

## EMPOWERMENT WOMEN THROUGH AGRICULTURE EXTENSION SERVICES

<sup>1</sup> Sudhanshu <sup>2</sup>CM Tripathi <sup>3</sup>Mithlesh Kumar Jha <sup>4</sup>Ashish Kumar  
Pandey <sup>5</sup> Mamta Tripathi <sup>6</sup>Ankit Tiwari <sup>7</sup>Abhishek Kumar  
Mishra <sup>8</sup>Sant Kumar Tripathi <sup>9</sup>Haripal Singh <sup>10</sup>Shashi Bala  
Singh <sup>11</sup>Rahul Shukla <sup>12</sup>Pushpendra Singh Gurjar

<sup>1</sup>SMS (Extension) DRI LBS KVK Gonda, <sup>2</sup>Senior Scientist and Head DRI LBS  
KVK Gonda <sup>3</sup>SMS (Agriculture Eng.) DRI LBS KVK Gonda <sup>4</sup>SMS (Plant  
pathology ) DRI LBS KVK Gonda <sup>5</sup>SMS (Home science ) DRI LBS KVK  
Gonda <sup>6</sup>SMS (Agronomy) DRI LBS KVK Gonda <sup>7</sup>SMS (Animal Husbandry)  
DRI LBS KVK Gonda <sup>8</sup>Program Assistant (Extension) DRI LBS KVK Gonda  
<sup>9</sup>Program Assistant (Agronomy) DRI LBS KVK Gonda <sup>10</sup>Program Assistant  
(Home Science) DRI LBS KVK Gonda <sup>11</sup>SRF DRI LBS KVK Gonda <sup>12</sup>SMS  
(Horticulture) DRI KVK Chitrakoot (Satna)

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### ABSTRACT

The empowerment of women through agricultural extension services is a crucial intersection that connects gender equality, rural development, and sustainable agricultural practices. This abstract provides a succinct summary of the transformative capacity inherent in agricultural extension programs specifically designed for women in the agricultural sector. These programs act as catalysts for improving the social and economic conditions, promoting equal opportunities for all, and advancing gender equality in rural communities. Agriculture extension services, when tailored to empower women, cover a range of interventions targeted at augmenting female involvement, expertise, and autonomy in farming techniques. These efforts focus on offering customized training, opportunities to learn contemporary farming methods, knowledge in financial matters, and skills in entrepreneurship. By enabling women to obtain resources, information, and opportunities in agriculture, these programs enhance their position in this field and also enhance household food security and economic sustainability. Furthermore, the empowerment of women in agricultural extension goes beyond the scope of farming techniques. It includes the cultivation of leadership skills, active involvement in the community, and the overcoming of cultural obstacles. These initiatives disrupt conventional gender norms, creating a space where women can take on influential roles and make decisions that shape the agriculture industry. This abstract briefly captures the core concept of women's empowerment through agriculture extension services, emphasizing its diverse and wide-ranging effects on livelihoods, rural development, and gender equality. This statement highlights the significant impact of customized extension programs in unleashing the latent potential of women as crucial contributors to sustainable agriculture and inclusive economic development.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender equality, rural communities, agricultural extension services, entrepreneurship, livelihood

### INTRODUCTION

Agriculture serves as the fundamental basis of India's economy, engaging more than half of the nation's people, with women making substantial contributions to its prosperity. Women's contributions to farming and allied occupations, despite being significant, are frequently devalued and disregarded. The

agriculture sector continues to experience gender inequities, which hinder women's access to resources, decision-making positions, and possibilities for advancement. Women, who make up over 50% of the agricultural labor force in India, participate in a wide range of farming tasks, including soil preparation and post-harvest

maintenance. However, their involvement is limited by complex and diverse obstacles. The challenges encompass restricted availability of land ownership, financing facilities, markets, technology, and educational resources. Furthermore, cultural norms and societal expectations frequently limit the independence and movement of women, thereby restricting their ability to make a complete contribution to agricultural development. Empowering women in agriculture goes beyond mere inclusion; it requires building an enabling environment that recognizes, values, and amplifies women's agency, abilities, and contributions. Agricultural extension services play a crucial role in reducing the gaps and promoting gender-inclusive agricultural growth. This chapter explores the diverse and complex terrain of women's empowerment in India through agricultural extension services. The text delves into the obstacles encountered by women in the agricultural industry, emphasizes the importance and function of extension services, and presents tactics designed to empower women in this pivotal area. This chapter seeks to illuminate the transformative capacity of customized extension services in enhancing women's involvement, empowerment, and influence in Indian agriculture. It does so by analyzing the current obstacles, proposing effective tactics, and showcasing successful examples. The chapter finally promotes a change in perspective, highlighting the necessity of gender-inclusive agricultural policies and interventions for achieving sustainable rural development and fair growth. The chapter will analyze in more detail the function of extension services in enabling women in agriculture to obtain resources, technology, information, and skills that are specifically designed to solve their distinct issues. Furthermore, it will showcase effective methods and projects that have shown concrete results in empowering women and promoting gender equality in the agricultural sector of India. This chapter seeks to enhance the discussion on women's empowerment in agriculture in India by conducting a comprehensive examination of the obstacles, prospects, and optimal methods. It provides valuable insights and suggestions to policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders who are interested in establishing an inclusive and prosperous agricultural environment.

## UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S ROLE IN INDIAN AGRICULTURE

Throughout history, women in India have played crucial roles in agricultural activities, actively participating in many stages of farming, ranging from pre-sowing to post-harvest tasks. Although they make substantial contributions, their jobs frequently go unnoticed and are not given proper recognition within the agriculture industry.

### Engagement in farming activities

Women play an active role in several agricultural activities, such as land preparation, seed sowing, weed control, fertilizer and pesticide application, crop care, harvesting, and post-harvest management. Furthermore, they engage in animal husbandry, dairy farming, and the management of household gardens, making substantial contributions to both food production and the sustenance of their families.

### Contribution to livelihoods

Women's contributions to livelihoods encompass more than just agricultural labor; they also play a crucial role in economically supporting their family. They frequently participate in non-agricultural pursuits such as weaving, handicrafts, and small-scale enterprises, which help to diversify household earnings and strengthen rural economies.

### Preservation of traditional knowledge

Women hold vital traditional knowledge and indigenous customs about seed selection, water conservation, crop diversity, and soil fertility preservation. The transmission of this knowledge between generations constitutes the fundamental basis of sustainable agriculture operations.

### Invisible labor and unrecognized contributions

Women's substantial role in agricultural output frequently remains unrecognized and unappreciated, despite its extent. They have obstacles with restricted availability of resources, land ownership, credit opportunities, and authority in making decisions within households and communities.

### Contribution to nutrition and household well-being

Women are essential in guaranteeing the provision of food and nutrition inside the household. Their participation in the development of kitchen gardens and different crops has a direct impact on the nutritional well-being of the entire family, particularly children and other vulnerable individuals within the home.

### Community cohesion and resilience

Women residing in rural areas frequently establish self-help associations, cooperatives, and joint agricultural endeavors, promoting community resilience, exchanging expertise, and providing mutual assistance during periods of adversity.

#### **Obstacles and difficulties**

Women face a range of obstacles, such as restricted opportunities for education, discriminatory cultural expectations, limited control over resources, time limits resulting from many obligations, and inadequate representation in decision-making arenas. These obstacles limit their potential and impede their ability to actively participate in revolutionary agriculture techniques.

It is essential to acknowledge and enhance the contributions of women in agriculture in order to promote sustainable and inclusive agricultural progress. To fully unlock the potential of women in India's agricultural industry, it is crucial to make efforts to reduce gender inequities, ensure fair access to resources and opportunities, and recognize the valuable contributions of women. Providing customized agricultural extension services to women can play a crucial role in tackling these issues and unleashing the revolutionary potential of women in Indian agriculture.

### **CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE**

**Restricted land and property rights:** Women frequently face limitations in owning land or possessing secure land rights, which hinders their capacity to get finance, exercise autonomy in decision-making, and engage in agricultural investments. Gender-based social conventions and conventional inheritance practices frequently give preference to male successors, resulting in the marginalization of women with regards to landownership.

#### **Financial constraints and limited access to credit**

Women face challenges in obtaining financial resources and credit facilities due to strict collateral requirements, insufficient financial knowledge, and inadequate representation in official banking organizations. This impedes their capacity to allocate resources towards agricultural inputs, technology, and infrastructure.

#### **Limited access to resources and inputs**

Women farmers encounter difficulties in obtaining high-quality seeds, fertilizers, insecticides, and state-of-the-art farming

equipment. This constraint adversely affects the productivity and quality of crops, hence limiting their capacity to compete in markets and enhance the well-being of farmers.

#### **Restricted access to educational and training programs**

The disparity in access to education and training exacerbates the gender disparity in agricultural knowledge and skills. Women frequently lack sufficient access to contemporary farming methodologies, scientific expertise, and agricultural advancements, impeding their ability to embrace more effective and environmentally-friendly farming methods.

#### **Time constraints and multiple responsibilities**

Women residing in rural areas face the challenge of managing various responsibilities simultaneously, such as agricultural labor, household tasks, childcare, and other unpaid domestic duties, due to limited time availability. Their ability to engage in capacity-building activities, attend training programs, or participate in community projects is limited by these time constraints.

#### **Technological barriers and digital divide**

Technological barriers and the digital divide hinder women in rural regions from accessing technology, information, digital tools, and agricultural extension services. These limitations arise from factors like inadequate infrastructure, low digital literacy, and connectivity problems. This impedes their ability to obtain crucial agricultural knowledge and access market opportunities.

#### **Cultural and societal norms**

Dominant cultural norms and gender stereotypes frequently limit the ability of women to move freely, exert influence in decision-making processes, and engage in community and institutional activities. This hinders their capacity to express grievances, obtain resources, and assume leadership positions in agricultural advancement.

#### **Climate change and environmental challenges**

Climate change poses significant problems to women farmers, who are disproportionately impacted by its effects, including unpredictable weather patterns, limited access to water, soil degradation, and increased vulnerability to natural catastrophes. The environmental conditions pose a threat to agricultural productivity and worsen the vulnerabilities faced by rural women. To tackle these difficulties, a comprehensive strategy is

needed that prioritizes the empowerment of women through customized interventions, policy changes, and specific programs. Strategies focused on improving resource accessibility, offering education and training, advancing financial inclusivity, advocating for gender-responsive policies, and establishing supportive environments are crucial for empowering women to overcome these obstacles and actively engage in and contribute to agricultural development in India. Agricultural extension services are essential for executing these policies as they offer customized assistance, dissemination of knowledge, and capacity-building programs specifically suited for women in agriculture.

### THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES

**Dissemination of knowledge and information:** Agricultural extension services play a crucial role in the distribution of current agricultural knowledge, new techniques, and technical breakthroughs to farmers, especially women. These services offer vital insights into crop cultivation techniques, insect control, soil preservation, water-efficient methods, and market trends.

**Customized training and capacity enhancement:** Extension services provide personalized training programs and activities to address the specific requirements and limitations experienced by women in the agricultural sector. These programs prioritize the improvement of women's proficiency in farm management, sustainable agricultural methods, use of contemporary farming technologies, and post-harvest handling procedures.

#### Access to resources and inputs

Extension services enable women farmers to access agricultural resources, inputs, and technology by linking them to government initiatives, subsidies, financial facilities, and markets. This assistance aids women in overcoming obstacles associated with limited resources and empowers them to embrace enhanced agricultural techniques.

#### Promotion of entrepreneurship and market linkages

The promotion of entrepreneurship and market linkages is greatly facilitated by extension services, which offer crucial advice to women in agriculture on value addition, Agri-processing, and establishing connections with markets. They facilitate the identification of market prospects,

foster connections with buyers, and enhance women's engagement in both local and global agricultural markets.

#### Community engagement and empowerment

Agricultural extension services regularly involve rural communities, particularly women's groups and self-help organizations, in order to promote a feeling of empowerment and encourage collective action. These services facilitate participative methods, fostering the engagement of women in decision-making processes pertaining to agricultural activities and community development efforts.

#### Innovative communication channels

Extension services utilize a range of communication channels, such as mobile technologies, radio broadcasts, community meetings, and demonstration plots, to effectively engage with women residing in distant and marginalized regions. These channels serve as a means to distribute agricultural information, allowing women to obtain timely assistance and support.

#### Gender-sensitive approaches

Gender-sensitive techniques are essential for effective extension services. These approaches recognize and tackle the distinct requirements, limitations, and priorities of women in the field of agriculture. They guarantee the incorporation of women in the process of planning, devising, and executing agricultural programs, promoting their active involvement and contribution.

**Building capacities of female extension workers:** Enhancing the competencies of female extension workers is essential for effectively engaging with women farmers. The presence of female extension workers who possess a deep understanding of the cultural context and can empathize with the difficulties experienced by women is crucial in fostering trust, enhancing communication, and providing extended services that have a greater effect.

#### Customized agricultural extension services that specifically target gender

specific limitations and aim to empower women possess the capacity to initiate profound transformations in the agricultural sector. These services greatly contribute to empowering women, improving their quality of life, and promoting sustainable agricultural development in India by equipping them with the required knowledge, skills, resources, and support.



## **STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES**

### **Tailored training and skill development programs**

Customized training and skill development programs are essential for addressing the special demands of women in the agricultural sector. These programmes should encompass a range of topics including crop management, sustainable agricultural methods, organic agriculture, pest and disease management, utilisation of contemporary technologies, and financial literacy. Through the enhancement of their skills and knowledge, women have the power to enhance agricultural productivity and ensure its long-term sustainability.

### **Access to information and technology**

Extension services should prioritise enhancing women's access to crucial agricultural information, market trends, weather forecasts, and technical improvements. By employing mobile applications, internet platforms, community radio programmes, and interactive workshops, information may be successfully spread, empowering women to make well-informed choices and embrace innovative methods.

### **Enabling financial inclusion and resource access**

Empowering women in agriculture entails facilitating their access to financing, inputs, land rights, and technologies. Extension services can form partnerships with financial institutions, government organisations, and NGOs to facilitate women's access to loans, subsidies, and agricultural supplies. By granting women this access, they are empowered to make investments in their agricultural operations, resulting in a boost in both productivity and income.

### **Gender-focused extension programmes**

In order to accommodate the time limitations and obligations experienced by women, extension services should modify its programmes to align with women's timetables and preferences. To promote women's participation and engagement in extension activities, it is beneficial to provide flexible scheduling for training sessions, build demonstration plots that are welcoming to women, and hold workshops in close proximity to residential areas.

### **Enhancing capacity and fostering leadership development**

It is imperative to empower women to assume leadership positions and engage actively in

decision-making procedures. Extension services should prioritise the development of women's leadership abilities by offering them opportunities to participate in community forums, farmer organisations, cooperatives, and agricultural associations. This engagement boosts their self-assurance, prominence, and impact within the agricultural industry.

### **Advocating for women-centric agricultural initiatives**

Facilitating the establishment of agricultural groups or cooperatives that priorities women's involvement promotes collaborative efforts and the consolidation of resources. Extension services can encourage the formation of these organisations, offering a venue for women to exchange expertise, collectively access resources, and negotiate more favourable prices for their agricultural products in the market.

### **Involvement of female extension workers**

Female extension workers' involvement is crucial to properly reach and engage women farmers. Increasing the number of female extension workers who possess a deep understanding of the local context, culture, and the specific issues encountered by women in agriculture can greatly improve the effectiveness and influence of extension services.

### **Monitoring and evaluation with a gender lens**

Integrating gender-disaggregated data collection, monitoring, and evaluation procedures into extension programmes is crucial for effective monitoring and evaluation with a gender lens. Through a gender analysis of these programmes, policymakers and stakeholders can gain a deeper understanding of the distinct requirements and obstacles encountered by women in agriculture. This will enable them to make well-informed decisions and enhance the effectiveness of the programs. Integrating these tactics into agricultural extension services can greatly contribute to the empowerment of women in agriculture, resulting in higher production, improved livelihoods, and enhanced social and economic well-being for female farmers in India.

## **CONCLUSION**

The endeavor to empower women in agriculture limited access to resources, financial restraints, societal standards, and technological differences. Nevertheless, in the face of these difficulties, a range of tactics and programmes have arisen with the specific aim of empowering women by means of agricultural extension

services. Initiatives like Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP), Krishi Sakhi, National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), and other others have demonstrated remarkable success stories. These initiatives have facilitated beneficial effects by offering instruction, opportunities to obtain resources, inclusion in financial matters, and encouraging women farmers to take on leadership positions. The programmes have the ability to bring about significant changes, as demonstrated by the increase in agricultural output, better quality of life, greater access to food, and the heightened socio-economic standing of women involved in agriculture. These initiatives empower women, enabling them to make major contributions to home nutrition, education, and income. Additionally, they act as catalysts for community growth and resilience.

Furthermore, agricultural extension services play a broader function than just sharing knowledge. They serve as a means to promote gender equality, by addressing socio-cultural norms and challenging old views on women's involvement in agriculture. Through the implementation of gender-sensitive strategies, customised training, and the participation of female extension workers, these services have a crucial role in reducing the disparity between genders and promoting an all-encompassing agricultural environment. It is crucial to

acknowledge the significance of continuous endeavours in empowering women in the field of agriculture as we progress. Implementing policy reforms that give priority to gender-inclusive strategies, allocating more resources to extension services, enhancing women's access to resources and markets, and promoting women's participation in decision-making forums are crucial measures for maintaining the progress of empowerment initiatives.

To summaries, the act of providing women with agricultural extension services is not just a goal for development, but also a powerful force that can bring about significant changes in society. India can attain improved food security, economic expansion, and social advancement by utilizing the capabilities of women in agriculture. Empowering women in agriculture is imperative for fostering a resilient, egalitarian, and sustainable future for India's agricultural sector and its people. This chapter promotes the ongoing dedication, cooperation, and originality in empowering women in agriculture, acknowledging them as catalysts of transformation and advocates of sustainable development in India's agricultural sector. The full realization of inclusive and resilient agricultural systems for the good of society as a whole can only be achieved via focused and continuous investments in women's empowerment.

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