

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH AGRIPRENEURSHIP
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Abstract: Agriculture, the base of Indian economy provides employment to 50 percent of work force, which again consists of 63.1 percent women. Among the pool of farmers, 70 percent are women. Those women farmers act as principal food producer, devote maximum time to agriculture but remain unreported in statistics. To owe justice to their heavy work, their energy needs to be properly channellized. One of the medium for that is agripreneurship. Women agripreneurship is a medium for women empowerment by making them self-sufficient, economically stable, independent decision taking, better purchasing power, socio-culturally more active. There are various opportunities in agriculture and allied sectors which are needed to be explored more and practiced to get a sound economic benefit. The women farmers need to be motivated by organizing them into cooperatives, Self Help Groups (SHGs), providing them land ownership, attracting them towards Micro, Small and Medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) and policy implementation by government to make agriculture more attractive and remunerative for them and the future generations.

Keywords: Agripreneurship, Women empowerment, SHGs, MSMEs.

Introduction

Agriculture being the mainstay of Indian economy, contributes to 18 percent of GDP. This sector provides employment to 50 percent of work force in India (Economic survey, 2017-18), which again consists of 63.1 percent women (Census, 2011). Nearly half of the world's farmers are women and in India it is around 70 percent (Saaliq, 2018). Women produce on an average more than half of all the food that is produced in world (FAO, 2011). So this feminization of agriculture led to feminization of labour. As small farm production is increasingly unattractive to males they frequently abandon agriculture in favour of greater opportunities in urban areas, women are left as the main labour force to eke out a living in rural areas (Stephens, 1995). The feminization of labour leads to feminization of poverty with women undertaking an increased portion of less remunerative work. The feminization of rural poverty is tied to gender constraints in women's traditional roles (Gills, 2002). So to drag women out of this unfavorable situation, they need to be empowered. This women empowerment is a buzz word of every platform starting from household issues to national

politics. The best way to empower women is to make them economically self-sufficient. In India as 70 percent women are farmers, so it's the best measure to empower them on their stay, which can be possible through entrepreneurship in agriculture sector which in short called as agripreneurship. Empowerment of women through agripreneurship will ultimately serve our purpose of gender equality so also food security.

Women Entrepreneurs may be defined as a group of women who initiate, organize and operate a business or enterprise. The Government of India has defined women owned enterprises as — “an enterprise owned and controlled by women having a minimum financial interest of 51 percent of the capital and giving at least 51 per cent of the employment generated in the enterprise to women” (Goyal and Prakash, 2012 and Sharma, 2013). So women entrepreneurship directly empowers the entrepreneur so also to other women members of community.

Constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in India

The traditional structure of gender bias in the society, severely constrains women's productivity by the fragmentation of their time, their dual and triple responsibilities, and their lack of access to essential inputs including knowledge i.e. lack of education, Social barriers (Garg and Agarwal, 2017). Again report suggests that women own less than 20 percent of the world's land, a survey of 34 developing nations by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization puts that percentage as low as 10 (Villa, 2017), so they are not able to get benefits of number of schemes which asks for land entitlement for providing financial assistance to farmers of India. So women farmers are facing financial problems while buying the critical inputs of agriculture. Along with this other barriers that limits women to prosper are personal barriers like self-confidence and fear of failure, lack of skill, lack of entrepreneurial aptitude, less market awareness and other operational barriers. Furthermore, as consequences of the unequal opportunities, most women's work day is longer than men's and many women have reached the limits of endurance in stretching their day. Also despite their harder labour, their gap with men is steadily widening. Women spend their labour in less remunerative or unpaid work, and much of rural women's work is not captured in official statistics.

Women-Agripreneurship: a way forward

Traditionally, agriculture seen as a low-tech industry with limited dynamics dominated by small and marginal farmers, mostly paying attention to sustenance of their family and left over to sold in the nearby markets with fewer profits. This led agriculture unattractive for

future generations. Over the last decade, this situation has changed dramatically due to economic liberalization. Agriculture now seen as an enterprise with good profit which is possible by changing the way it has been practiced. Making farmers aware of crop diversification, integrated farming, farm mechanization, market intelligence, value addition, post-harvest processing, new necessities for product quality, chain management, food security, sustainability, and so on has brought a tremendous impact in this sector and most of them now take agriculture as an enterprise, with sound economic benefits. These alterations have cleared the way for new participator, innovation, and portfolio entrepreneurship. Concept of Agripreneur defined as “entrepreneur whose main business is agriculture or agriculture-related” Agriculture + Entrepreneur = Agripreneur. Agripreneurship can be defined as “generally, sustainable, community-oriented, directly-marketed agriculture. Sustainable agriculture denotes a holistic, systems oriented approach to farming that focuses on the interrelationships of social, economic, and environmental processes” (Upalonakar and Biradar, 2015). Again agripreneurship among women is a major agenda of government for better balancing in the society and women empowerment. To achieve this, several measures needed to be taken. Describing some of those is:

- 1. Land ownership:** The foremost thing needed to be done is land entitlement on the name of female members of the household, so that women will become self-sustained, independent in decision making and most important to get easy access to benefits from banks and many other schemes which demands a land ownership.
- 2. Agricultural cooperatives:** In many developing countries, women work individually, often isolated, in the informal economy, operating at a low level of activity and reaping marginal income. Joining forces in small-scale cooperative can provide them with the economic, social and political leverage they need. For gender mainstreaming in rural development, it is important to promote women’s participation in cooperative entrepreneurship
- 3. SHG: Self-help groups (SHG):** SHGs are small voluntary associations of people preferably from the same socioeconomic background based on the concept of solving common problems through self-help and mutual help. This existing concept of SHG can be rejuvenated with the focus on empowerment of women through agripreneurship.
- 4. MSME in agriculture:** Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in agriculture sector can play a crucial way to promote women’s economic empowerment while fighting against poverty and gender inequity. They have been identified as engines of growth by many

governments, and their promotion has led to creation of new jobs for developing countries and to drive innovation and economic dynamism.

5. ICT tools: Now-a-days ICT tools have been popularized and have multifarious uses such as medium to inform, aware, educate, dissemination of new technologies, assessment of new technologies, audience poll, platform for discussion among experts and farmers, information on market i.e. market price, market demands, weather forecasting etc. Mobile phone is one of easy assessable ICT tool also being used by most of the rural population. Whatsapp as an e-media serving a better purpose in this aspect. Government is also emphasizing ICT projects like e-NAM, e-Pashuhaat, e-Choupal etc. to reach each and every farmer rapidly with less cost and easy assesibility. So this platform has immense potential in promoting agripreneurship.

6. Policy implications: In the current decade number of policies emphasized on entrepreneurship in agriculture like DEDS (Dairy Entrepreneurship Development Scheme, Agri Udaan etc. emphasizing entrepreneurship in agriculture and allied sectors.

Entrepreneurial opportunities in agriculture and allied sectors

Agriculture sector provides various employment opportunities like Organic farming, Agro based industries, farm mechanization, post- harvest processing, quality input production and supply chain, synthesis of bio fertilizers like vermi composting, medicinal plant farming, pickle production, flori culture, mushroom cultivation so on. Furthermore, an important subsector of agriculture i.e. Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Sector provides opportunities for milk processing and chilling, meat processing, feed preparation, Vaccine and drug preparations along with other allied sectors like honey bee rearing, fish production, oyster farming etc. are the innovative ways to take agriculture as a means of commercialization and profitable venture.

Opportunities are not lacking, concern is proper utilization of those. Women farmers needed to be aware, motivated and trained about these diverse agripreneurial opportunities and skilled to manage those, from the bottom level by organizations like Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), NGOs and agricultural universities on agri-preneurship development which will not only solve the purpose of women empowerment in terms economic and socio-cultural aspect but also will make agriculture more attractive and lucrative.

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