

# Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture: Issues and Strategies

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## ABSTRACT

Gender mainstreaming in agriculture is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable rural development. Despite the significant role women play in agricultural production, they continue to face systemic barriers such as limited access to land, credit, extension services, technology, and decision-making platforms. These disparities hinder agricultural productivity and social equity. Gender mainstreaming involves the integration of gender perspectives at all levels of policy-making, planning, and implementation to ensure that both women and men benefit equally. This paper explores the key issues related to gender inequality in agriculture, including socio-cultural constraints, institutional biases, and data gaps. It also outlines strategic interventions such as gender-sensitive extension services, inclusive policy frameworks, capacity building, and the promotion of women's cooperatives and leadership. Addressing these challenges through targeted strategies not only empowers rural women but also enhances agricultural efficiency, food security, and community resilience.

**Keywords:** Gender Mainstreaming, Agriculture, Issues and Challenges

## INTRODUCTION

Nearly half of the world's farmers are women, and they comprise most of the agricultural workforce in developing countries. More than half of all the food on average is produced by women thus forming the economic backbone of the rural community. In contradiction, rural women's contribution to building social and economic capital remains concealed since they are invisible in plans and programs thereby denying them access to resources which could enhance their socio-economic contribution to society. Women receive only 1 % of all agricultural credit and own only 2% of the land, whereas only 5 % of all agricultural extension resources are directed towards them. The limits of poverty and marginalization mean that the inequitable access to resources exposes women to excessively expose to shocks such as floods, drought, illness and death.

Role of women in agriculture is generally determined

by a combination of factors (Sharma *et al.*, 2016). These include the extent and nature of agricultural labour performed, quantum of food produced, access to technology, decision making ability and access to institutions. It is beyond doubt that women make important contributions to agricultural and rural economies across all regions of the world, despite differing viewpoints. A comprehensive review on the role of women in agriculture was published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2011, on the exact contribution of women both in terms of magnitude and nature (Rathore and Joshi, 2019). Moreover, the share of women in unorganized and unskilled labour force is more than men that reinforces and regenerates another form of discrimination in terms of access to opportunities for skill development. This impacts their employability for skilled employment even in unorganized sector. Contribution of women to agricultural output is extremely significant, although difficult to quantify with accuracy. It has often been

**How to cite this Article:** Borah, Sayanika and Kalita, H.C. (2025). Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture: Issues and Strategies. *Internat. J. Appl. Home Sci.*, 12 (5 & 6) : 323-326.

claimed that women produce 60-80% of food in many parts of the world (Towards gender mainstreaming in Agriculture, 2023). However, assigning contributions to agricultural outputs by gender is challenging and tricky because in most agricultural households both men and women are involved in agricultural production. In India, there is no concept of man's plot or a woman's plot. The household, owns the plot. In addition to participation in agriculture, women spend considerable time in allied activities like livestock management, home gardening along with the responsibility of domestic and reproductive work (Government of India, 2016).

Agriculture is not just a livelihood generation activity but also a way of life for the rural communities. It encompasses a range of other associated activities such as animal husbandry, food processing and horticulture. Women make crucial contributions in agriculture and rural enterprises in all developing regions, as farmers, workers and entrepreneurs. Women work in agriculture as farmers either as unpaid workers on family farms and or as wage laborers on other farms and agricultural enterprises. They are involved in both crop and livestock production at subsistence and commercial levels. Despite varying patterns of participation, women's roles in agriculture remain critical both in terms of the quantity of their effort put in as well as the quality and nature of labor performed. It is estimated that across the world, two-thirds of poor livestock keepers, aggregating approximately 400 million, are women (Sachs, 1996). This figure masks the situation in developing and primarily agrarian economies, where it has crossed the 50% mark and is also increasing owing to various factors, such as distress migration of male population. In addition to contributing to various agriculture processes, women in most regions of the world share responsibility with men and children for caring of animals.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has continuously demonstrated within its work that gender equality is not simply a matter of human rights, but is key to eliminating poverty and hunger. It is only by closing the gender gap that sustainable agriculture and rural development can reach their full potential (FAO, 2011).

Gender mainstreaming is the process of ensuring that women and men have equal access and control over resources, development benefits and decision-making, at all stages of the development process (Manyire and Apekey, 2013).

### **Why is gender mainstreaming important or needed?:**

Researches have proved that gender inequalities exist in most societies and incur direct costs. Public policies are mostly formulated on the basis of need and requirement of the dominating group that is dictated by patriarchy, while excluding the needs of the second gender. The movement on women's rights, having women in decision-making, with ensuring the human rights of the second gender at all spheres of development and paying emphasis on gender studies and gender – disaggregated data, have all led to revealing the fact that public programmes and policies often did not consider differing needs and situations of women in particular. It's quite evident that the public decisions regarding programmes, services and policies, which do not consider the needs, situations and issues of all the ultimate users may lead to solutions which are mostly inappropriate and probably lead to inadequate fund allocation in public spheres. So, gender mainstreaming is a strategy which curbs all sorts of exclusion aiming at integrating the need of both the genders equally. It also has its roots underlying the fact that women do not belong to a "vulnerable group", rather they represent almost 50% of the population. It is reiterated that gender mainstreaming is a strategy which ensures judicious allocation of resources for the well-being of both the genders, thus building a just and socially sustainable society.

### **Gender Issues in Agriculture : Over-burden of Work:**

Rural women are much more over-burdened than men owing to their multiple- occupations. Researches on women in agriculture have revealed that on an average women work for 15-16 hours a day. Studies further point out that farm activities, which are time and labour intensive, monotonous, repetitive and more drudgery prone, are generally performed by women. Since these operations are done manually, they cause considerable physical and mental fatigue and health problems.

### **Impact of Technology:**

Some of the new agricultural technologies are reported to have affected farmwomen adversely. Green revolution had led to the dispossession of small women land-holders, who have been forced to join the ranks of wage earners. Wherever the new agricultural technology led to multiple cropping, the work load of women has

increased. While a number of tasks performed by males have been mechanized, the tasks usually allotted to women continue to be manual and suffer from drudgery. Even where improved techniques have been found for the women's activities, there is not sufficient access to training in such techniques.

### **Facilities and Support Services:**

There is rigidity for female labourers in terms of working hours, place and duration of work. Because of this, children are neglected and health of women is also adversely affected. Lack of adequate support services like child care services-creche, balwadi, adequate maternity and health care- lack of safe drinking water etc. further add to their problems

### **Development Bias:**

Despite the contribution of women in the production process, persistent bias of development planners in treating them primarily as consumers of social services rather than producers, kept them away from the development programmes in agriculture and allied sectors. Women suffer from a statistical purdah because of which their contribution is not recognized. They often have heavier workloads than men and bear virtually sole responsibility for family welfare and household management. However, they have limited control over productive resources. Gender discrimination, rooted in law and custom, is pervasive and impedes socio-economic development.

### **Constraints to Women's Access to Resources:**

Many of the constraints that rural women confront are like those all-resource poor farmers confront such as lack of access to land, credit, training, extension and marketing facilities. But, for social and economic reasons, women's constraints are even more pronounced and, in general, development interventions that seek to remove constraints for poor farmers do not reach women. Consequently, the development of technologies specifically tailored to women-specific occupations and the involvement of women in technology development and transfer have received inadequate attention from both scientific and administrative departments of governments.

### **Access to Land:**

Women's lack of access to land or insecure tenure

continues to be a major obstacle to increasing their contributions and benefits. When women have access to land, they often do not have secure tenancy and tend to have smaller and less productive plots in comparison with men. While land access is increasingly problematic for poor men and women, women's access has further restriction by inheritance laws and customs. Rural women-headed households are especially affected by land constraints.

### **Access to Credit:**

Women are better credit risks. In places where women are legally entitled to access to financial institutions, they face problems getting loans because they often belong to the poorest sector of the rural population. Rural financial institutions are also often hesitant to accept women clients because they, in an even greater proportion than men, cannot fulfil collateral requirements, are inexperienced borrowers, do not have access to extension and marketing services and cannot fulfill application requirements.

### **Access to Markets:**

Women engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishery tend to produce small quantities and have poor access to marketing boards and cooperatives. Therefore, women sell mainly to private traders and have low bargaining power. Institutions which promote women's group access to market should be strengthened. Successful examples are of SEWA, Gramin Bank, SHG Federations etc.

### **Research and Technology Development:**

Women only benefit from agricultural support programmes if the information, technology and methods imparted are relevant to their production activities. Agricultural research is generally very less oriented towards adapting technology to women's physical capabilities or towards addressing their tasks. Women's low productivity stems mainly from lack of appropriate technology.

### **Access to Extension and Training:**

Women farmers usually have been neglected in extension efforts. Recently, the need for innovating changes in extension programmes for women farmers is being felt. The Central Sector Scheme Women in Agriculture, which started on a pilot basis in 1993-94 in seven states, has shown encouraging results and was

expanded to a few other states. The need for capacity building and skill up-gradation of farmwomen is now receiving the priority it deserves. Special extension and technology dissemination programmes for women are being implemented.

### Efforts for Gender Mainstreaming:

First of all, try to have gender disaggregated data at all levels of R&D Efforts should be made towards employing more and more women scientists in agriculture. Designing of drudgery reducing implements for women. Opportunities should be given to women scientists to hold managerial positions. Capacity building of Women farmers in all those tasks they are interested in such as tractor driving, motor cycle driving, using combine, harvester etc.

### Conclusion:

Agriculture unarguably constitutes an integral part of development discourse in India. It is beyond doubt that agricultural growth in India is profoundly contingent on skills and capacity of farmers and agricultural labor force. There is however, an innate gender imbalance noted in this workforce. Women's participation in agriculture is a critical feature of agrarian economies of developing world. The contributions of women, the non-recognition of their role and limited decision making power, continues to be an issue of concern. Social and economic costs of ignoring this vital aspect of economy may counterbalance development gains for the nation.

If addressed well, gender mainstreaming is an approach which has a great potential for bringing in gender equality. Since gender mainstreaming is a process of change, every small step towards this approach counts but to have its integration in policy-making, we still have to make some more efforts and some more time is required for this change to occur. Wide acceptance has been experienced regarding the effectiveness of a two-way approach towards gender equality, involving specific measures for women's advancement, at the same time ensuring better policy making and efficient utilization of

resources, both human and non-human. The 2030 agenda of the United Nations for Sustainable Development includes a goal of on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (SDG 5), with gender-sensitive targets in rest of the 17 goals is a welcome step in this direction (UN Women, 2018).

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