



भारतीय कृषि एवं खाद्य परिषद्
INDIAN COUNCIL OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Role of Women in Eco Village Development for Sustainability

NATIONAL ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE



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Role of Women



INTRODUCTION

Women form the backbone of agriculture, in India, comprising the majority of agricultural laborers; women have been putting in labor not only in terms of physical output but also in terms of quality and efficiency. However, their contribution to rural development, food security and the socio-economic burden they share is yet to be recognized. Even at the policy level they are ignored, with the voices of women stakeholders rarely being heard by decision makers. Where policies addressing the poor do exist, small women farmers have ironically been left out. In fact in the hilly areas of the India, major proportion of women is indulged in all aspects of the agriculture. The agriculture practiced in hilly areas is more or less a form of eco agriculture due to less usage of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Scientist and now government also feel the need to shift to eco friendly agriculture for better sustainability.

Role of Women

In villages, where agriculture is the main livelihood, women perform much of the agricultural work in the fields but their work on the family farm is uncompensated. Since women's major contribution to the local economy is not recognized, they are financially dependent and vulnerable to domestic isolation and violence. These realities continue a vicious cycle of poverty.

Empowerment of women in such villages will not only lead to emergence of women leaders but will also accelerate development of the entire community. Research has shown that bringing women into leadership positions helps the larger community, given that women think about the impact of their decisions on

their families and surroundings. Indian law recognizes the importance of women's inclusion, offering a minimum of 33% of seats for women in panchayati raj institutions. The need of the hour is to equip rural women with information and skills that can build their confidence to be leaders who catalyze rural development. It has been quite evident that rural women possess tremendous potential as individuals, as leaders in their communities, and in society at large. Here are five tips on how to build their capacities for development leadership:

Role of Women

Millions of rural women are unaware of their equal rights as Indian citizens, or of ways in which they can become involved in their village-level institutions. This means women are kept from participating in the essence of Indian democracy. Structured, local means of engaging women to learn about their rights goes a long way in helping them become well-informed citizens who will eventually take on leadership roles to improve their lives and their communities.

Rural Women as Role Models

Recognizing and featuring women in rural India who have crossed barriers to lead their community forward have served to motivate other women - and men - in the community to support female leadership. Honoring women role models is a simple and effective means for getting the word out that women can be a force of positive change that benefits women, men, and children. When women have the opportunities to reach their potential, and when they are economically and socially empowered, they can become a potent force for positive, lasting social change.



Collective Responsibility

Rural women are often reluctant to voice their opinions in mixed gatherings of panchayats or village management committees. Patriarchal norms, lack of education, limited access to information, and restricted mobility discourage women from actively contributing to community development. All-women gatherings, such as mahila sangathans provide a comfortable space for women to raise fundamental, but often ignored development issues that men often do not recognize such as female literacy, alcoholism, access to clean water, and lack of toilets.

Build Media Platforms

Information is critical for empowerment. However, in rural areas, where most women are semi-illiterate or illiterate, important messages in print publications, wall paintings, posters, and other traditional rural media fail in providing them crucial information. In communities where women and girls lack freedom to attend meetings, they have few ways to find answers to their questions. Media platforms can help in overcoming the bottlenecks by promoting and providing freedom of access and some degree of literacy and training.

Help Them Young

Education is critical, especially for adolescent girls, who begin to feel social pressures acutely, experience hormonal changes, and struggle with low self-esteem. With the limited exposure available to women and girls in rural areas, life skills development is even more important than academic education. Life skills education helps girls express themselves, participate as decision makers in their life choices, and take up action-oriented roles in community governance. Such programs teach life skills through interactive training sessions that provide girls with the opportunity to share their experiences, develop a positive peer culture, and establish comradeship, which is often missing in their lives.

Eco Village Development

Eco-Village Development concept involves the implementation of appropriate and inexpensive renewable-energy technology (RET) and capacity-building activities for climate change adaptation at the village-level. It takes a collaborative approach by involving community members in planning and implementation, while also equipping them with tools

for resilience while facing climate change.

Thus, women to an extent are, and can further play a vital role in the development of Eco Villages in India as they are quicker at adopting new technologies that can improve their lives and the lives of their families. Therefore, it is important to focus on them. By including income generation through self-employment options, women can be empowered and also motivated to continue with Eco Village Development practices. Introduction of technologies which are simple, low-cost and environment-friendly will have a better and wider acceptance among women.

Conclusion

If women were given the same access to land, seed and other resources as men, they could increase yields on their farm up to 30%, reducing the number of hungry people in the world by 150 million. Thus, it is required to give priority to women's access to education, information, science and technology, and extension services to enable improving women's access, ownership and control of economic and natural resources. To ensure such access, ownership and control legal measures, appropriate credit schemes, support for women's income generating activities and the reinforcement of women's organizations and networks are needed. This, in turn, depends on strengthening women's ability to benefit from market-based opportunities by institutions and policies giving explicit priority to women farmer groups in value chains.

A number of other changes will strengthen women's contributions to agricultural production and sustainability. These include support for public services and investment in rural areas in order to improve women's living and working conditions; giving priority to technological development policies targeting rural and farm women's needs and recognizing their knowledge, skills and experience in the production of food and the conservation of biodiversity; and assessing the negative effects and risks of farming practices and technology, including pesticides on women's health, and taking measures to reduce use and exposure. Finally, if we are to better recognize women as integral to sustainable development, it is critical to ensure gender balance in decision-making at all levels and provide mechanisms to hold organizations accountable for progress.

DELIBERATIONS

Eco-Village Development concept involves the implementation of appropriate and inexpensive renewable-energy technology (RET) and capacity-building activities for climate change adaptation at the village-level. It takes a collaborative approach by involving community members in planning and implementation, while also equipping them with tools for resilience while facing climate change. Women, to an extent are, and can further play a vital role in the development of Eco Villages in India as they are quicker at adopting new technologies that can improve their lives and the lives of their families. Therefore, it is important to focus on them. By including income generation through self-employment options, women can be empowered and also motivated to continue with Eco Village Development practices. In this context, **Indian Council of Food and Agriculture**, in affiliation with **WAFD** and **INSEDA**, convened a National Round Table Conference on “**Role of Women in Eco Village Development for Sustainability**” on July 26, 2017 at India International Centre, New Delhi.

The brain storming session was chaired by **Dr. Shashi Singh**, Chairperson, Consortium of Women Entrepreneurs of India. Ms. Neerja Suneja, Director Extension, Ms. Mamta Saxena, Advisor Horticulture, Ministry of Agriculture, Ms. Zareen Myles, Executive Director, WAFD along with eminent experts and prominent names from the agriculture fraternity addressed critical issues of small women farmer participants from the states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Bihar.

Dr. M.J. Khan, Chairman, ICFA, welcomed all the delegates and members and highlighted the important role of women in agriculture in different perspective and how this kind of platform was needed for a long time. He raised various issues faced by women in the male dominated society and expressed the need for change along with the changing environment and technology. He also spoke about farming, production and post-production models along with supply chain from farm to fork. In his view point, the role of women should be increased in the areas where returns can be augmented and recognized forums should be set up for the voice of women. Moreover, flagship schemes of government, banks and other international organizations can be effectively linked and a national level platform for policy making should be set up.

Ms. Zareen Myles, Executive Director Women Actions for Development (WAFD), discussed about

the emergence of the concept of Eco Village Development (EVD). The eco village development or EVD concept was developed by jointly by WAFD and INSEDA as a means of helping women in cope with the change in climate leading to difficulties in livelihood, farming and overall environment in the sub Himalayan regions of Uttarakhand. Women's burden was increasing not only in farming but also in fetching water from distances as water tables were going down and springs drying up, fetching fodder for animals apart from regular work. This burden was increasing as men were leaving the villages and the homes became women headed homes in the absence of the men. In short, EVD is an integrated approach for development, for communities specially women through interventions of affordable green technologies using local resources, organic/eco agriculture, kitchen gardens and capacity building of women to decrease their drudgery and improve livelihoods.

The focus of the eco village development is to adopt mitigation and adaptation practices to help women and communities as well as to focus on low carbon development activities. Through this work in 6 villages of Uttarakhand, the organization have established an evidence base which shows that the activities of EVD can alleviate the effects of climate change on the lives of the women and communities up to a great extent. The different technologies are affordable, low carbon, user friendly, environmentally safe green technologies.



These are rain roof water harvesting tanks, small solar dryers for domestic use, bamboo baskets for making organic compost, small solar poly house, and a special hybrid improved cook stove which not only eliminates smoke inside the house but also eliminates up to 80% smoke emission into the atmosphere. The special features for this are that it uses less firewood, and the waste heat in form of smoke and flue gasses warms water, it also warms the room as well as cooks two dishes at the same time. The second focus activity is organic farming and organic kitchen gardening, self help groups for thrift and credit and organizing women into women's groups for collective action.

There are now 350 to 400 women practicing organic farming on their small pieces of land and are able to achieve 70% food security for their families. Through kitchen gardens they are able to improve their nutrition intake by the inclusion of fresh vegetables in their diets daily. They earn a small amount by selling some of the extra produce or barter this for those things they have not grown.

Now that the organization have an evidence base and show that the EVD concept works, WAFD would like to invite industry, women entrepreneurs dealing in organic produce, research institutions and experts to join us to take up an entire district to implement EVD in each village. With data it would give the EVD credibility so it can be put up for the government to study for inclusion of EVD as a policy.

Lastly, she welcomed the women farmers from Uttarakhand who came to share about their experiences after being linked to EVD initiative of WAFD and also how they were able to overcome their problems.

Dr. Shashi Singh, Chairperson, Consortium of Women Entrepreneurs of India, discussed about the capacity building of women especially from villages. The introduction of "M" of MSME, which stands for Micro is to promote women as about 99% of women are from unorganized sector i.e. they are not recognized. Every woman can be an entrepreneur in some or other sense. There are different modules of entrepreneurship and each module needs assessment based approach as there is need to bring on broad scale of entrepreneurship. Rather than forcing women to undertake a particular task, they should be given freedom to decide for themselves and provide them with the required skills, tools and technology for the same along with making them understand the current market demand. Moreover, the need of the hour is quality, certification, branding and marketing and most

importantly appropriate use of Intellectual Property Rights. Thus, women should be aware about their rights and product quality standards. This is because it plays an important role in transforming "village to smart village and smart village to smart city". In fact, men have to be part of this movement as we all have to complement each other. It is about family development along with community development. It is not easy to move or change but society have to condition women by dissemination of information. It is building "by the women" and "for the women".

Mrs. Savita Malik, Farmer, Keet Saksharta Misson, suggested that understanding the life cycles of vegetarian and non-vegetarian insects is the key to maintaining the natural balance in crop cycles. Insects are not the enemy, but pesticides are. Working under the panel for Dr. Surender Dalal, they do not propagate organic or natural farming rather they suggest that it is better to take the route of mutual co-existence by making peace with them. Even though climate change is resulting in more frequent pest attack, framers who understand insects feel that nature is able to maintain the balance. Human interference is more responsible for increasing crop failure. Every insect is important for the crop. The popularity of this mission has grown manifold which resulted in saving of about ₹1 crore on pesticides in Punjab last year. There is still need for chain system, full government support and integrated management.

Ms. Neerja Suneja, Director Extension, Ministry of Agriculture put light on different government initiatives and need for these schemes to reach to ground level. There is lack of awareness and how these schemes do not reach to middle level platform.



There is National Gender Resource Centre in the Ministry of Agriculture. It works in the direction of for increasing knowledge and providing economic support along with working with UNDP to help backward regions. Under National Policy of Farmers 2007, major amendments were made especially for women like changes in definition of women in National commission of Women. She also emphasized that women should be encouraged to benefit from all the programmes and take equal participation.

There is Sub-Mission on Agriculture Extension which focuses on awareness creation and enhanced use of appropriate technologies. Personnel trained under Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres Scheme (ACABC) and Diploma in Agriculture Extension Services for Input Dealers (DAESI) also provides extension services to the farmers. Use of interactive and innovative methods of information dissemination like pico projectors, low cost films, handheld devices, mobile based services, Kisan Call Centers (KCCs) etc. are used and convergence is brought among extension efforts under different programmes and schemes at village level through the institution of ATMA (Agriculture Technology Management Agency) and Block Technology Teams (BTTs). One can always approach District Agricultural Officer for help besides grievance portal. For an agrarian economy it is now time to be a torch bearer for women farmers.

Ms. Purnima Sahni Mohanty, Director – Corp Comm, DuPont South Asia, discussed about the projects undertaken by their organization as the Corporate Social Responsibility initiative in three themes namely: Education, Skill Development and Environment conservation which also includes health and hygiene. They are undertaking a Women Farmer Programme in Hisar and Telangana which helps women farmer to connect them to market so that they get fair price for their produce.

Dr. Shikha Chaudhry, Veterinarian, Mother Dairy, explained how they empower women in Muzaffarnagar district as they did not get fair price for their produce. The most common mode of disposal of milk, though less remunerative is to convert milk into Ghee and Khoya. In the absence of adequate storage facilities these products are sold at very low price due to the fact that milk & milk products are perishable commodities. Individual producer finds it difficult to sell their produce at reasonable price because of lack of resources. This leads to exploitation of milk producers by the middleman. Mother Dairy help these farmers by providing proper training such as educating them

about proper standard of rearing which help these farmers provide good quality product and buy milk from them on the basis of quality of milk and exact quantity. Lastly, she invited a women farmer associated with her to share her story with the participants.

Mrs. Anupama Singh, Faculty, RUDSETI, stressed on the fact that employment potential in agricultural economy appears to have reached a saturation level leading to large scale migration of manpower from rural areas to urban areas adding woes and pressure to already over strained civic infrastructure. It is under these circumstances that Rural Development & Self Employment Training Institute (RUDSETI) a unique initiative in mitigating the problem of unemployment was taken a way back in 1982 jointly by Sri Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara Educational Trust, Syndicate Bank and Canara Bank. Government of India has recognized Rural Development and Self Employment training Institute (RUDSETI) model as a replicable model for promoting development of entrepreneurship amongst the rural youth and has advised all Banks with Lead Bank responsibility to open “RUDSETI Institutes” under the name and style as Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETIs). Over the last three years, a number of RSETIs have been established in various States and at present, there are 577 functional RSETIs across the country, which has trained more than 2 crore people.

Ms. Ranjita Sood, Director Government Affairs at Abbott Healthcare, mentioned about the production of one of their products, PediaSure, whose plant is setup in Gujarat. She mentioned that one of the ingredients used in the PediaSure is power milk, which they initially used to import from various countries as a result, there had to bear large cost for the same. Thus, they undertook a initiative and contacted dairy farmers of Mumbai, who would supply there milk to the dairy and they would process the milk and process it to powder milk and sell it to the company.

Finally, the formal vote of thanks was presented by **Ms. Mamta Jain, Director – Corporate Affairs, ICFA**, who expressed her gratitude to all the participants for sparing there valuable time and making the discussion worthy.

The Conference ended on a happy note.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields. Despite such a huge involvement, her role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic, and political indicators. Hence, a specific forum should be set up by the government or with public private partnership, which acts as a voice for women and provide them a platform in accordance to present their views on policies and practices in the agricultural sector of India.
2. Despite women's role as a backbone of food production and provision for family consumption in developing countries, women remain limited in their access to critical resources and services due to cultural, traditional and sociological factors. Thus, NGOs and government agencies should take initiatives for skill development and technical knowhow for women farmers and allocate a quota of funds for training of farm women.
3. There is a need for improving and redesigning training programmes for farm women. These should include, (a) allowing sufficient time to enable women to acquire new skills and adjust schedules to fit women's existing workloads, (b) Emphasize activities for which there is an actual income-generation potential, (c) ensuring the involvement and full participation of women from poorer and less educated backgrounds, (d) use trainers who are not only technically competent and up-to-date, but who empathize with the needs and aspirations of rural women and providing practical field experience in the use of innovations.
4. Currently, there are many programmes and initiatives taken by various NGOs, government agencies and other organizations, but there seems to be little cooperation between projects administered by the same agency or between agencies, even where these agencies are under the umbrella of the same national government or development policy. The use of human and material resources could be managed more efficiently and with greater impact if development agencies would cooperate with each other. Moreover, in order to avoid duplicity, a database of various schemes or initiatives for women should be created and open for access to all.
5. Various legislative changes have been made in India to facilitate women's rights to inheritance and ownership of land, but in practice they still have great difficulty in realizing the benefits which should flow to them. Thus, women must be aware regarding their existing rights and should have access to judicial reliefs and redresses. This can be done by disseminating information to women by conducting workshops, seminars, counseling and etc. The government through its agencies can execute and earmark the funds for the same.
6. Private companies in food and agriculture sector or drawing input from agriculture sector should mark a part of CSR funds for development of farming community to improve their standard of living by executing training programs, workshops, seminars to enhance their technological knowhow and farming techniques.
7. Women should be encouraged to shift to entrepreneurship as it provides them greater recognition. Because of relative isolation, rural people tend to be more self-sufficient. However, resulting sense of independence may reduce likelihood of seeking support. Hence, there is a need for promoting women entrepreneurship at a broader scale, which involves assessment of needs such as skills, tools, technologies and understanding of importance of market demand. Therefore, government should arrange to provide entrepreneurship development training to farm women to ensure better success.
8. There are number of SHGs and FPOs for skill development, training and etc., which already exist. Thus, capacity building of existing groups should be strengthened, which can be more successful than forming a new group to which members are less likely to be committed. Moreover, women groups which are at passive stage or are adjourning should be revived or reorganized as dissolution of groups will demotivate the other farm women also.



9. Small efforts are already under way to alleviate the hardship faced by farm women, but the most effective way would be to customize the existing and new design tools and equipments to suit their needs. This is because; it will reduce the work load and improve efficiency in agricultural operations by women.

10. The country has a coastline of 7,517 km and an extensive river and canal system of about 195,210 km, consisting of 14 major rivers, 44 medium rivers and numerous small rivers and streams. Thus, India offers a

huge potential for aquaculture development. There is a need to stress on the inclusion of aquaculture as an integral part of the eco-village development. The "farm pond" scheme in Maharashtra has been a success in terms of water conservation, overcoming adversities of unpredictable rain fall and generating additional farm income through aquaculture. Therefore, a small pond will be ideally suitable for the women farmers as additional income generating activity.





LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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2. Ms. Neerja Suneja, Director Extension, Ministry of Agriculture
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25. Mrs. Vinita Thakur, Programme Executive, All India Radio - FM Gold
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31. Mrs. Savita Malik, Farmer, Keet Saksharta Misson, +5 Women Farmers
32. Mr. Narendra Arya, Farmer – Organic Farming, Muzaffarnagar
33. Mrs. Manisha Sharma, Head Milk Collection, Mother Dairy + 3 Women Farmers (Dairy)
34. Rural Women Entrepreneurs, CWEI – 2
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