

ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD: A POLICY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Since the beginning of agricultural history, women play a crucial role in Indian Agriculture. From tillage operation to post-harvesting activities and from livestock management to management of the agricultural household, women have an important role. No activity in agriculture becomes complete without the involvement of women. The National Commission on Farmers (Swaminathan Commission) mentioned it clearly that the role of women in agriculture has not been recognized properly, due to which this larger section in Indian agriculture remains marginalized on different socio-economic fronts like education, health, political representation, economic freedom, involvement of decision making and so on. There is a close relationship between the role of women in agriculture and sustainable rural livelihood. Therefore it is equally important for policymakers to provide enough attention to the women in agriculture during the formulation of policies toward sustainable rural livelihood. This study selected the Vidarbha region in Maharashtra to study the role of women in agriculture and rural sustainable livelihood through a policy perspective. Vidarbha is notoriously known for its agrarian crisis, where the highest farmers' suicides have been found for many years. The study explored the views of different stakeholders like Sarpanch/Panch, farmers' leaders, common farmers and so on to understand existing constraints in the policies and required changes in future policies related to the role of women in agriculture. This study explored the role of women in Indian agriculture in the context of sustainable rural livelihood through a policy perspective.

Keywords: *Agricultural Policy, Women in Agriculture, Rural Sustainable Livelihood, Swaminathan Commission*

Introduction

In India, about 70 per cent of women live rural parts of the country. Out of which, up to 80 per cent of women engaged in agriculture-related work. Despite this large engagement, women in India remain an invisible and unrecognized workforce. Unfortunately, women in Indian agriculture receive only 5 per cent of extension services. They are also underrepresented in training programmes. They rarely get an opportunity to involve in agricultural research and policymaking positions (Vidani, 2020). In agricultural history, it has been found that it was

women who first domesticated crop plants, which further developed the art and science of farming. (Jayasheela, 2015).

It has been an undisputedly proven fact that the agricultural sector has enough potential to act as an engine of growth and poverty reduction. But it has been observed that this sector is underperforming due to improper acknowledgement of the role of women in agriculture and the rural economy (SOFA Team, 2011). In the Himalayan region of India, a pair of bullocks works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and woman 3485 hours in a year on a one-hectare farm (Jayasheela, 2015). It shows the rigorous engagement of women in agricultural activities as it is far more than men and even farming animals like a bullock. The fifth goal of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-2030) is dedicated to gender equality. (Preeti Madan, n.d.) In this context, this study becomes more relevant and important.

The National Commission on Women also emphasised the multidimensional role of women in agriculture, such as (Technology, 2005)

Agriculture: Women in the rural area play a vital role in different agricultural operations like sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizers application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.

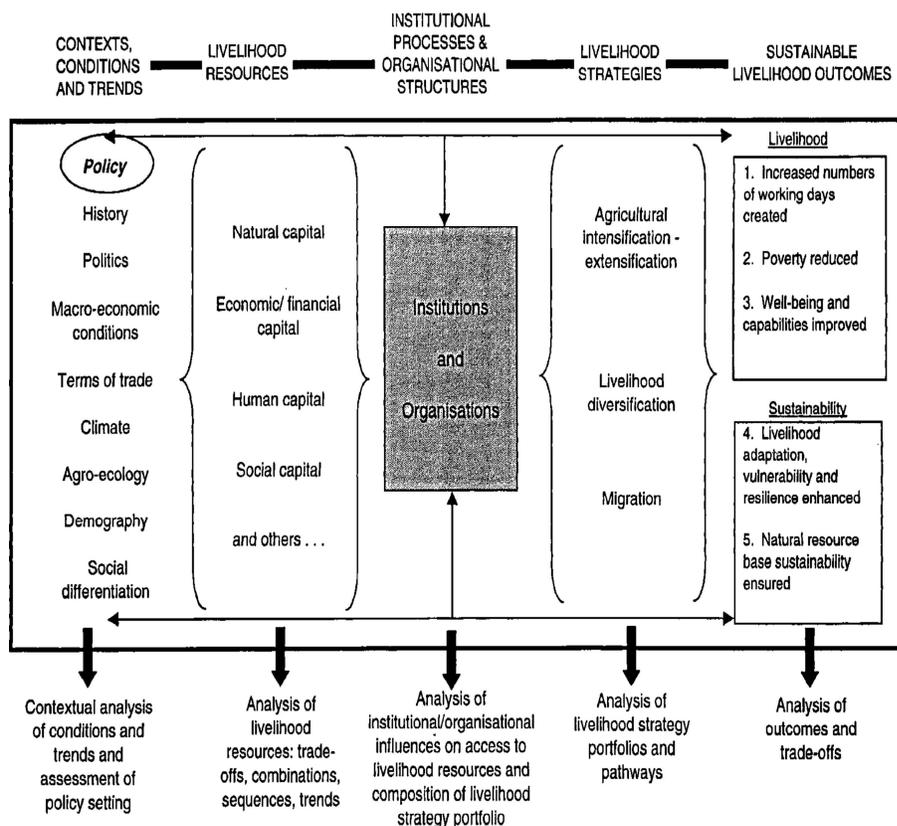
Domestic Work: In addition to agricultural work, women have to fulfil additional domestic responsibilities as compared to the male member of the family like cooking, child-rearing, water collection, fuelwood gathering, household maintenance etc.

Allied Activities: There are some allied activities like cattle management, fodder collection, and milking. Women also play an active role in these kinds of allied activities.

The rural women's force has enough potential to play the role of torchbearers in the process of socio-economic transformation of rural India. Policymakers cannot ignore the contribution of rural women to the agricultural development of the country where 80 per cent of rural women are engaged in agriculture. Hence there is a serious need to empower and mainstream rural women at different stages of the policy cycle from agenda-setting to reformulation of policy. There is a serious need to provide efforts in some important areas like access to resources, health facilities, ownership rights and skill development which are closely related to rural women. Through this involvement, nutrition security, poverty, and hunger can be addressed simultaneously (Neelam Patel, 2021).

There is a need to understand the mechanism of rural sustainable livelihood. The below figure can help with an in-depth understanding of the concept of rural sustainable livelihood. This conceptual clarity is essential to understanding the relationship between the role of women in agriculture and sustainable rural livelihood.

Figure 1: Sustainable rural livelihoods: a framework for analysis



Source: (Scoones, 1998)

Through this figure (Figure No. 1), it becomes clear that the role of women is important during every step and process toward sustainable rural livelihood. Therefore there is a quite serious need to provide emphasis the empowerment of women in agriculture at the policy level. Sustainable Livelihood can be defined as (Scoones, 1998)

“A Livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base.”

Table No. 1: Share of Indian Women in Agricultural Operation

Activity	Involvement (Percentage)
Land preparation	32
Seed cleaning and sowing	80
Inter cultivation activities	86
Harvesting-reaping, winnowing, drying, cleaning and storage	84

Source: (Technology, 2005)

The above table (Table No. 1) is providing an actual idea about the share of women in different agricultural activities in India. It makes clear that women are engaging in all activities, whereas the engagement in inter cultivation and harvesting activities is comparatively more than the remaining activities.

Table 2: Energy and Time Distribution by Rural Indian Women

Activities	Duration Hours/Min	Energy K. Cal.	Percentage
Domestic activities	7.55	903	40.53
Agriculture and allied activities	7.00	283	39.69
Sleep	6.50	284	12.76
Rest and Recreation	2.15	155	6.97
Total	24.00	1655	100.00

Source: (Technology, 2005)

This table (Table No. 2) illustrates the distribution of time and energy of Indian women in agriculture. Most of the time in a day of Indian women (i.e. 14.55 hours) are utilized in domestic and agricultural activities. Hence maximum energy (i.e. 1186 K. Cal.) of women has been utilized for daily domestic and agricultural activities. This fact should be considered during the formulation of the agricultural and farmer policies of India.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of workers (main + marginal) according to Categories of the worker by sex and by sector

Categories of Worker	Rural			Urban			Combined		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Cultivators	36.46	42.19	40.14	4.26	2.99	3.21	32.51	31.34	31.71
Agricultural labours	43.4	27.48	33.20	11.03	3.42	4.71	39.43	20.82	26.69

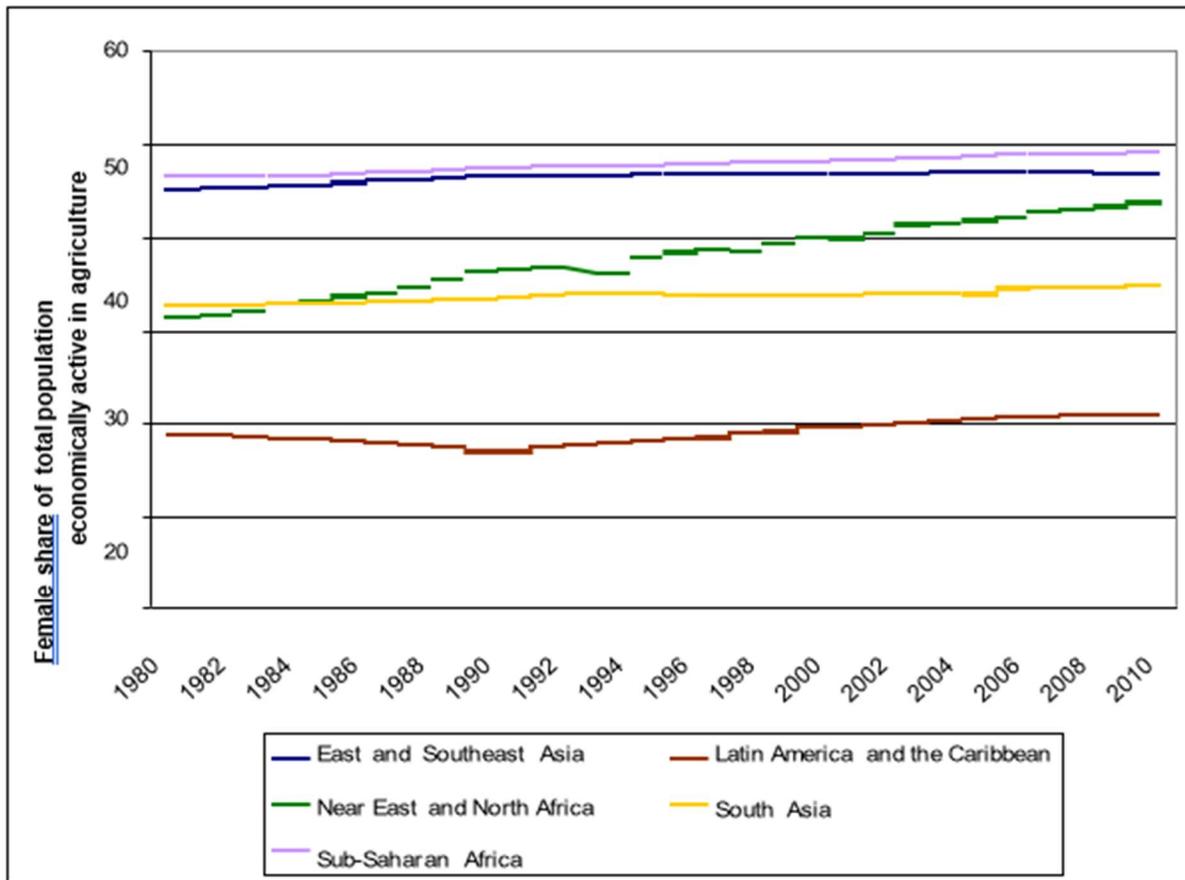
Household Industry workers	5.44	2.83	3.77	12.93	3.50	5.10	6.36	3.02	4.07
Other Workers	14.70	27.49	22.90	71.77	90.09	86.98	21.70	44.82	37.52
All workers	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Total workers (main+marginal In Millions)	111.46	199.20	310.66	15.59	76.26	91.86	127.05	275.46	402.51

Source: (Technology, 2005)

Table No. 3 provides an idea about the distribution of workers (main + marginal) according to Categories of the worker by sex and by sector. Through this table, the categorical, as well as sectorial comparison of women with their counterparts, is possible. This table indicates that in rural areas more females (43.4 per cent) are engaged in agriculture as agricultural labourers whereas the male percentage is 27.48 per cent. The 5.44 per cent of females in the rural area engaged as household industry workers, whereas the male percentage is only 2.83 per cent. The same trend can be observed in the urban area.

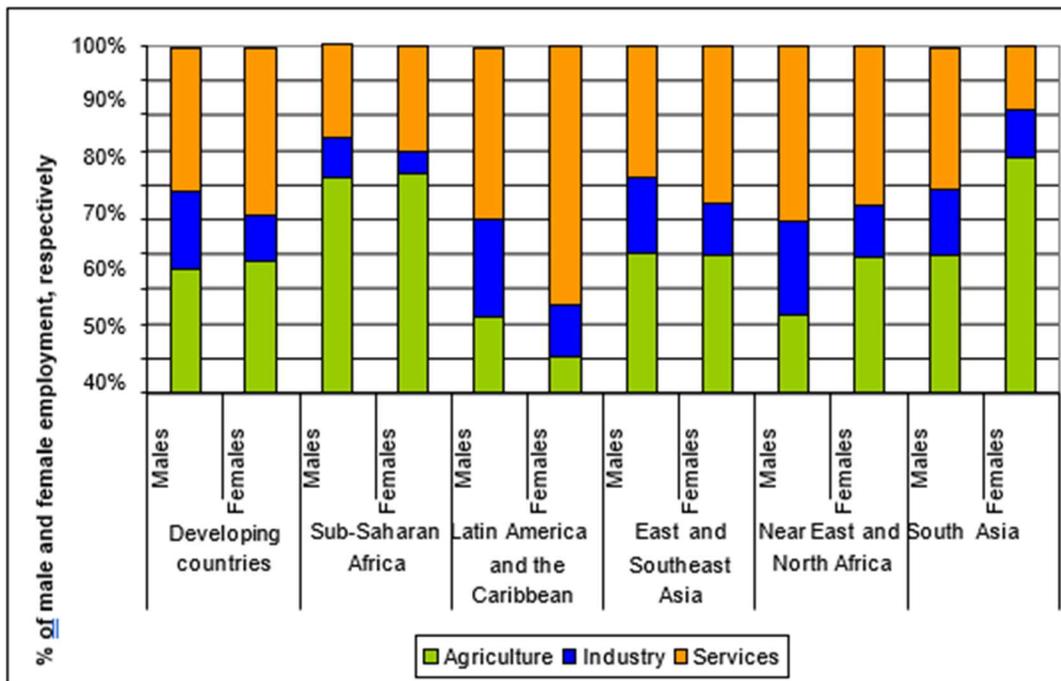
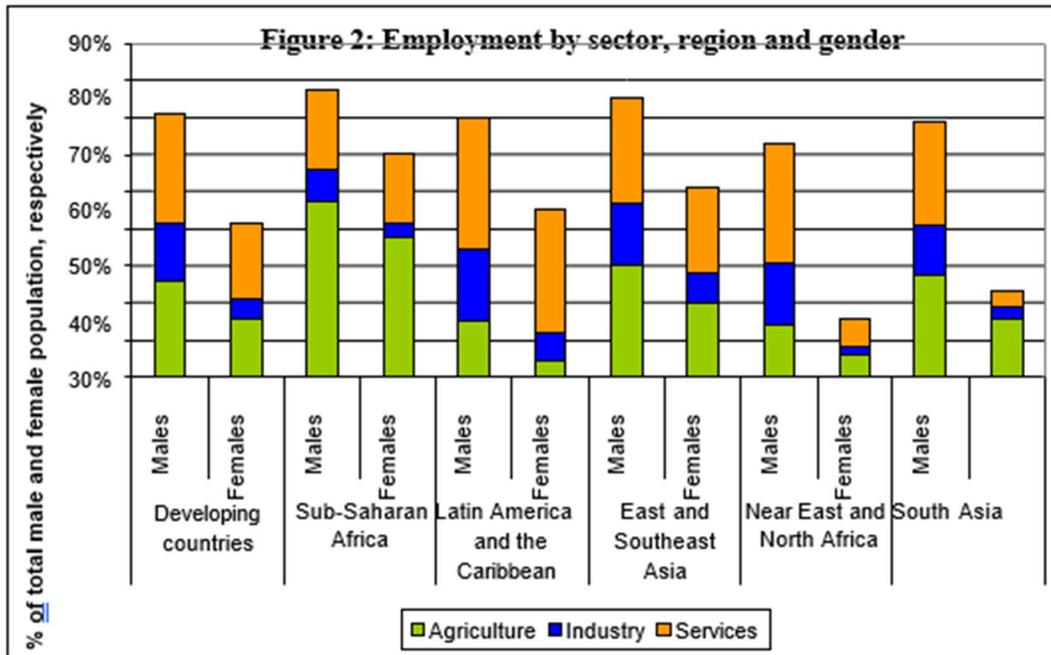
In the modern history of Indian agricultural policy, for the First time, Sixth Five Year Plan provided a separate chapter as 'Women in Development'. (India, n.d.) The role of local self-government in the process of empowerment of women in agriculture is very important as it can be started Gram Panchayat Mahila Fund for the economic empowerment of women who are engaged in agriculture (Kulkarni, 2020). The policymakers should provide proper attention to institutional mechanisms for women empowerment by formulating mechanisms like gender audits. It is quite unfortunate that women in agriculture are not getting proper attention as productive agents in agriculture or as farmers. (Kulkarni, 2020)

There is a serious need to establish a competent mechanism that would advise the Government on issues of policy, strategies, programmes and so on. There is a need to keep women's interests at the centre point during the formulation of agricultural and farmers' policies in India. (Kulkarni, 2020)



Source: (SOFA Team, 2011)

Figure No. 1 gives an idea about the share of women in the agricultural economy. The global average is dominated by Asia. The female share of the agricultural force remained steady at just over 30 per cent.



Source: (SOFA Team, 2011)

As per figure 2, the total workforce engaged in agriculture is 50 per cent. Figure No. 3 clearly showed that in South Asia, the out of total workforce engaged in different sectors, nearly 80 per cent workforce females engaged in agriculture. It indicates clearly that the majority of the women's workforce belongs to the agricultural sector.

Swaminathan Commission in its first report recommended that there is a need for formulation of the National Board for a New Deal for Women in Agriculture, headed by the Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. At the same time, it is equally important that every state government should set up Gender Resource Unit or Cell in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. (National Commission on Farmers, First Report, 2004)

The present study selected the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. The highest number of farmers' suicides had been observed in Maharashtra, especially in the Vidarbha region (Rajeshwari, 2018). In Maharashtra, about 200,000 farmers committed suicides, out of which 70 per cent of farmer suicides took place in the Vidarbha region (Sonawane, 2017). Therefore this study considered it important to choose such a region which is at its peak stage in the context of agrarian crisis. In the Vidarbha region, there is a total of 11 districts. Out of it, Amaravati, Yavatmal, and Buldhana districts were selected based on the intensity of the agrarian crisis, which is highest in these three districts (Reporter, 2019).

For this study, 150 agrarian households have been chosen through purposive sampling. The efforts had been taken to make these samples more comprehensive by involving different stakeholders like families of people representatives (former and working Sarpanch/Panch), farmer leaders, common farmers, families where suicides happen and so on. A mixed-method has been used to collect data. The primary data has been collected through semi-structured interviews and observations, whereas secondary data has been collected through government reports, research papers, articles and so on. The data has been treated by applying percentages, and content analysis techniques.

Assumptions for the Analysis of Primary Data

Table No. 1: Proportion of Response

Range of Percentage	Proportion of Response
0-10	Insignificant Proportion
11-20	Negligible Proportion of Respondents
21-30	Inconsequential Proportion of Respondents
31-40	Noticeable Proportion of Respondents
41-50	Highly Noticeable Proportion of Respondents
51-60	Majority of Respondents
61-70	Fair Majority of Respondents
71-80	High Majority of Respondents
81-90	Significant Majority of Respondents
91-100	Highly Significant Majority of Respondent

Source: The Assumptions considered while analyzing the primary data given in the table (Chaudhary, 2012)

Table No. 2: Distribution of Gender of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Male	134	89.3
Female	16	10.7
Total	150	100.0
Mean	1.10	

Source: Primary Data

The above table (Table No. 1) provides the distribution of respondents. This distribution exposes the male-dominated agrarian culture, where 89.3 per cent of selected agricultural households were led by male candidates of the family. It is reflected in every aspect of rural women, where decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of the male member of the family. This male-dominated culture also restricts the girls in farmers' families from education.

Table No. 3: Distribution of Categories of Respondents

	Frequency	Per cent
General	25	16.7
Backward Classes	1	.7
Other Backward Classes	63	42.0
Scheduled Caste	11	7.3
Nomadic Tribes	28	18.7
Scheduled Tribes	22	14.7
Total	150	100.0

Source: Primary Data

This study aims to choose agrarian households from different categories to make it more comprehensive. The above table (Table No. 2) indicated that there were involvements of different categories like Backward Classes, Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Classes, Nomadic Tribes, and Scheduled Tribes in this study.

Table No. 4: Distribution of Social Background of Respondents

	Frequency	Per cent
Working or Former Sarpanch	19	12.7
Working or Former Panch	30	20.0
Working or Former Police Patil	5	3.3
Farmer Leader	9	6.0
Common Farmer	70	46.7
Belong to Farmer Suicider's Family	7	4.7
Krishi Mitra	10	6.7
Total	150	100.0

Source: Primary Data

This table (Table No.3) showed that there was the involvement of families from different social backgrounds like working or former Sarpanch, Panch, Police Patil, Farmer Leaders, Common Farmers and so on. It made the study more holistic.

The content analysis method was used to analyze the data. As per the Content Analysis method, the researcher followed the process of coding the data, identifying themes and sub-themes, categorizing data based on those themes and sub-themes and analyzing themes to count the frequency of codes to arrive at the findings (Bengtsson, 2016).

Table No. 5: Issues Related to Women in Agriculture in the Context of Sustainable Rural Livelihood

Theme	Sub Theme	Code	Frequency	Percentage
Issues Related with Women in Agriculture in the Context of Sustainable Rural Livelihood	Policy Issues	Absence of Separate Policy for Women in Agriculture	136	90.66
		Poor Implementation of Swaminathan Commission	141	94
		Weak Gender-Sensitive Approach	123	82
		No Equal Share in Property	133	88.66
	Employment Issues	Promotion of SHGs	141	94
		Poor Employment Opportunities for Women	148	98.66
		Absence of Subsidies and Loans for Small Scale Industries	139	92.66
		No Equal Wages	129	86
	Education and Skill Development Issues	Poor Literacy among Women Farmers	147	98
		Absence of Agricultural Training	141	94
		Poor Opportunities of Higher Education for Rural Girls	118	78.66
	Socio-Political Issues	Socio-Political Empowerment	128	85.33
		Involvement in Decision Making	137	91.33
		Poor Representation in Panchayat Raj Institutions	143	95.33
	Others	Maternity Facilities	119	79.33
		Rehabilitation for Widow	135	90

		Absence of Women Friendly Technologies	140	93.33
		Delay in Action Against Domestic Violence	139	92.66

Source: Primary Data

The above Table (Table No. 4) provided issues raised by respondents related to women in agriculture in the context of sustainable rural livelihood. These raised issues are as follows:

Policy Issues

1. **Absence of Separate Policy:** Highly significant proportion of respondents (90.66 per cent) raised the issue related to the absence of a separate policy for women in agriculture. As it is needed for the holistic development of women who are rigorously working in agriculture.
2. **Poor Implementation of Swaminathan Commission:** National Commission on Farmers, popularly known as Swaminathan Commission provided some important recommendations regarding with empowerment of women in the rural area. The fourth chapter of the first report of the National Commission on Farmers titled A New Deal for Women in Agriculture is dedicated to the role of women in Indian agriculture. It shows the importance of women in agriculture with special reference to Indian agriculture. (National Commission on Farmers, 2004). Swaminathan Commission provided some focus areas regarding with acceleration of existing programmes for women's development. Some important areas are as follows: (National Commission on Farmers, First Report, 2004)
 - a. There is a serious need to provide proper attention to provisions of existing policy procurements and directives of direct transfer of government land to women in agriculture.
 - b. It is essential to create some drastic changes in laws regarding the inheritance rights of women towards agricultural land.
 - c. There is a need to provide enough exposure for women to buy land from the market.

The 'Title Transfers' and 'Joint Patta' are also some historical policy issues, which are constantly affecting the development of women in Indian Agriculture. The National Commission on Farmers is quite serious about these issues. In its first report, the commission provides some crucial recommendations towards 'Title Transfer' and 'Joint Patta' as follows: (National Commission on Farmers, First Report, 2004)

 - a. The commission recommends that there is a serious need to set targets state-wise, for allotting at least 40 per cent of government land distributed to women's groups.
 - b. It also suggests that the state-wise targets should be set up for allotment of remaining government land transfers based on joint pattas to husband and wife.
 - c. State-wise targets should be set up at least 40 per cent of government land distributed to SC/ST to go to the women of these communities.

The Swaminathan Commission emphasised a crucial issue as the private land is skewed by both class and gender. It is quite unfortunate for women's empowerment in the agricultural sector. Commission also gives the painful fact that the largest number of women farmers and workers in agriculture belongs to the tenant's category. This fact again underlined the issue of ownership of agricultural land by women. Without equitable ownership of land, the empowerment of women will remain a mere dream. In this regard, the Swaminathan Commission quoted an example of Scheduled Caste Development Corporation, as it enables Dalit women's group to purchase/lease private land from the market for the cultivation of crops (National Commission on Farmers, First Report, 2004). Swaminathan Commission discussed some important issues related to women's land security in Indian agriculture. Some of these important issues are as follows: (National Commission on Farmers, First Report, 2004)

- a. The commission observed that in the northeast part of the country, there is an issue related to the proof of community-owned land. In this context, the Swaminathan Commission provided a recommendation that there is a need to be conducted a comprehensive survey of land ownership in the northeast region of the country with the assurance of a participatory and transparent process.
- b. According to the commission, women's names are absent in the land record of land ownership. Policymakers should have to provide enough attention to this issue.

Swaminathan Commission also provided some important recommendations, related to the food security of community and households' agricultural biodiversity documentation. The recommendations are as follows: (National Commission on Farmers, First Report, 2004)

- a. According to the Commission, there is a need to encourage an alternative public distribution system, which should be based on locally produced food items, such as organic food and coarse grains.
- b. Commission thought that there is an urgent need to support women in the communities to launch and participate in movements to save and preserve several varieties of indigenous seeds.
- c. There is a need to provide initial support to local Self Help Groups (SHGs) and groups to establish food, feed, fodder and water banks.
- d. There is a need to create community grain banks and seed banks by women's groups/NGOs.
- e. The commission found it important to support the training of local women's groups to produce compost manure and vermicompost.
- f. There is a need to keep documentation of women's oral knowledge of the traditional system of cultivation.
- g. It is essential to ensure better access to credit, technology, and collaboration with technical and financial management institutions.

The Swaminathan Commission also provided important recommendations related to engendering the agricultural curriculum. It quoted the example of the course started by Kerala University with the collaboration of M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai. It provides some recommendations such as (National Commission on Farmers, First Report, 2004)

- a. There is an urgent need to build a perspective by providing an overview of the social construction of gender and gender inequality in the educational curriculum, especially in agricultural universities.
- b. There is a serious need to create skills by identifying gender roles, rights and responsibilities in gender relations.
- c. It is also essential to build attitudinal changes during the policies related to curriculum frameworks of colleges and universities.

The highly significant majority of respondents (i.e. 94 per cent) mentioned that there is a poor implementation of these recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission.

3. **Weak Gender-Sensitive Approach:** The significant majority of respondents (82 per cent) mentioned that the policies made for agricultural development are not gendered sensitive.
4. **No Equal Share in Property:** The amendment to Hindu Succession Act, 1956 provided an opportunity for the daughters to share equal rights in ancestral property (India, The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, n.d.). Policymakers have to implement this amendment seriously, especially in the case right of agricultural land in rural areas. Without proper implementation of the crucial amendment, empowerment of women in agriculture is not possible. As Agriculture is a state subject, the state governments have to work seriously in the direction of providing land rights to women in agriculture. (India G. o., n.d.) In this study, a significant majority of respondents raised their issue about an unequal share of daughters in their ancestral property like agricultural land.

Employment Issues

1. **Promotion of Self Help Group:** The Swaminathan Commission said that there is a need to provide initial support to local Self Help Groups (SHGs) and groups to establish food, feed, fodder and water banks (National Commission on Farmers, First Report, 2004). The Significant majority of the respondent in this study provided an emphasis on the promotion of Self Help Group.
2. **Poor Employment Opportunities for Women:** It is also equally important to understand the condition of migrated women from rural areas to urban areas. Women in the rural area migrated due to the non-availability of job opportunities for most of the year and low wages in agriculture followed by natural calamities and debt burden. Out of all migrated women from the rural area, 48 per cent of migrant women moved back to their villages during the lean months (monsoon and autumn) which are important agricultural seasons in Indian agriculture. Out of these migrated women, 67 per cent engaged as agricultural labourers in rice and vegetable farming in their villages, whereas 25 per cent were engaged in farming either on their own or on lease-in land (ICAR, 2012-13). The highly significant majority

of the respondent (i.e 98.66 per cent) raised the issue of poor employment opportunities for women.

3. **Absence of Subsidies and Loans for Small Scale Industries:** The highly significant majority (92.66 per cent) emphasised the weak supply of subsidies and loans for small scale industries. Therefore many women cannot start small scale industries.
4. **No Equal Wages:** At the global level, women comprise 43 per cent share of the agricultural labour force. It should be understood that the overall burden of rural women exceeds that of men, which involves a higher proportion of unpaid household responsibilities like preparation of food, and collection of fuel and water. It has been found that the contribution of women in agriculture had not been recognized properly because the share produced by women does not verify empirically in a separate manner. Unfortunately, women are over-represented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work. Women are often paid less than men in agriculture (SOFA Team, 2011). The Significant majority of respondents (86 per cent) provided focused on the fact that women are not getting equal wages as compared to their male counterparts.

Education and Skill Development Issues

1. **Poor Literacy Rate among Women:** Highly significant majority of the respondent (i.e 98 per cent) raised the issue of the poor literacy rate among women.
2. **Absence of Agricultural Training:** Highly significant majority of the respondent (i.e 94 per cent) raised the issue of poor agricultural training for women.
3. **Poor Opportunities of Higher Education for Rural Girls:** High majority of respondents (i.e. 78.66) emphasised poor opportunities for higher education for rural girls.

Socio-Political Issues

1. **Socio-Political Empowerment:** In this study, the significant majority of respondents had shown their serious concern about the socio-political empowerment of women in rural areas.
2. **Involvement in Decision Making:** The highly significant majority of the respondent (i.e. 91.33 per cent) mentioned that there is a serious need to create a favourable environment for women in which they can be actively involved in the decision making process.
3. **Poor Representation in Panchayat Raj Institutions:** It has been observed that the highly significant majority of respondents (95.33 per cent) raised the issue regarding with poor representation of women in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

Others

1. **Maternity Facilities:** High Majority of respondents (i.e. 79.33 per cent) mentioned that there is not a proper maternity facility in rural areas for women who are working in agriculture.
2. **Rehabilitation of Widow:** The widows, whose husbands committed suicide due to an agrarian crisis, the proper mechanism is absent for rehabilitation for them. The highly significant majority raised this vital issue.

3. **Absence of Women Friendly Technologies:** The highly significant majority (i.e. 93.33 per cent) of respondents mentioned that women are absent from friendly technologies in the rural area.
4. **Delay in action against domestic violence:** It has been observed that there is a highly significant majority of respondents (92.66 per cent) mentioned that there is a delay in action against domestic violence.

Suggestions and Recommendations

1. **Separate Policy for Women in Agriculture:** Women in agriculture are the most vulnerable section in rural India. This section faces serious problems like malnutrition, health problems, domestic violence, overburden of physical work etc. Most of the time, they do not have ownership of land. Even if women commit suicide, it will not be considered a farmer's suicide due to the issue of ownership of agricultural land. Policymakers should provide separate policies for women in agriculture. Special provisions and facilities should be there for women in agriculture because they face the highest stress in the family from all sides.
2. **Implementation of Swaminathan Commission:** Recommendation of National Commission on Farmers (Swaminathan Commission) titled 'Women in Agriculture should be implemented immediately and adequately.
3. **Maternity Facilities:** Maternity facilities like 'Baby Care' are not available for women in agriculture. These facilities should be provided to them.
4. **Rehabilitation Plan for Widow:** There should be a proper and holistic rehabilitation plan for widows and their children whose husbands committed suicide due to agrarian crises. Special protection should be provided to widows whose husbands committed suicide.
5. **Gender-Sensitive Approach:** Women in agriculture are facing different problems like health problems, sanitation, domestic violence, etc. Government should provide serious attention to solving this problem.
6. **Promotion of Women Self Help Group:** Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) should be promoted at the village level in this region
7. **Employment for Women:** Small scale women-friendly industries like agricultural processing industries should be promoted at the village level.
8. **Loan for Women:** Women in agriculture should get a loan with nominal interest or zero interest.
9. **Efforts for Socio-Political Empowerment:** There is a severe need for women's political and social empowerment in agriculture.
10. **Equal Share in Property:** Women should get an equal share in their ancestral property.
11. **Subsidies:** Subsidies and other help should transfer on account of female family candidates.
12. **Literacy among Women Farmer:** Special efforts should be delivered for increasing the literacy rate among women in the rural area.

- 13. Involvement in Decision Making:** Women should be de facto involved in decision making bodies. For that matter, society and policymakers should provide a comfortable and positive environment. Women in agriculture should get control of household income and decisions. All rights and freedom should get to women representatives in local self-government.
- 14. Women Friendly Technology:** Technology and advanced agriculture practices should be women-friendly.
- 15. Quick Legal Action against Domestic Violence:** Quick legal action should be taken against domestic violence. For that matter, the fast track court should be formulated for such kinds of cases.
- 16. Equal Wages:** Women labour in agriculture should get equal pay.

Conclusion

The women in Indian agriculture have enough potential to play the role of torchbearers in the process of sustainability in the livelihood of rural India. Policymakers cannot ignore the contribution of rural women to the agricultural development of the country where 80 per cent of rural women are engaged in agriculture. Hence there is a serious need to empower and mainstream rural women at different stages of the policy cycle from agenda-setting to reformulation of policy. There is a serious need to provide efforts in some important areas like access to resources, health facilities, ownership rights and skill development which are closely related to rural women. There is a serious need to work on recommendations which are provided by this study like separate policy for women in agriculture, implementation of Swaminathan Commission, policies for widows in agriculture, gender-sensitive approach, efforts for socio-political empowerment of women in rural areas, equal share in ancestral property, involvement in decision making, action against domestic violence and so on. Through the true empowerment of women in agriculture, the issues like nutrition security, poverty, and hunger can be addressed successfully, which ultimately strengthens the sustainable rural livelihood at the grass-root level of India.

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