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Gender Sensitization: A Step Towards Gender Inclusiveness

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ABSTRACT

Women across the world are engaged in farming in multifarious roles and contribute immensely to the agricultural production. However, given the marginalization of majority of women in farming, it is realized that their contributions are hardly acknowledged. Their productive capacities and access to resources are largely constrained by poor understanding of their issues and needs by administrators and prevailing socio cultural barriers. Studies suggest that gender is a key determinant in shaping these constraints. In India, participation of women in agriculture and allied sectors is on a rise and more women are expected to join the agricultural work force in the coming years. In such a backdrop, the recent developmental efforts tried to understand and fix the issues specific to gender with unique approaches. Gender sensitization is one such key approach which tries to build increased understanding and sensitivity of stakeholders towards issues of women in agriculture. Interventions under this approach include enhancing representation of women at various levels, targeted programmes to stimulate behavioural change and redesigning the institutional service delivery mechanisms. Promising approaches of this kind are crucial in agriculture sector to move further towards the end of inclusive development.

Key words: Farm women, gender, sensitivity, feminization, extension

1. Introduction

The intricate relationship between agriculture and women has been widely featured in the development discourse for long. Globally, more than 400 million women are engaged in farm work directly or indirectly. In other words, 42 per cent of economically active women are engaged in agriculture and they comprise about 43 per cent of the total workforce in agriculture (Dash and Srinath, 2013). In India, agriculture and allied sectors continue to be the most immediate avenues of employment and income for about 160 million rural women

who work as farmers, co-farmers, farm labourers and farm entrepreneurs (Oxfam 2017; Sadangi et al. 2009). It is estimated that about 65 per cent of rural women workers are engaged in agriculture as cultivators and agricultural labourers in the country as opposed to 49.8 per cent of male workers. In these capacities, women perform multiple tasks such as land preparation, sowing, transplantation, harvesting and rearing of animals. Most of these operations are labour intensive and not mechanized (Pachauri, 2019). Besides, they are engaged in off-farm domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, water and fuel collection and community activities. Shrinking remunerative opportunities in the farming sector has triggered migration of rural male folk to urban areas and also there is a shift in their job priorities to pursue employment in the rural non-farm sector in recent years. Since women did not feature predominantly in either of these trends, most of them are still engaged in agriculture, mostly as labourers and cultivators (Mehrotra, 2020). This argument is vindicated by the fact that the number of female agricultural labourers in India increased by 24 per cent between 2001 and 2011, even though 7.7 million farmers left farming during the corresponding period. During the period when up to 34 per cent of men in rural areas migrated in search of employment and better economic opportunities, the corresponding figure for rural women is merely 3.6 per cent. A recent study of National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) found that 55 per cent of employed women in India are working in the farm sector (MoSPI-PLFS, 2020) and their concentration is highest (28%) among small and marginal farmers. Active participation of women in agriculture is reported from most of the Indian states, except Kerala, Punjab and West Bengal where women are actively participating in non-agricultural activities (Ghosh and Ghosh 2014). As per the estimates of the International Labour Organization, an average employed Indian woman works 44.4 hours per week as against the developing country average of 35-36 hours (ILO 2018). However, rural women continue to face strong socio-cultural barriers and direct resistance from male members towards social and economic liberalization and independent decision making (DRWA 2014). The percentage distribution of female workers by broad industry division in India is depicted as Figure 1.

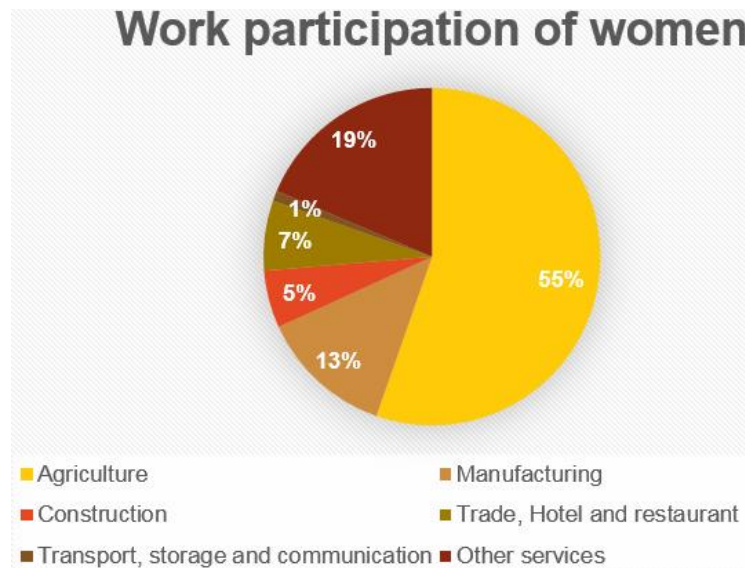


Fig. 1. Distribution of female workers (%) by broad industry division
(Source: NSSO PLFS Report, 2018-19)

1.1. Women in agriculture

Various studies report that the role of women in agriculture is not well acknowledged. Their increased work participation has hardly translated into equal employment opportunities or remuneration. Women employment in agriculture sector is mostly seasonal and provisional adding up to all sorts of uncertainties in their income cycle (Nirmala and Venkateswarlu, 2012; Mehorta, 2020). Discrimination of wages and working status still prevails for women agricultural labour (Ghosh and Ghosh, 2014). This is despite the role of women in providing family labour input in agriculture and allied sectors like livestock keeping where their contribution exceeds that of men (Tipilda and Kristjanson, 2008). These suggest that their involvement has not been given due place and their share in income from livestock is considered negligible (Dudi et al. 2019). These indicate that the gender gap in access to productive resources and services persists and the gender-specific constraints are undermining women's potential to contribute to sustainable agricultural growth. Moreover, it tend to perpetuate disparity in earnings for men and women (Dash and Srinath, 2013). This finds support in the study report of Oxfam (2019) which state that the gender wage gap is highest in Asia with women wages recorded at 34 per cent below men, even in conditions of equal qualification and work. Further, according to prevailing social norms, women are supposed to perform domestic work like child-rearing and collection of fuel and water collection. Prevalence of illiteracy, lack of

knowledge, improper training and less opportunities for skill development worsen their subdued existence (Majumder and Shah 2017). These constraints would make them deprived of the land rights, access to banking systems and leave them incompetent concerning decisions related to agricultural transactions. This further deepens their precarious socioeconomic status and exclusion from paid labour. The low rank of India in the Global Gender Gap report 2020 of World Economic Forum, also reflect the low levels of economic participation and opportunity for women in the country. A study report by CIAE (2013) indicates declining agricultural workforce in the coming years and predicts continuance of this trend till the wages offered in the farm sector are comparable to other sectors. Such a scenario would lead to mechanization of most of agricultural operations and brings the need to upskill and reskill the farm labourers. With the present trend of increasing share of women labourers in agriculture, it may be a daunting challenge to equip the female labour force to fit into the employment opportunities in the farm sector. The change in the agricultural labour force dynamics in the country is presented in the Figure 2.

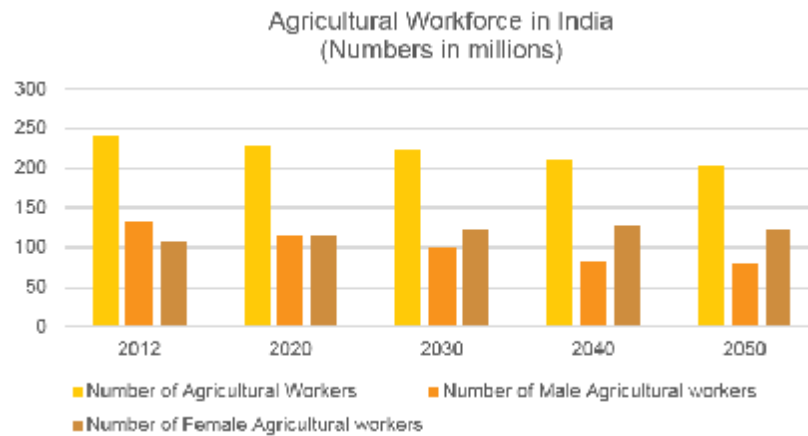


Fig. 2. Population dynamics of Indian Agricultural workforce over the years

Access of farm women to agricultural extension and advisory services (EAS) is another serious concern (CIWA 2018; Beevi et al. 2018). EAS and information on new technologies are almost exclusively directed to men, even though women are increasingly contributing to the farm work (Kelkar 2011). Though multitude of factors contribute to the current scenario, one of the prime causes is attributed to the lack of required degree of gender sensitivity of our extension system. Extension mostly fails in adopting gender-focused extension approaches and models for dissemination (CIWA 2018). Another significant cause emerges from the barriers created by the prevalent socio-cultural values and taboos that exist

between extension agents & the farm women (Sadangi et al. 2009). There are global reports from Ethiopia that reveal social norms restricting the male extension officials from interacting with women farmers (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011). Also the gendered perspectives cause differences in the extension needs of women and men as they are often involved in different activities (CRISP n.d).

Finally, there also arises the issue of whether women are recognized as farmers per se for availing the benefits of the extension services (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011). When extension officers do contact women, it is often to provide information and advice that pertains to women's household, rather than farming (Berger et al. 1984). Thus lack of awareness among male extension workers about specific gender-based realities of agricultural information access (Lamontagne-Godwin et al. 2019) deepens the marginalization of women. Moreover, reports suggest that women tend to be excluded further from the ambit of EAS with the digitalization of service delivery platforms.

These conditions of inequality may persist, if gender is not well integrated into the agricultural development projects. There are studies which argue that women are capable of bringing positive contributions to development outcomes when they are given the opportunity and resources (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011). It is in these pretexts, the gender sensitization issues in agriculture are explored in this chapter. The focus is on transformative approaches which question the long-held view of women's subordinate position in various socio-economic spheres and propounds for a gender-equitable society. Measures which advocate or reinforce better integration of women into agriculture are also discussed with the support of evidence from literature and review of case studies.

2. Gender sensitization

Gender sensitization is the process of making a person aware of the differential ways in which men and women will be affected by policies, programs, and its outcome (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011). It intends to change the stereotypic mindset of men and women, which considers both as unequal entities and prompts them to function in separate socio-economic space (Dash et al. 2008). The process intends to increase the sensitivity of people at large towards women and their issues and is considered as the primary step in recognizing gender equity and equality. It puts light into the role of women farmers and their differential needs in agriculture. As a result of sensitization, men is expected to share more responsibilities with women and actively back them in the pursuit of equality.

2.1. Gender sensitization in agriculture

Among various social identities, gender is one of the critical determinant in deciding the individual's relation with the society (Shrestha et al., 2020). It refers

to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of women and men (Holmes and Jones 2010). It has assumed greater significance in agriculture with the sweeping changes that is happening in terms of roles and technology use in recent years. Despite the spread of education and awareness, gender bias is still a glaring reality in our society, more particularly in rural areas. In agriculture it is manifested in myriads forms in almost all aspects of farming such as labour, control of resources in production to marketing causing marginalization of women (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011). These indicate that agriculture sector tend to reinforce a patriarchal ideology and a socio-cultural value system that keeps women bound to villages to perform domestic chores and agricultural work as argued by Mehrotra (2020). Though with the migration of men, women became de facto heads of many rural households, it has not resulted in their enhanced participation in decision making (Nelson et al. 2002). Further, access of men as well as their control over the productive resources is much higher than women in most of the farming systems (ICAR,2007). According to India Spend (2019), only 13 per cent of the women tillers owned their land. This lack of control on land resources has created serious impediment in EAS delivery as it is primarily targeted to farmers who are landowners and as such women continue to be secluded from the purview of extension agencies. This inequality has even pervaded into the competencies of women to deal with uncertainties related to climate change. Though women and men farmers are vulnerable to adverse impacts of climate change, women are less likely to act to reduce vulnerability by adopting climate-smart farming practices (Kristjanson et al. 2017). Women perceive greater gender inequality than men do and encourage the implementation of measures to increase awareness and address the problem (García-González et al. 2019). Without a deliberate challenge to gender relations, women farmers are not likely to benefit from EAS on par with their male counterparts (Ogawa 2004). Therefore, specific interventions are required to improve women's integration in agricultural activities by examining their social and economic condition. At the same time, these efforts must raise awareness about the contribution of women to farming as well as their other protective and household management roles among male members. Interventions for gender sensitization have been resorted as a means in various sectors including agriculture to highlight the role of women and stimulating actions for transformative changes. This include sensitization training, campaigns, workshops etc.

2.2. Process of gender sensitization

Gender sensitization aims to bring change in the thinking of individuals about the practices and approach towards gender issues. According to Dash et al (2008), in sensitization process individuals undergo the following definite stages of sequential changes:

- Perceptual change
- Recognition
- Accommodation and
- Action

Perceptual change: The first stage of the gender sensitization process involves changing the inherent mindset of men and women about their roles and gender division of labour in the society. Traditionally women are seen in the subordinate role and considered as a weak and unequal entity. This very assumption is questioned and scrutinized at this stage. As perceptual change sets in men start to realize that women are equally important in the society and have the capacity to make independent decisions at various levels.

Recognition: In the recognition phase the multifarious roles played by women in productive, reproductive and community management functions of family and society are brought to the fore. Generally, these roles are less recognized and appreciated by men. At this stage, men start to look into the positively endowed qualities of women. Interestingly, women will also start to realize their vital roles and contributions at different levels. Thus the role of women and the significance of their actions gains more visibility at this stage. Such an orientation would prompt a realignment in the gender relations.

Accommodation: This is an adjustment phase in which the barriers between men and women start to disintegrate. Men tend to understand the difficulties and issues faced by women with great empathy. Rather than overlooking or aggravating the differences with their counterparts, men at this stage would try to discuss and resolve the issues. In other words, men would try to rationalize their behaviour by shedding their ego to accommodate concerns of women. In this way gender relations would be improved by narrowing the difference between men and women and both will try to work in harmony.

Action: In this final stage, the changes will be materialized into action and would become more apparent. Men would become the main proponents in promoting the welfare of women and their efforts would be directed to improve gender equations at all levels. Sensitized persons would play the lead role in nurturing women's talents and helping them to check discrimination and to claim their status. Women at this stage would tend to act collectively to address their issues which are necessary for their empowerment.

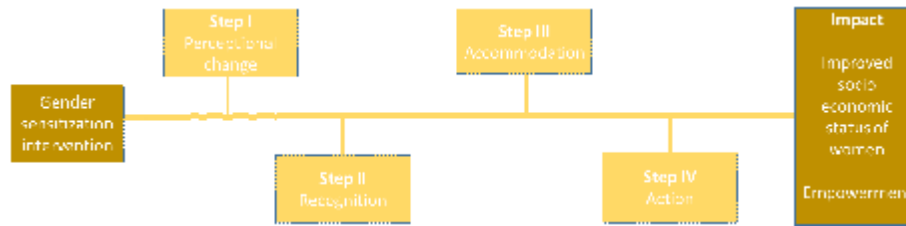


Fig. 3. Gender sensitization process

3. Promoting gender sensitization-Overview of some cases

Efforts to integrate the idea of gender sensitivity into the agricultural development interventions has been active from the last decade of twentieth century. The aim has been to redesign the service delivery mechanisms so as to improve the reach to women and increase the visibility of their multifarious roles. Acknowledging the growing role women play in India's key agricultural sector, policymakers has started paying attention to the gender aspects by incorporating gender component in most of its development programmes, increasingly. Economic Survey (2019) had highlighted increasing feminization of farm sector, while calling for inclusive transformative agricultural policy that aimed at gender-specific interventions to support the women farmers. These find reflected in the pro-women steps initiated by the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers' Welfare (DAC&FW). It has earmarked 30 per cent of its annual funds for women under its various major schemes /programmes. These schemes are also aimed at promoting collectivization of women to improve their access to resources and mandating measures to ensure women staff in various programmes.

Many development organizations have intensified their efforts to build gender sensitiveness into their programmes in recent years. A few successful cases reported from different parts of India that structured extension interventions in a gender-sensitive manner has been included.

Case I: The *Pashu Sakshi* (meaning friends of livestock) initiative under the National Rural Livelihood Mission to support the women farmers engaged in rearing of small livestock such as sheep, goat and pig. Through this community-led livestock extension and advisory service approach, rural women are equipped through technical training and support to take lead in generating demand for inputs and provide services to livestock farmers. By building their capacities, over 4712 *Pashu Sakhis* have been promoted in 16 Indian states reaching to over 2.5 lakh small livestock farmers daily (Kumar n.d). The intervention is an excellent example for providing the EAS in a gender-sensitive manner.

Case II: Digital Green, an NGO in India works with women-led self-help groups to produce and screen locally adapted agricultural extension videos. The chief

intention here is to increase women's participation in agricultural extension provision in contrast to the conventional extension approaches. Study reports suggest that the intervention is 10 times more effective for the money spent than the traditional approach on a cost per adoption basis (Gandhi et al 2009).

Case III: The interventions of State Rural Livelihood Mission (Kudumbashree), the network of 4.3 million women in Kerala, focuss on social and economic empowerment of women through collectives is another case worth mentioning. Kudumbashree organizes gender sensitization programmes to bring definite and conscious thinking and intervention of the staff and community members. The multifaceted strategic interventions include trainings for staff and community members, campaigns and thematic workshops. A gender sensitization module was also developed towards this purpose. The main objective is to integrate a gender perspective into its programmes to achieve gender equality (Thomas n.d).

Box-1: Meena Raju Manch- a unique initiative to promote gender sensitization among school children

The NGO, CORO was formed initially to propagate adult literacy in the slums of Mumbai. Later, it started working to promote the leadership of women in their community and empower them economically through entrepreneurship and self-help group-based activities. Gender sensitization is one of the areas in which the NGO works to make social change. Meena Raju Manch (MRM), a unique initiative of CORO aims to raise awareness about gender sensitization among students and teachers. The initiative launched in 2012, seeks to ensure that 'gender equality' is not just a book concept, but also a change in the behaviour. MRM sessions are based on different themes – including fair distribution of food and the need for equal nutrition amongst girls and boys. Gender sensitization campaigns are conducted in 25000 schools in Maharashtra in collaboration with UNICEF. The central idea is that, if correct messages about equity and equality are given to adolescents, we can surely expect the next generation to be more gender-sensitive and fair. Though the programme had a previous version, Meena Manch, it was restructured later to accommodate boys as well in the campaigns. When 'Meena-Raju Manch' is established, students take an oath of equality and swearing campaign. Further, children are made aware of the typified gender roles in their households through variety of PRA exercises. Through these activities, boys will be sensitized about the onerous tasks performed by their female counterparts and would be more accommodative in their behaviour.

4. Towards gender-sensitive extension advisory services (EAS)

A more gender-responsive agricultural system calls for a comprehensive look at the system. Actors of different stages, users of the technology, and needs that are to be addressed at each stage need to be delineated. The whole process from priority setting and implementation to evaluation and impact assessment need to be addressed. The most common approaches adopted to bring about better gender sensitization in extension organizations include organizing training programmes for gender staff, formation of women farmer collectives with micro-

credit assistance and conducting targeted interventions for them and designing women friendly tools and equipments (CRISP n.d). EAS should be aware of various social and cultural norms which restricts women's access to advisory services and redesign and deploy services to benefit them (Williams and Taron 2020). Creation of institutional structures to accommodate the voice of farm women in policy and decision making is imperative for making the sector more gender-sensitive.

Box-2: Developing a Gender-Sensitive Extension Model- CIWA Experience

Central Institute of Women in Agriculture (CIWA), Bhubaneswar had conducted a study on developing a gender-sensitive extension model by deploying Village Level Para Extension workers (VPEWs). A male and female VPEWs each were recruited for a village and were given capacity building trainings. Besides they were equipped to provide farm advisory services and conduct discussions, meetings, method and result demonstrations and organize Women Self Help Groups (WSHG). Their roles and responsibilities were aligned to meet the needs and issues of farm women. Institutional mechanisms were in place to monitor their performance regularly and to give necessary incentives. VPEWs could also mediate knowledge transfer from agricultural experts to these women including the farmers from marginalized communities. Outcomes suggested increased contact of these extension staff with women farmers, better knowledge exchange and technology dissemination and improved reach of advisory services. Similar experiences were also reported by the *Jeevika* intervention of the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Program. These field experiences reinforces the argument that such interventions are crucial in making the extension service delivery mechanisms more gender-sensitive.

In order to ensure that farm women get a fair deal at the hands of change agents, one of the remedial measures that needs to be undertaken is the induction of women staff. A sizeable number of well-trained women personnel in training and extension programmes of agricultural development agencies at all levels and more so at the grass-root level can ensure it (UN Women 2013). Extension interventions can make a better impact when they can leverage the network of female farmers than males, as demonstrated by many studies (Magnan et al. 2015). Moreover, design and development of ergonomic tools may help to lessen the burden of women farmers. Presently, barriers to adoption of technology range from its design to access to credit, land, and information to purchase, access, or use the technology (Jones 2019). The limited institutional capacity of the women should be strengthened to improve their access to production resources and technologies. Trainings and capacity building programmes may be specifically designed for farm women after considering their specific roles in each phase of the production process. Any training programme targeting rural women workers should be gender-friendly, given the patriarchal social norms governing women's mobility.

5. Emerging Trends

An overview of the discourse on gender-sensitive agriculture would suggest that the topic has assumed greater relevance among the development practitioners. Recently, many methodologies and tools are developed to promote gender responsiveness of the technologies and EAS delivery mechanisms. For instance, Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services (INGENAES) Technology Assessment Toolkit developed by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Feed the Future Programme helps in assessing gender sensitivity of agricultural technologies in terms of design, use and dissemination (Heinz 2018). Similarly, Food and Agriculture Organizations' (FAO) developed Gender in Rural Advisory Services Assessment Tool (GRAST), to improve the gender responsiveness of rural advisory services (FAO, 2016). The information generated by the tool can be used to design and deliver gender-sensitive rural advisory services. Similarly, FAO (2017) has developed a manual to develop capacities to address gender issues in rural advisory services. The manual intends to impart knowledge and tools to improve the understanding of how gender issues and provide participants with the skills to design and deliver participatory and gender-sensitive training themselves. In order to enable gender-sensitive policy and programme design and implementation to maximize the effectiveness of social protection, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) has developed a toolkit. Gendered vulnerability analysis is used to inform the design of gender-sensitive social protection (Holmes and Johns 2010). Further, women farmers are subjected to the vagaries of climate change to a greater extent. The tool, Climate Resilient Agricultural Module (CRAM) comprises a group of participatory research tools to design inclusive and gender-sensitive programs in climate-resilient agriculture. CRAM can also be used to identify opportunities for enhancing climate change adaptation for women and vulnerable groups (Douxchamps et al. 2017). Jafry and Sulaiman (2013) proposed the 'New Consultative Design Process' (NCDP) for designing of extension services to women farmers. It enables, rural women, to represent their aspirations and desires for improving their livelihoods and tries to incorporate varied support from different stakeholders. Such tools are increasingly been used by development organizations to integrate gender concerns in their interventions to make it more inclusive.

6. Conclusion

The process of gender sensitization aims to modify the behaviour and attitude of both women and men so that there is greater awareness and empathy to create gender equality. By increasing awareness and sensitizing men on the

discrimination women face in their communities, they can become supporters instead of barriers in a women's life (Vyas et al. 2019). At the same time, it prompts women to proactively look into their versatile roles and contributions to the society at large. Also, gender sensitization programs can play an important role in forming and changing gender attitudes during adolescence and have the potential to alter their short and long-term beliefs. Lack of sensitization at different levels, may lead to poor implementation and outcome of development interventions. In the face of increased feminization of agriculture and participation of women in the farm labour force, gender aspects need to be better integrated in design and delivery of services. Development practitioners should be made aware about the variety of tools and methodologies at their disposal for gender-sensitive planning and implementation of interventions. Moreover, specific extension interventions to build the capacity of farm women and institutional structures to enhance their access to production technologies and resources are very much required. Sensitization efforts are required at grass root level to advocate for women's equal rights in decision making a social norm, by changing the attitude of male members. Finally, it is imperative to track the dynamic gender issues and priorities in different spheres for better designing and targeting of interventions (DRWA 2014).

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