

# Empowerment Agri-based

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In India, agriculture accounts for 32 per cent of the national gross product. Rural Indian women are extensively involved in agricultural activities. About 70 per cent of the total working population of women are involved in this field. Nature and extent of their involvement differ with the variations in agro-production systems. The mode of female participation in agricultural production varies with the ownership of land of farm households. Their role ranges from managers to landless labourers. In overall farm production, women's average contribution is estimated at 55 to 66 per cent of the total labour. Qualified women work as development personnel in the field of agriculture. The state agricultural universities as well as Central and State research institutes flaunt women agricultural scientists, but their number, compared to men, is very low.

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## Women as agricultural labourers

Majority of women workers (66.8 per cent) are employed in agricultural and allied industrial sectors, according to 1991 census. Women employed in this sector are 80.7 per cent, compared to 62.7 per cent for men. In rural areas, 89.5 per cent of total females employed are engaged in

agricultural and allied industrial sector.  
**Crop Production**

In the highly diversified Indian context, no simple gender division of labour exists with regard to crop production. In certain areas in India, women play key roles as seed selectors and in seedling production. Their knowledge on seeds and seed storage contribute to viability of agricultural diversity and production. As weeders, women contribute to crop management. Women prepare and apply green and farmyard manure. As integrated pest management practices are introduced, it could be expected that women's work would increase due to more labour-intensive activities.

In addition to their role in crop production, women are gainfully employed in agri-based allied activities like dairying, animal husbandry, poultry, goatery, rabbitry, apiary, floriculture, horticulture, fruit preservation, post-

harvest technology, value added food products etc.

## Livestock

Livestock plays a multi-faceted role in providing draught power for the farm, manure for crops, energy for cooking and food for household consumption as well as the market. In animal husbandry, women have a multiple role. Their activities

vary widely ranging from care of animals, grazing, fodder collection, cleaning of animal sheds, processing milk and livestock products. In livestock management, indoor jobs like milking, feeding, cleaning etc. are done by women in 90 per cent of families while management of animals and fodder production are done by men. Though women play a significant role in



livestock management and production, women's control over livestock and its products is negligible.

## Fisheries

India is among the top ten fish producing countries in the world contributing about three percent to the world marine fish catch. About five million people in the coastal areas carry out fishing and allied activities for their livelihood. In



cast nets while women and children catch fish with hands. In the fishing villages, both women and men who do not belong to the fishing community perform fish drying/curing. In coastal aquaculture, women are involved in prawn and seed collection to a very limited extent.

#### Women as conservators

From time immemorial, women used to act as conservators of natural resources. During the annals of evolution, when humans were hunter-gatherers, it was the women folk who evolved the first agriculture, by systematically planting the thrown away seeds. Over thousands of years, women still nurture everything associated with the household and even her neighbourhood, be it plants or animals or her living system itself.

Women play a key role in both land use and management. Women-headed movements for forest protection such as Chipko and Appiko deserve special mention. Women have also been the source of knowledge relating to conserving and maintaining the quality of water. Depleting water resources have impacted women severely in terms of longer walk and more work, as they are principal collectors of water.

#### Women professionals in agriculture

The spurt in the number of women professionals in agriculture and allied sectors is a recent phenomenon. With rapid changes in agriculture scenario on one hand due to globalisation, liberalisation,

bio-technology, bio-engineering, WTO etc. the contribution of women scientists, extension workers, administrators etc. in development assumes new roles. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research has 30,000 scientists, extension scientists and teachers. Only about 20 per cent of this are women. Most of the departments related to Agriculture are male dominated in staffing pattern, approach and methodology.

#### Mobilisation of Groups

The importance of organising women into Self Help Groups (SHGs) is an accepted method of empowerment. SHGs are an effective means through which women can build self-reliance, solidarity and confidence, as well as contribute to the overall development of their families and societies. Belonging to a group provides women with a sense of identity, status and security and also provides them access to credit and institutional support services which they otherwise would not have had as individuals. SHGs have bargaining power and the ability to make major decisions for their own development. The Kudumbasree movement initiated by the Kerala Government is an ideal example for this.

Harithasree, the lease land farming promoted by the State Poverty Eradication Mission, Kerala, through Kudumbasree has helped women farmers to stay on in agriculture for their livelihood. The number of Grama Panchayats involved in the Programme has increased to 914, with 19 more Panchayats getting involved, compared to the previous year, 2005. There are about 35,130 SHGs and 3,54,513 families involved in the Harithasree programme, covering an area of 23,160 ha during 2005-06.

While the Rashtriya Mahila Khosh project and the UPSLR project are using NGOs as facilitators to help in group formation, training, micro-credit, micro-finance, entrepreneurship development etc, in Kudumbasree programme, the officials and people's representatives of local bodies are trained to perform these facilitating functions. Nobel Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus in his well-read book 'Banker to The Poor' narrates the role of micro-credit financing through Grameen Banks in empowering women below poverty level to the status of women of confidence and well being. ■

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India, nature and extent of women's participation in this sector varies across the States. Fish drying/curing, marketing, and hand braiding and net-mending are the main areas of women's involvement in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. Women are also involved in shrimp processing in these States. In Andhra Pradesh, women are engaged in mollusca and shell collection on a seasonal basis along the coastline. Among the mangroves of Bhitarkanika on the Orissa coast, both women and men engage in fishing. Men

