



EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN THROUGH AGRICULTURE

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Research article

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Abstract:

Rural Indian women are extensively involved in agricultural activities. However the nature and extent of their involvement differs with the variations in agro production systems. In over all farm production, women's average contribution is estimated about 55%. In addition to their role in agricultural production, women are gainfully employed in agro- based allied activities like dairying, animal husbandry, poultry, rabbit rearing, beekeeping, vermiculture, floriculture, horticulture, fruit preservation, post-harvest technology, value added food products, etc. Empowerment of women by micro entrepreneurship led to the empowerment of women in many ways.

Keywords: Rural, Women, Agriculture, Empowerment

Introduction:

Empowerment of women emerged as an important issue in recent time. The economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a way in development process of a country hence the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance. According to political thinkers, social scientists and reformers women play important role in development of nation. It is well said that "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women".

This research article deals with empowerment of rural women through agriculture. The emergence of women entrepreneurs and their contribution to the national economy is quite visible in India. The number of women entrepreneurs has grown over a period of time especially in the 1990.

Empowerment in the context of women's development is away of defining, challenging and overcoming barriers in a woman's life through which she increases her ability to shape her life, environment and community. It is an active multidimensional process which should enable women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life.

Since time immemorial women have played and continue to play a key role in basic life support system such as land, water, flora and fauna. Rural women help in agricultural development and allied fields, including crop production, livestock production harvest operations, fisheries, etc without total intellectual and physical part possible to achieve the goals of rural uplift.

In spite of all this, it is unfortunate that because of centuries of inertia, ignorance and conservatism, the actual and potential role of women in the society has been ignored, preventing them from making their rightful contribution to social progress. It is also because of distorted and/or partial information

about their involvement in agriculture and consequent devaluation of their contribution that they are denied their rightful status as active producers in agriculture and access to developmental resources and services contributing to their marginalization. Women must be empowered by enhancing their awareness, knowledge, skills and technology use efficiency so that agricultural production multiplies at a faster pace, environmental degradation is reduced and conservation of resources is practiced earnestly, thereby, facilitating overall development of the society.

Rural Indian women are extensively involved in agricultural activities. However the nature and extent of their involvement differs with the variations in agro production systems. The mode of female participation in agricultural production varies with the landowning status of farm households. Their roles range from managers to landless laborers.

Development of the society is directly related with the income generator capacity of its member with agriculture. Prabha Singh stated that, entrepreneurship on small scale is the only solution to the problems of unemployment and proper utilization of both human and non-human resources and improving the living condition of the women in rural area.

Agricultural Activities:

Women have to do jobs that are time and labour intensive such as sowing, transplanting, weeding, intercultural harvesting, threshing, and post-harvest operations like, shelling, cleaning, grading and processing. They also contribute to decision-making processes for crop production, seed production and management, post-harvest management of agricultural and horticultural produce, biomass utilization, livestock management, marketing and financial management. In addition, women take up small ventures to generate additional family income.

Therefore, the role of women in agriculture and allied occupations and household activities needs proper recognition.

Sericulture:

It is also one of the activities related with agriculture. Culture of silk worm, *Bombyx morri* in our own house or farm maintaining certain geographical and biological conditions and cultivating the food plants (mulberry Plant) in the field so that this process will be more economical is one of the self employment way for empowerment of rural women.

Beekeeping-An Ideal Enterprise for Women

Beekeeping can be taken up on a commercial scale now as we have available with us the high yielding Mellifera type, commonly called Italian bee. Also, beekeeping requires less labor and attention and can be taken up as a profession by the farmwomen. There is less initial investment but returns are quick. Beekeepers should be encouraged with good support price and easy marketing, with appropriate loan for this low cost adventure. The farm women, families and unemployed youth can be encouraged to adopt this hobby which could turn into a large scale profitable business.

Mushroom Cultivation - A Women Friendly Profession

Mushroom growing is one of the agricultural activity in which women can play a vital role without sacrificing their household responsibilities. Mushroom cultivation is simple, low cost, and suitable for rural areas. It is labour intensive and can provide employment in both the semi-urban and rural areas. Mushroom cultivation will improve the socioeconomic condition of farmer's families and solve employment problems of both illiterate and literate, especially women.

Rural Based Low Cost Nutritional Foods as an Enterprise for Women

A large number of low cost nutritional products grouped under infant food, health beverages, nutritious snacks, convenience foods (even for people on fast), specialty foods (for patients under stress condition) and home preserves have been developed which require simple processing methods and have the ability to fulfill the nutritional requirement of our population, especially the vulnerable segment of our society. Babycorn, quality protein maize, nutritional grains, etc., are the gift for people under stress conditions and can be used to develop a number of products. These products are a great source of rural entrepreneurship particularly suited to women due to low capital requirements.

Coconut Sector

It is a major sector, which is a woman dominated. The role of women in core sector is as high as 80 per cent and 60 per cent in coconut processing and broom making, respectively. Involvement of women in coconut based handicrafts is up to 40 per cent.

Household Appliances

Improved chuna, biogas, solar cookers, solar heaters, and photovoltaic energy operated appliances etc. have great scope of adoption by women. This must be encouraged and if necessary, subsidized.

Rural Entrepreneurship and its Advantages

According to Devdas (1999), women's participation in income generating activities is believed to increase their status and decision making power with employment. Women do not remain as 'objects' of social change, but become 'agents' of it. There is need to design programmes which could gainfully utilize the services and skill of women in relation to their involvement in agro- based allied activities.

Some of the capabilities developed as result of taking up enterprise among rural women such as economic empowerment, improved standard of living, self confidence, enhance awareness, sense of achievement, increased social interaction, engaged in political activities, increased predication level in Gram Sabha meeting, improvement in leadership qualities, involvement in solving problems related to women and community, decision making capacity in family and community. All these personal and social capabilities were developed as a result of taking up enterprise among rural women.

Some of the ventures would include agro-service centers, sell of quality seeds and other agricultural inputs, advisory services and consultancy village-level marketing, multipurpose warehouses and controlled atmosphere storage, hiring of implements, micro propagation, hatcheries for fishery, production of bio-fertilizers bio-control agents, beekeeping livestock feeding and health management and artificial insemination, food processing and tasting units, post-harvest management units, social agro forestry, agro-horticulture, cultivation and management of medicinal and aromatic plants, utilization of crop residues, mushroom, cultivation, poultry, piggery, goatery, agro-based handicrafts, child health care centers, use of renewable and unconventional sources of energy, low cost household equipment and appliances etc.

Entrepreneurship skills can help in building confidence and self awareness through income generation. Various activities can be taken up by rural women for income generation while being at home and by organizing themselves in 'self-help groups'.

Financial institutions

Various economic activities, investment outlet enterprises are needed to create employment opportunities including self-employment avenues and income generation, particularly for downtrodden women in rural areas. For financial support to these ventures a rural network is required to provided credit on appropriate and easier terms. Regional rural banks should continue to play an important role in empowerment of rural women through various credit schemes.

Various financial institutions have special financial schemes for women. These include KVIC, NABARD, cooperative societies and regional rural banks. They provide loan opportunities to rural women for dairying, poultry, beekeeping, food processing and preservation, mushroom cultivation, spices processing, potato chips, dalia and other cottage industries. These agencies provide loans to women up to 5 lakhs without any security. Other facilities include 13 .5 per cent rate of interest up to a loan of Rs. 2 lakhs, relaxation of registration and respective fees related to land mortgages involved trisect for a loan in rural areas up to the limit of Rs. 3 lakhs, convenient

and easy installments in case long term loans and provision of immediate cash under a limit as working capital, loans for housing and consumption loans to raise status of rural women and special credit schemes for enterprises related computers and other electronic equipment at easier rate.

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