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The Role of Women in Production and Marketing of Agricultural Products

Sreelakshmi Das¹, Bharatha Vinay Kumar², Amrutha T Joshi³, Jagrathi B Deshmanya⁴, Lokesh G. B⁵

^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur,

Abstract: *Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably when urbanization and labour migration in the economy are inviting greater opportunities for women in agriculture to sustain the production levels. Thus emphasizing the transformation of farm women from labour to farm producers and agripreneurs. This study focused mainly on the role of SHG in empowering women as successful agripreneurs. The present study analyzed empirically the factors determining the participation of women in agri and allied activities. Among various factors, the role of SHGs and women collective groups had given major thrust along with other institutional supports. In line with this, the study had also focused on the major constraints hindering women to reach out more towards secondary agricultural activities. Apart from these the study brought out certain strategies for mainstreaming women in agricultural marketing.*

Keywords: *Self help groups, Economic empowerment*

I. INTRODUCTION

Women play a major role in the agriculture of developing countries. In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture is as high as 84%. Women makeup about 33% cultivators and 47% of agricultural laborers'. Even though women are strongly involved in smallholder cultivation, their role is seldom fully acknowledged or rewarded. They engage in multiple livelihood strategies and yet their contributions to agriculture are treated as mere 'help' or unpaid subsistence labor. Despite their dominance of labor force, women in India still face extreme disadvantage in terms of pay, land rights, access to credit and representation in local farmer organizations.

The 'feminization' of agriculture has been amplified by the large-scale migration of men seeking higher-paid work in urban areas, urging women to change their role from part time agricultural laborers' to full time producers. Thus the need of women to be predominant at all levels of agricultural production including marketing can be further improved by incorporating them into groups like SHG or Women Cooperatives through which they can pool themselves and cut down their drudgery and make their efforts worthwhile and economical.

A. Role of SHG's: Beyond Microfinance:

A self help group (SHG) is a voluntary association of men or women in similar economic conditions. The Self help Group linked micro credit programs mostly aim at extending income generating self employment activities among poor women in rural areas through financial inclusion.

The concept of collective action is to organize small farmers in the wake of agricultural market liberalization. Especially where women farmers collaborate, there could be gains in productivity as well as bargaining power in acting jointly rather than individually and can help spread the risk of farming among a larger number and increase production and marketing opportunities. The main idea behind these women cooperatives is to encourage farmer groups to organize different types of services for themselves, including input supply, credit, processing, technical services and marketing arrangements-activities that would increase their productivity and incomes, while decreasing their dependence on farm income alone

B. Past Experiences

According to Ahmed and Hussain (2004) rural women play key roles in agriculture sector production by working with full passion in production of crops right from the soil preparation till postharvest activities. Aggregate data show that women comprise about 43 percent of the agricultural labor force globally and in developing countries (FAO, 2011). Moreover, according to the data of World Bank (2013), global female labour force participation is around 50 percent but, in fact, less value is given to their contributions, and rural women are less likely to realize their capacity to make a life better for themselves, families and communities.

Study by Swain and Adel Varghese(2009) have shown that in case of Indian SHG members with longer participation in SHGs, members move away from pure agriculture as an income source towards other sources such as livestock income. Training by NGOs positively affects asset creation but the type of SHG linkage per se has no effect.

The study by Swain and Wallentin(2009) using household survey data on SHG from India adopted a general structural model where the latent women empowerment and its latent components (economic factors and financial confidence, managerial control, behavioral changes, education and networking, communication and political participation and awareness) are measured using observed indicators.

They show that for SHG members, economic factors, managerial control and behavioral changes are the most significant factors in empowering women.

Women play a pivotal role in agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector.

Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes (Team and Doss, 2011; Arshad et al., 2010; Pal, 2013).

The process of economic empowerment among women can be institutionalized through Self Help Groups. The role played by Self Help Groups in the field of women empowerment is being recognized these days. The SHGs are characterized by a focused attention on providing employment opportunities by imparting training in order to generate both income as well as employment (Husain and Nair, 2006).

II. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- 1) To identify the role of women in marketing of agriculture and allied products.
- 2) To identify the constraints faced by women in participation of agricultural activities.

A. Hypothesis

- 1) Women play a significant role in marketing of agriculture and allied produces.
- 2) SHGs have proved successful in empowering rural women.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in villages of Raichur taluk Karnataka. To know more about the socio economic background, asset position and extent of involvement in agricultural activities of women in the village primary data will be collected with the help of questionnaire having both open and closed ended questions and through personal interviews of a sample of 30 women (15 members and 15 non member of SHG). Two SHGs were selected randomly for the study.

Based on the Information collected by interacting with the respondents, involved in marketing of agri and allied produces, the data collected were tabulated and analyzed using simple statistical tools like ratios and percentages to interpret the results.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. General Characteristics of Respondents

In the survey we had observed that many self employed women who were pursuing their activities from home, could not actually demarcate the exact allocation of time between the household activities and income earning activities as agricultural activity was considered subsistence to their household activities. But their age, family size and literacy rate had influenced their participation in SHG activities.

Middle aged women showed higher rate of participation because they recognized the need of more income from subsidiary sources. Also higher educational status of women made them aware of better opportunities in forming a collective. Women in nuclear families showed a higher rate of participation in SHG as they had limited family financial sources. (Table 1)

Table1.

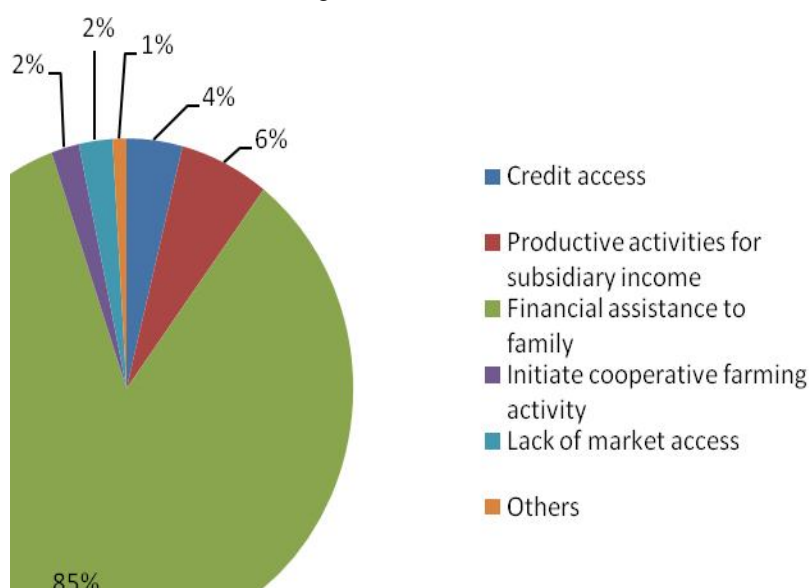
Sl no	Particulars	Member (n=15)	Non member (n=15)
I.	Average age		
1	Young (18-35)	4 (26.66)	7 (46.66)
2	Middle (36-50)	8 (53.33)	5 (33.33)
3	Old (>50)	3 (20.00)	2 (13.33)
II.	Education status		
1	Illiterate	2 (13.33)	6 (40.00)
2	Primary	4 (26.67)	3 (20.00)
3	Highschool	7 (46.66)	4 (26.67)
4	College	2 (13.33)	2 (13.33)
III.	Family composition		
1.	Nuclear family	10 (66.67)	7 (46.67)
2.	Joint family	5 (33.33)	8 (53.33)

Note: figures in parenthe are percentages to the total.

B. Reasons to join SHG

Of all the reasons cited, majority of the women had resorted to join SHG inorder to provide financial assistance to family (85%).The next weightage was given to initiation of productive activities for subsidiary income (6%), means of credit access, market access and cooperative farming respectively. (Fig1.)

Fig1.



C. Participation Of Women In Agri And Allied Activities

Table2.

Sl no	Activity	Involvement			
		Member(n=15)		Non member (n=15)	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	Production	7	46.67	4	26.66
2	Grading and standardization	5	33.33	2	13.33
3	Packaging	3	20.00	3	20.00
4	Transportation	2	13.33	0	0.00
5	Sales and distribution	4	26.66	1	6.00
6	Finance/Accounting	2	13.30	3	20.00
7	others	1	6.00	0	0.00

Note : total doesn't make up to the percentile as there were multiple responses.

From the above table it is clear that extent of participation is more among the women members of SHG rather than non member. Majority of women were involved in production, grading and standardization, packaging and distribution activities. A meager proportion were involved in transportation as it is considered as a tedious job.

Thus it was recognized during the survey that there was a need to bring more women under collective groups like SHGs so that they can involve more in agricultural activities . This can be brought in through various extension approaches.

D. Constraints

Sl no	Constraints	Frequency	percentage
1	Allocation of work hours	4	26.7
2	Family restrictions	4	26.7
3	Lack of credit	3	20
4	Distance from household	2	13.3
5	others	2	13.3

Note: Total doesn't make up to the percentile as there were multiple responses.

- 1) The major constraint was the allocation of work hours. Since patriarchy demanded that women complete their household chores, it was found during the survey that SHG members generally sacrifice their leisure hours to undertake SHG activities in the afternoon and evenings. This leads to overwork, fatigue and even malnutrition.
- 2) Another constraint was the existence of local caste groups where they concentrate on unnecessary social issues of the society rather than on productive activities.
- 3) SHG did improve the income levels to the respondents expected level there had been criticisms that they have ignored the poorer households fearing credit risk.
- 4) Also the women in the groups though enthusiastic in involving in more secondary agricultural activities they lack clear market information and poor risk bearing ability. Also a major part of the loans sanctioned for productive activities of SHG were being diverted to improve their household asset possession and meeting financial insecurities of their own family.

E. Strategies and Policies for Mainstreaming Women in Agricultural Production and Marketing

- 1) There is need to bring more women under a collective group so that they can involve more in agricultural activities .This can be brought in by various extension approaches by identifying the right training and extension needs of women, giving women farmers more access to meetings, trainings, exposure visits and demonstrations can be organized as per the convenience of the women farmers through SHGs
- 2) Active women groups can be selected and provided with input and credit to practice improved technologies.
- 3) Provide access to market information and better market intelligence.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has collated the empirical evidence on women's role in agricultural production and marketing can be enhanced by working with SHGs.

SHG had made its members financially stable also granting them a sense of empowerment. Their membership in SHGs gave them the necessary bargaining power in the market. Muhammad Yunus, the winner of 2006 Nobel Peace Prize said:

“When a destitute mother starts earning an income, her dreams of success invariably centre on her children. A woman's second priority is the household. She wants to buy utensils, build a stronger roof, or find a bed for herself and her family. A man has entirely different set of priorities. When a destitute father earns an extra income, he focuses more attention on himself. Thus money entering a household through women brings more benefit to the family as a whole.”

Thus removing the gender disparities in agricultural sector, providing equal space and allocation of resources (land, machineries, inputs and extension facilities) and providing more activity choices to participate, women will soon find progress in various agricultural activities viz., marketing and sales.

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