Women's participation in rural labour markets varies considerably across regions, but invariably women are over represented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work, and the available evidence suggests that women are often paid less than men, for the same work.

In this study area maximum no of women laborers are illiterate with no formal educational status which directly informed their participation in agricultural production. Women participation in rural labor markets varies considerably across regions, but invariably women are over represented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work, and the available evidence suggests that women are often paid less than men for the same work. This paper re-affirms that women make essential contributions to agriculture and rural enterprises across the study area as well as developing world.

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INTRODUCTION

The international development community has recognized that agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor.³ But the agricultural sector in many developing countries is underperforming, in part because women, who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources. Efforts by national governments and the international community to achieve their goals for agricultural development, economic growth and food security will be strengthened and accelerated if they build on the contributions that women make and take steps to alleviate these constraints.

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing

agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as "economically active employment" in national accounts but they are essential to the well-being of rural households.

The agricultural sector is the largest employer of women. According to official statistics (National Sample Survey [NSS] of 2004-05), women make up 32 per cent of the total workforce in the Indian economy. Majority of the female workforce (84 per cent) works in rural India. A very large share (73 per cent) of this female workforce toils in the agricultural sector, mostly (96 per cent) in rural areas. These numbers alone would provide justification for addressing women workers in policy. But the actual numbers are higher. It is now well established that women workers, particularly in the primary sector, are underestimated by official data systems due to difficulties in measuring employment in the informal, unorganized and home-based segments in which they predominate. Further, post-liberalization, women's participation in agriculture has been growing relative to men. This not only implies increased

dependence of women on agriculture but the converse as well: women have a crucial role in the future of this sector.

Beyond numbers, the following facts about women agricultural workers provide a compelling case for expressly addressing women in agricultural policy. First, women are involved in almost all agricultural activities. Second, their contribution to household survival and food security is critical, especially at a time when agriculture is in distress. Third, they operate under severe limitations due to their subordinate position in society and the market. This paper sets out to provide a description of the current role, position and problems of women in agriculture with a view to exploring policy options that will enhance women's choices and benefits from work.

The advent of settled life happened with the beginning of agriculture when people started cultivating food for their livelihood. Agriculture is the vertical backbone of the country. Major part of the country's population earns its livelihood from agriculture. Our country has a wide and very old setting of agriculture of about 10 thousand years. At present in terms of agriculture production the country holds second position across the world. The agricultural production in India encompasses field crops, fruit crop, plantation crop, livestock, forestry, fishery etc. So overall it is a huge industry which recruits or engages 52 % of overall manpower of India. The rural population of our country is mostly dependent on agricultural activity. Despite of the fact that there has been steady slump in the contribution of agriculture in country's GDP, Indian agriculture continues to remain the leading industry in the country contributing vastly in the socioeconomic growth of India. States like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar and West Bengal are the leading states in terms of agricultural contribution of the country followed by the rest. Thus agriculture in India is the key industry and in recent times with implementation and initiatives of various government policies, NGO's and private agencies immense growth is recorded in this industry. The scenario of agriculture has completely changed with change in time but from centuries one thing that didn't change is the visualization of women as key labour in this industry. Agriculture sector as a whole has developed and emerged immensely with the infusion of science and technology. But this latest emergence is not capable of plummeting the ignorance of women labour as an integral part of this industry. In developing countries like India, agriculture continues to absorb and employ 2/3rd of the female work force but fails to give them recognition of employed labour. The female labour force in developing nations still faces the oppressive status of being majorly responsible for family and household maintenance. In addition to that their contribution of being a agriculture labour is suppressed under the status of family labour who work in farm in addition to her regular household chores. These problems of the rural women are further accentuated by the tribulations of illiteracy, underdevelopment, unemployment and

poverty. Despite of the major productive women labor force in agriculture their needs and problems are somewhat ignored by the rural development initiatives. The multitasking potentiality of female labour bought significant propositions for agricultural productivity, rural production, economic vitality, household food security, family health, family economic security and welfare.

Many of the systematic studies identify the trends of working female labour in agriculture. Empirical studies were conducted and explained on gender roles and gender analysis. This piece of research will further highlight the trend of female participation in agriculture across various Indian states. Efforts were put to collate and categorize the states of identical behaviour in Indian agriculture by hierarchical clustering of economically active female in agriculture.

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO AGRICULTURAL

Women play an indispensable role in farming and in improving the quality of life in rural areas. However, their contributions often remain concealed due to some social barriers and gender bias. Even government programmes often fail to focus on women in agriculture. This undermines the potential benefits from programmes, especially those related to food production, household income improvements, nutrition, literacy, poverty alleviation and population control. Equitable access for rural women to educational facilities would certainly improve their performance and liberate them from their marginalised status in the society. Other areas where women's potential could be effectively harnessed are agricultural extension, farming systems development, land reform and rural welfare. Landmark improvements have been recorded in such cases as the extension of institutional credit and domestic water supplies where women's potential have been consciously tapped.

Socio-economic goals of productivity, equity and environment stability are closely woven around the agriculture sector policies and new dimensions in programmes implemented are already emerging as new values. Regardless of the level of development achieved by the respective economies, women play a pivotal role in agriculture and in rural development in most countries of the Asia-Pacific Region.

Asia-Pacific region had witnessed spectacular development in crop yields which even surpassed the population growth rate in the past decade. However, pockets of hunger remain when landless or small farm rural population lack economic access to food because of a lack of remunerative non-farm employment in rural areas, where 80% of Asia-Pacific's 400 million poor live. It has also been suggested that with the acceleration of crop-diversification programmes and the transformation of agriculture to commercial production levels, women's lot had been even further worsened by the addition of new burdens which they

have to shoulder in order to realise profits in farm operations.

Rural women who are obliged to attend to all the household chores, children's welfare, nutrition and family cohesion along with farm work, are desperately driven to adopt a survival strategy to save the family food security from total collapse. Rural poverty has increased in the region particularly for farmers as priority has been accorded to the industrial and service sectors: this is both the cause and an effect of rural-urban migration leading to the "feminization of farming". Thus the numbers and the proportion of rural women among the absolutely poor and destitute, currently around 60%, is expected to increase to 65 to 70% by the year 2000.

In spite of social, political and economic constraints, women farmers have proved extremely resourceful and hardworking in their attempt to ensure household food security. Social constraints place barriers around their access to scientific and technological information. Lack of collateral denies them access to agricultural credit.

Culture or traditions accord membership of cooperatives only to heads of households – usually a man. Many rural women, even in highly mechanized farming systems such as the Republic of Korea and Japan would have agriculture for work in other sectors if choices were available.

After some decades of development, global problems and issues concerning environment, women in development, and poverty have reappeared. All these have emerged in rural communities and threatening their sustainability. Rural communities with norms developed for managing resources are important for the stability of community life. Gender-oriented rural development programmes which focus on role of women to guarantee the stability of life provide a sound basis for integrated development of the quality of life.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES

Women are represented in various forms and in various types of cooperatives in the Region. In most of the South-Asian countries women membership in mixed membership cooperatives is generally lower as compared with those from other countries in the Region. In societies where culture restricts women's membership in cooperatives, women-only cooperatives proliferate. It is in women-only cooperatives that women feel freer and less restricted in their participation in cooperatives. In countries like India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, women comprise just 7.5% as compared with men (92.5%) of the total membership. In Malaysia it is

around 30.6%. In many of the Asian countries women's membership is low [ranging from 2 to 10.5%] in agricultural cooperatives. This reflects the age-old stereotype that men are the farmers and not the women, and the title of the farm property should be in the name of the man. This situation automatically prohibits women to be the members. Out of a total of 450,000 cooperatives with a total membership of 204.5 million in India, there were 8,171 women-only cooperatives with a total membership of 693,000. It is also known that the women-only cooperatives e.g., cooperative banks, consumer stores, fruits and vegetable vendors, have done exceedingly well and provided a whole range of services to their members. In India, with a view to involve women in the process of decision-making in local self-government bodies including cooperatives, a 33% representation has been instituted and in a number of states all boards of directors have women serving on them. There has also been a discussion to have a similar representation in state and national legislatures as well.

There are still some prevailing laws which place barriers for women's participation in agricultural cooperatives and/or farmers' associations, like land ownership and head of the household. In many societies the very women who need to organize to cooperate and prosper, lack the time for participation due to multiple work demands.

Cooperatives being people-centered movement had recognized these limitations place on women by the society and economic institutions. Experiments made in different parts of the world clearly indicate that women's participation in cooperatives and other local government bodies not only provides them an opportunity to articulate their problems but it also helps them to be an active partner in decision-making process.

The relationship between women and their cooperatives in the context of gender integration can be summarized as under:

- A cooperative being a social development agency should play an active role in advocating for gender equality;
- Since women have been active in development work, they should play central role in development;
- The cooperative can be a venue to improve women's social status and economic conditions; and
- Thus, cooperatives should promote women's empowerment by integrating gender

concerns and formulating a strategy that would address gender issues.

In terms of the ratio of membership of women in agricultural cooperatives, the percentage is rather low, but they have a strong influence on them – through the heads of the household. Certain obvious barriers restrict their direct and formal entry in agricultural cooperatives. Agricultural cooperatives, in present times, everywhere have come under dark clouds due to heavy competitions and pressures of open market economy systems. They are now expected to meet the challenges which they had never anticipated before. Their business methods remain traditional and they expect government support in the form of protection and subsidies. These are no longer available and will not be available in the near future. In several countries, agricultural cooperatives have either folded up or are under massive reorganization.

The challenges faced by agricultural cooperatives can be enumerated as under:

- Need to improve professional management skills of those who provide advisory or guidance services to cooperatives and of the managers and some key members of primary level cooperatives;
- Establishment of a marketing intelligence system within the Cooperative Movement to enable the farmer-producers follow market trends and plan their production and marketing strategies;
- Assured supply of farm inputs [quality seeds, chemical fertiliser, farm chemicals, credit and extension services];
- Establishment of business federations through cooperative clusters to undertake primary agro-processing marketing of local products and to cover financial requirements;
- Be aware of quality controls and standardization of farm products to be able to compete effectively in the open market;
- Participate in efforts to conserve natural resources which directly and indirectly, influence farm production and rural employment;
- Need for providing information to the farmers and farmers' organizations on the implications of restructuring, globalization and WTO agreements.

AGRARIAN SOCIETIES

As agrarian technology developed, the potential for substantial gains in per capita production arose as more sophisticated technology was put into farmers'

and artisans' hands. Gains in production per unit of land and per unit of human labor have somewhat different implications for culture core traits, The tragedy of agrarian societies is that this potential was not generally realized. A combination of exploitation by elites and population growth tended to erase any gains in well-being for most cultivators. Agrarian states do permit larger numbers of people to live, and some would count that as a gain itself.

Have agrarian societies really removed environmental constraints? Another important theme developed by Lenski and Lenski (1982) and others is that the variations among agrarian societies seems to have had less and less to do with environmental variation and more and more to do with technical and sociopolitical evolution. Humans seem to be winning more and more independence from direct environmental controls over human behavior through the culture core. You should be skeptical of this claim. It is true that some of the variation between societies living in different environments is reduced, but perhaps environmental effects are only being made internal to these larger and more complex societies rather than being eliminated. Agrarian societies are typically large in size and internal redistribution and external trade tend to reduce the society-wide impact of local environmental differences. Thus the neat geographical correlation between sociopolitical form, demography, and the like, nicely showing how culture core traits are connected to environment, is lost. However, the structure of economic life and even of political structure still strongly reflects environment, albeit through more complex causal pathways.

Our sample of agrarian societies is quite large, because so many of them have maintained written records, and have persisted until quite recently. Even today, poorer nations typically categorized as "Third World" or "Less Developed Countries" (LDCs) are generally agrarian societies, albeit with variable admixtures of industrial technology. Geertz (1965) gives a classic account of one such society, Indonesia. China, India, Peru, and many others retain much of the technology and other culture core features of agrarian societies.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN WORKERS

We have so far looked at the all-India picture and at women in general. However, women agricultural workers are far from homogeneous. Women workers with differentiated needs and problems

need to be distinguished while designing interventions. We now look at distribution of rural female agricultural workers based on age, class, caste and location (geographical as well as sub-sectoral) before discussing policy options.

Age composition –

The median age for male and female agricultural workers is 35 to 39 years. However, in terms of the proportion of agricultural workers in each age group, participation for males rises with age, albeit somewhat unevenly, peaking for the age class 55-59 years. For women, the pattern is different: a smoother, inverted 'U' with participation peaking at 40 to 44 years and falling thereafter. Data also reveals that younger males and females (35 to 39 years) select themselves for casual labour in agriculture apparently due to its high physical demands while there is a preponderance of women just past their prime (40-49 years) and older men (above 50 years) tending own farms. The majority of women workers (over 93 per cent) are currently married.

Work participation by class-

Here we look at two indicators of class, namely, land ownership and income.

Land ownership - NSS data on household land ownership reveals that work participation of both men and women decreases with increase in the size of household cultivated land. A larger proportion of women workers (28 per cent) belong to landless households compared to males (24 per cent). The majority (83 per cent) of female (and male) agricultural workers are concentrated in three classes: the landless, marginal and small farm households. The self-employed belong predominantly to the marginal and small farm households and the majority of casual workers hail from the landless and marginal farm households with little gender difference.

As regards individual ownership of land, there is no reliable data by gender. 16 Title to land generally rests with males in our patriarchal society. The implications of this are discussed in the following section.

Income- According to the Eleventh Plan calculations based on NSS 61st Round, the self-employed in agriculture and agricultural labour households constitute respectively 22 per cent and 41 per cent of the poor (Gol, 2008a). 17 These numbers are based on the official poverty line which, as the Plan document admits, is too low. Gender-wise calculations reveal that 85 per cent of poor female workers are in agriculture compared to 73 per cent of poor male workers. Women also experience poverty more intensely than men due to their inferior social status. Numerous studies have documented how they are the last to eat, consult health care personnel only as the last resort and give up education for work and reproduction, thus suffering greater deprivations than men.

Work participation across social groups -

The three social groups-Other Backward Classes (OBC), Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST)-together account for 81 per cent of female agricultural workers in India. The OBCs form the largest contingent (43 per cent) of female agricultural workers, followed by SCs (22 per cent), Others (19 per cent) and STs (16 per cent). As in the general population, female participation in agriculture exceeds that of the males across social groups. Amongst STs, 89.9 per cent of female workers are in agriculture while the gender gap in agricultural participation is highest amongst SCs (19 percentage points). Social mores regarding caste-based division of labour have a role to play in determining participation rates, although caste-wise specialization in different agricultural operations varies from place to place (see, for instance, Rajuladevi, 2000). As in the general population, a larger proportion of agricultural workers (male and female) are self-employed amongst STs and OBCs. However, in the case of SCs, 59 per cent of males and 55 per cent of female agricultural workers are casual labour, reflecting their poorer land holding status (more than 57 per cent of SCs do not have any land under cultivation compared to 42.8 per cent in the general population). SC/ST women are among the poorest in the country. Among social groups, SCs, STs and backward castes account for 80 per cent of the rural poor in 2004-05, considerably more than their share in the rural population. Educational attainment of women is lowest amongst STs (nearly 72 per cent are illiterate) followed by SCs (69 per cent) and OBCs (60.1 per cent). Only 16.6 per cent of STs are educated up to primary (17 per cent for SCs and 19 per cent for OBCs). In all, ST and SC women in agriculture are at the bottom of the economic ladder, with caste reinforcing gender differences.

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.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we collate the empirical evidence on women's roles in agriculture, setting the stage for subsequent analysis on gender differences in agriculture and the potential gains from removing these gender differences. The main findings are:

Women comprise about 43 percent of the global agricultural labour force and of that in developing countries, but this figure masks considerable variation across regions and within countries according age and social class. Women comprise half or more of the agricultural labour force in many African and Asian countries, but the share is much less in some.

Women have been the focus of attention of all international and national development programmes. Efforts have been directed at empowering them in all fields of activity. Special programmes have been instituted to improve their social and economic status through provision of education, employment, health-care and involvement in social and economic institutions, including cooperatives. Cooperative institutions and especially the agricultural cooperatives are the agencies which hold enormous potential for the development of women, and more particularly the rural women. Rural women are actively involved in the process of food production, processing and marketing. They often lack the legal status which prohibits them to have access to credit, education and technology. Cooperative institutions can help accelerate the process of development and participation of women in their organizational and business activities. Institutions like the International Cooperative Alliance [ICA] and the Institute for the Development of Agricultural Cooperation in Asia-Japan [IDACA] together with the support of other international organizations and national level institutions can develop and sponsor programmes which are aimed at improving the lot of rural women. In the past some efforts have been made through which member-organizations, cooperative and agricultural departments all over Asia and Africa have been requested to make special programmes for rural women and set aside budgets for their implementation. In some cases some good responses have been received.

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