

Feminization of Indian Agriculture: Identifying the challenges

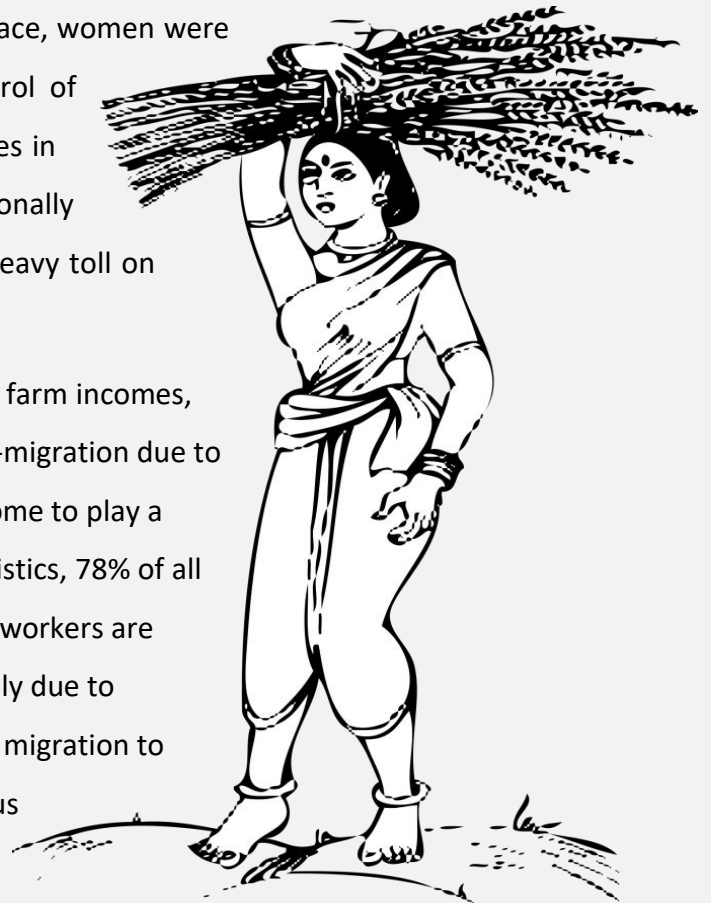


INTRODUCTION

The Economic Survey of India highlights ‘feminization’ of Indian agriculture, with increasing number of women in multiple roles such as cultivators, entrepreneurs, and laborers, due to growing rural to urban migration by men.¹

Feminization of agriculture, which may be defined as the increasing importance of women in agriculture, measured as a ratio of males to females;² is not a new phenomenon. When mechanization took place, women were generally displaced as men assumed control of the machines. “The introduction of machines in planting and hulling/milling (two traditionally female domains) had taken a particularly heavy toll on female labor.”³

However in the present context of declining farm incomes, increase in the cost of production, male out-migration due to agrarian distress, and so on; women have come to play a greater role in agriculture. According to statistics, 78% of all female workers, and 86% of all rural female workers are involved in agricultural activity.⁴ This is largely due to increasing number of male farmers’ distress migration to cities for higher wages and employment, thus leaving behind women to support the



¹ Economic Survey 2017-18

² Lastarria, Susana Cornhiel (2006), ‘Feminization of Agriculture: Trends and Driving Forces’, Background Paper for The World Development Report 2008. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDRS/Resources/477365-1327599046334/8394679-1327599874257/LastarriaCornhiel_FeminizationOfAgri.pdf, (accessed on 29th July 2014)

³ Martha A Chen, “Women s Work in Indian Agriculture by Agro-Ecologic Zone-Meeting Needs of Landless and Land-Poor Women”, Vol. 24, Issue No. 43, 28 Oct, 1989, Economic and Political Weekly

⁴ Dashora, Kavya. (2010). women farmers: from seed to kitchen. Agenda.

small farms and family.

As a result, the agricultural sector in India is seeing a "paradox of rising proportion' of female agricultural laborers in the female workforce in the context of an overall declining participation rate" in agriculture⁵.

Recognizing the critical role of women in agriculture and given their increasing presence in the sector, the government has taken various steps like allocating 30 percent of the 2018 budget for women beneficiaries in the ongoing agricultural schemes, programmes and development activities; focusing on women self-help group (SHG) to connect them to micro-credit through capacity building activities; to provide information and ensuring their representation in different decision-making bodies; and so on. Besides this, 15th October of every year has been declared as Women Farmer's Day.

However, despite these efforts, the condition of women farmers continues to be deplorable. Women in agriculture face several socio economic challenges owing to gender discrimination. The discrimination extends itself to denial of property rights to females. It is evident from the fact that, at all India level, the number of total operational holdings between 2010-11 and 2015-16 saw a percentage increase of just 5.33% and stands at 13.87% presently.⁶ Therefore due to lack of land as collateral, it leads to limited access to institutional credit, resulting in low investment in input factors and technology, and thus earning low incomes for the farm women.

In this context, this edition of Gender Watch attempts to highlight and understand the major challenges faced by the women farmers in India and stresses on the need for policy intervention to address the challenges related to feminization and make agriculture profitable for the women farmers of the country.

⁵Nata Duvvury, "Women in Agriculture A Review of the Indian Literature" Vol. 24, Issue No. 43, 28 Oct, 1989, Economic and Political Weekly

⁶ Agricultural Census 2015-16



Source: Development News



Source: Future Kerala

Challenges of Feminization of Indian Agriculture



Women play a significant role in Indian agriculture including main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post-harvest operations, agro/social forestry, fisheries etc. According to the Census 2011, out of the total female workers in any sector, 24 percent are cultivators and 41 percent are agricultural laborers. Besides this, women also account for 47 percent participation in tea plantations and cotton cultivation, about 45 percent in the production of oilseeds and 39 percent in vegetable production.⁷ According to Oxfam India, women are⁸ responsible for about 60-80% of food and 90% of dairy production, respectively.⁹

Growth of female worker population by occupation during 1981 to 2011

Census Year	Percentage Female worker to Total Female Population				
	Female Main Workers	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers	Household Industry	Other Workers
1981	13.99	4.65	6.46	0.64	2.24
1991	15.93	5.51	7.05	0.55	2.82
2001	14.68	5.11	4.51	0.95	4.11
2011	25.5	24.0	41.1	5.7	29.2
CAGR	16.19	50.73	58.82	72.75	90.01

Source: Statistical Profile on Women Labour, 2012-2013, Labour Bureau, Government of India. CAGR= Compound Annual Growth rate.

Source: Statistical Profile on Women Labour, 2012-2013, Labour Bureau, Government of India. CAGR= Compound Annual Growth rate.¹⁰

Whereas an increase in number of women in agriculture and allied activities in multiple roles such as cultivators, entrepreneurs and laborers is itself not an issue; it poses a challenge to Indian agriculture and productivity. Gender inequality and its consequences

⁷<https://www.ruralmarketing.in/industry/agriculture/it-is-time-we-recognise-women-as-farmers>

⁸<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/helping-the-invisible-hands-of-agriculture/article25221707.ece>

¹⁰<http://ndpublisher.in/admin/issues/EAV61N3b.pdf>

limit their ability to fulfill their potential in agriculture. The following section highlights the major challenges of the Indian farm women.

Gender Discrimination

A recent [study](#)¹¹ conducted by Corteva Agriscience, titled “Global Women in Agriculture” reveals that 78 per cent women farmers in India perceive gender discrimination to be an issue in the agricultural industry”.

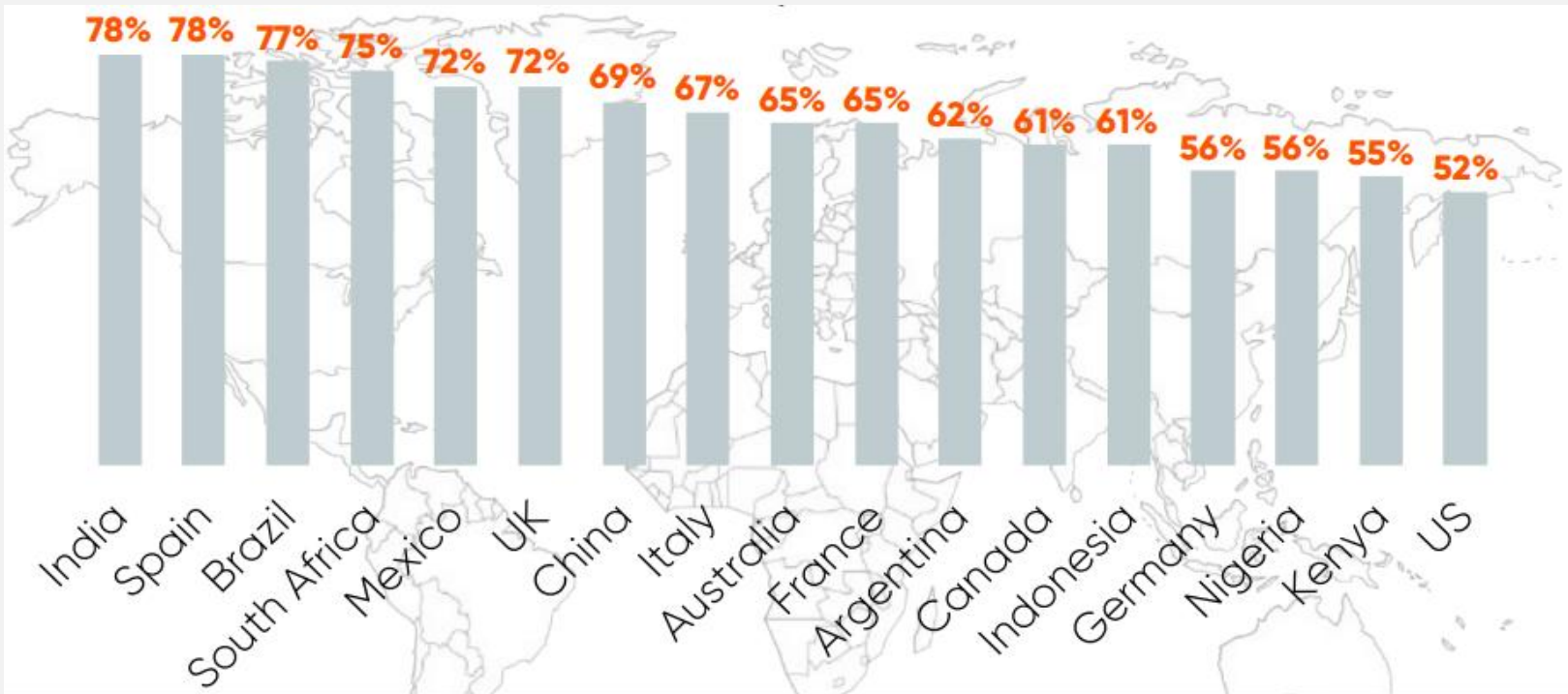
According to the respondents some of this inequality can be attributed to:

- Active gender discriminatory practices such as-
 - the denial of equal opportunities
 - limited right to make financial decisions
 - tendency of society to not take their concerns or viewpoints seriously;
- Structural inequalities such as
 - Lack of education
 - Lack of training in the use of technology
 - The need to balance their role as family caregivers

As a result of this discrimination, the study highlights that women end up *getting “less wages than their male counterparts, have less access to financing than men and lack the training needed to manage farms and to optimize the use of technological advances in farming”*. This also gives them less decision making power in farm related issues, like decision regarding the choice of crop to be sown. These issues have been discussed in Indian context in the following sections.

“78 per cent women farmers in India perceive gender discrimination to be an issue in the agricultural industry.”

¹¹<https://www.corteva.com/content/dam/dpagco/corteva/global/corporate/general/files/Global%20Women%20In%20Agriculture%20White%20Paper%20100318.pdf>



Percentage of women farmers in different countries who believe gender discrimination is a hindrance in practising Agriculture (Corteva Study)

Issues related to Land Ownership

In agrarian economies, arable land is the most valued form of property. A farmer's productivity depends crucially on access to land, which is highly gender unequal.

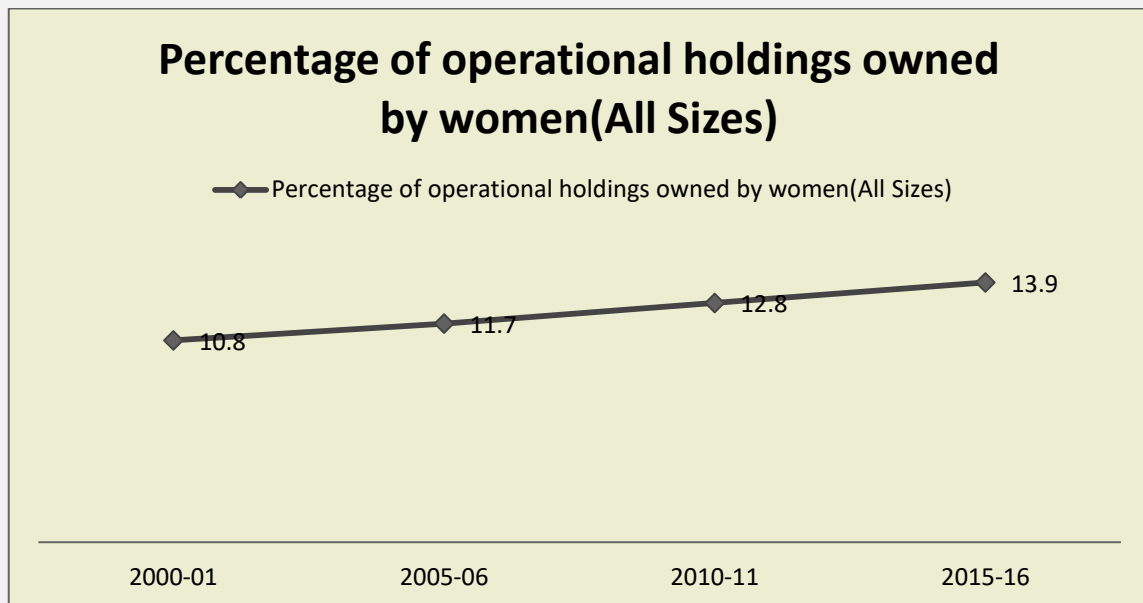
The gender disparity in ownership of land in agriculture is reflected in the fact while women do 80 per cent of farm work, they own only 13 per cent of land¹² according to a factsheet released by international non-profit Oxfam in 2013.

“Being lucrative property in rural areas, agricultural land was always a male privilege. Even when communist West Bengal tried land reforms in 1977 by distributing land to the landless, it did not consider women. “This was because...women were not considered land-tillers. Thus, although they did most agricultural work, they had little right over agricultural property.”

Indu Agnihotri, senior fellow, Centre for Women and Development Studies.

Source: Down to Earth¹

¹²<https://www.oxfamindia.org/women-empowerment-india-farmers>



Source: Agriculture Census Data¹³

The increase in operational landholding as seen in the graph above is marginal as compared to the percentage that women contribute to farming and other agricultural activities.

Secondly, the land holdings have doubled over the years with the result that the average size of farms have shrunk¹⁴, leaving many women farmers as marginal or small farmers. This means lower net returns earned and less technology adoption on small farms.

Bina Agarwal in her book¹⁵ "A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia," stresses on the need for independent rights in arable land for women on the basis of four arguments of "*welfare, efficiency, equality and empowerment.*" The welfare

¹³ Agricultural census 2015-16

¹⁴

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/helping-the-invisible-hands-of-agriculture/article25221707.ece>

¹⁵ Agarwal, Bina (1994), A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

argument position is that land rights could reduce women's own and the household's risk of poverty. In the argument based on efficiency, land rights of women leads to efficient use of the resource, including more environmentally sound use of the resource along with better credit availability, investment in farm technology, etc. The equality and empowerment arguments are concerned with "women's position relative to men, and particularly with women's ability to challenge male oppression within the home and in the wider society." This explains the importance of land ownership for women not only in the agricultural context but also in uplifting their social status.

Therefore ensuring land ownership is a lofty but necessary goal to be achieved and is also related to the socio-cultural practices. However, even before that, we can ensure for the tenant farmers a security of tenure. The NITI Aayog's Model Land Leasing Act 2016 is a step towards achieving that, but lacks consensus among the different states. Also the model act faces several other criticisms, discussing which is beyond the scope of this issue.¹⁶

Lack of identification and recognition

It is ironical that despite great contribution in terms of their percentage and labour, the women farmers fail to be recognised as farmers. The official definition of "farmers" for the government includes those cultivators who own land. As per this definition the 87% women who don't own land are not identified as farmers, but identified only as "cultivators". As a result, the women farmers are unable to avail themselves of the several schemes meant for the farmers, including access to institutional credit etc.¹⁷

Earlier in June this year, while responding to a Lok Sabha question¹⁸ on "whether there is a proposal to provide identity cards to women farmers", the response from the minister noted that "3.60 crore women have already been recognised as 'cultivators'

¹⁶ <https://www.epw.in/journal/2016/42/web-exclusives/model-agricultural-land-leasing-act-2016-some-observations.html>

¹⁷ <https://thewire.in/women/women-farmers-agriculture-rights>

¹⁸ <http://164.100.47.194/Loksabha/Questions/QResult15.aspx?qref=69777&lsno=16>

under the 2011 Census, the government has no proposal to provide identity cards to women farmers.”

However, it must be noted that the census data gives only a head count of women involved in agricultural activities and does not make them eligible to access the rights that accrue to farmers. Therefore necessary identification must be made for women farmers, which would thus enable them to avail themselves of the benefits of schemes and programmes that are made for farmers. Lack of administrative will to

“3.60 crore women have already been recognised as ‘cultivators’ under the 2011 Census, the government has no proposal to provide identity cards to women farmers.”

Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer’s Welfare

provide identity cards to women farmers is of the greatest hurdles to provide due recognition and benefits to farm women. If female farmers are provided security of land tenure, they will be officially recognized as farmers and hence, will see their household bargaining power increase. Women farmers’ self-confidence and agency will slowly grow and expand outside just their household.¹⁹

“An identity card for women is useful for access to entitlements. The Kisan Credit Card for example requires land ownership title.” -MS Swaminathan

¹⁹ <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indian-women-farmers-agriculture-sector-patriarchy-land-ownership-4781311/>

Video: Women Plough The Fields But Aren't Farmers- The Quint



Reporting that male farmers in India work approximately 1860 hours in a year, while female farmers work for over 3300 hours in farms; this video by The Quint mentions about the invisibility of the women farmers to the policy makers and the government. It describes encounters with female farmer in Lalitpur, Sultanpur, Gorakhpur. Highlighting issues like land rights, the video provides an insight into the struggle of Indian women farmers.

For complete video, click [here](#)

Access to institutional credit

As mentioned earlier, women seldom own the land they cultivate. It is usually registered in the names of their husbands and this makes it difficult for them to access institutional credit as they do not own land that can be used as collateral. Thus women farmers have less capital to invest and earn lower wages than their male counterpart.

The government introduced in 1998, the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) Scheme for issue of KCC to farmers so that farmers may use them to readily purchase agriculture inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides etc. and draw cash for their production needs.²⁰ Although a major innovation in agricultural credit and in spite of nearly 4.5 crore Kisan Credit cards issued by the banks, very few cards have been issued to women farmers. M.S. Swaminathan, the agricultural scientist, in his article on “Agricultural Renewal and

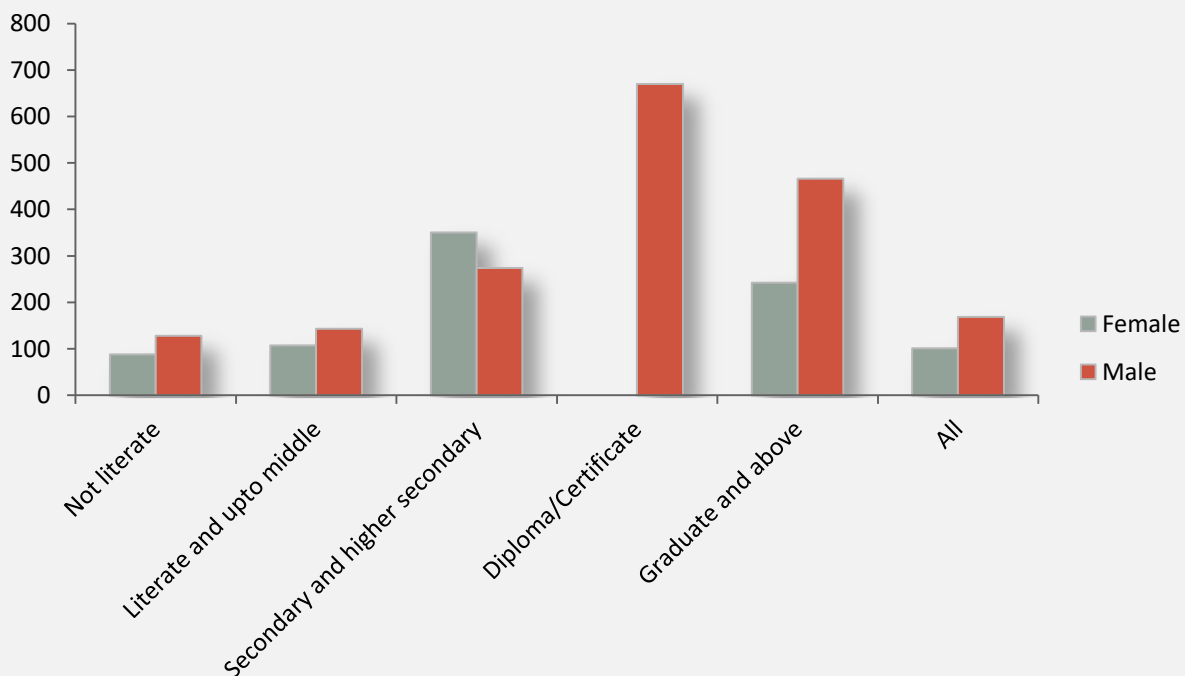
²⁰<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=181634>

Prosperity” stressed on the issuance of Kisan Credit Card to women farmers to empower women farmers and to improve the status of Indian agriculture.

Disparity in Wages

Gender pay gap or disparity in wages is a phenomenon also seen in agricultural sector along with other sectors like manufacturing, services etc. According to a 2018 report released by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, titled “Men and Women In 2017”; “in agriculture, an illiterate woman worker in rural India receives Rs 88.2 per day while an illiterate man receives Rs 128.52, which is 45% more.”

Average per day wage/salary earnings of regular wage/salaried employees of age 15-59 years by broad education category in Agricultural Sector(2011-12)



Source: Men and Women In 2017, MoSPI²¹

²¹http://mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/reports_and_publication/statistical_publication/social_statistics/WM17Chapter4.pdf

“In agriculture, an illiterate woman worker in rural India receives Rs 88.2 per day while an illiterate man receives Rs 128.52, which is 45% more.”

Besides this, an Indian Statistical Institute (Delhi Centre) research noted that the gender differential in wages is greatest in the Southern states of India, where women enjoy a better status in society as compared to the Northern states.²² This shows the

gravity of problem.

Within India, the ratio of female to male agricultural wages varies widely across regions ranging from 90% in Gujarat to 54% in Tamil Nadu in 2004/05. It also shows that the wage gap shows regional variation.²³ A major reason for this is the undervaluation of women’s labor.

Access to technology

According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) equalizing access to productive resources for female and male farmers could increase agricultural output in developing countries by as much as 2.5% to 4%.²⁴ Women account for 43% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries on average but only receive about 5% of training and advisory services, known as agricultural extension. This results in low productivity and incomes.

Further, considering the impact of climate change, IPCC-predicted temperatures and India’s recent trends in precipitation; in case of no policy responses would lead to farm

²²https://www.isid.ac.in/~pu/conference/dec_11_conf/Papers/KanikaMahajan.pdf

²³https://www.isid.ac.in/~pu/conference/dec_11_conf/Papers/KanikaMahajan.pdf

²⁴<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/helping-the-invisible-hands-of-agriculture/article25221707.ece>

income losses of 20-25 percent for the unirrigated areas²⁵. As a result, this will pose a threat to farm women if they are not equipped and trained to adopt new technology to practice climate resilient agriculture. Gender friendly technology must be promoted and requisite training must be provided to the women farmers to enhance agricultural productivity and incomes.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from government reports, various other sources and studies that India is witnessing feminization in the agricultural sector. As a result of which not only do the women farmers face challenges, but also it hampers the agricultural productivity and growth. According to a 2011 Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) report titled “The role of women in agriculture”, *“the agricultural sector in many developing countries is underperforming, in part because women, who represent a crucial resource in*

agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as farmers, laborers and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources.”

Considering the contribution of women and the significant

Video: Pioneering women farmers in India-BBC



The BBC documentary covers the story of women farmers who took up agricultural activity, overcoming several challenges that came in their way. For complete video, click [here](#).

²⁵ Economic Survey 2017-18

percentage of their participation, the unsung heroes of the Indian agricultural sector cannot be ignored. The challenges they face are not isolated but interplay of multiple socio-economic factors that impact each other as seen above. They will thus have to be holistically addressed. But to expect these gender issues in agriculture to be resolved on its own would be but to our own peril. An external policy intervention is therefore needed to make women dominated farm activities more structured. To start with providing identity card to women cultivators and recognizing them as farmers as demanded by agricultural scientists like MS Swaminathan, would be a positive step.

As has been stated that land is the most important resource for agriculture, securing women's land ownership rights in the long term and land tenure rights as immediate relief is therefore necessary. This will help them to be recognized as farmers and strengthen their confidence and empower them.

Besides this, the entire process from pre-cultivation farm investment, to sowing, cropping, harvesting and marketing, the entire chain of activity needs to be made gender friendly. A deeper understanding and a more data driven approach to addressing the challenges of farm women could make the phenomenon of feminization, a great opportunity to close the gender gap and empower rural women.

GENDER ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Amnesty reports calls Twitter a “Toxic place for women”

A study by human rights watch Amnesty International revealed that women of colour were 34% more likely to be target than white women. Black women were 84% more likely to be mentioned in “problematic tweets” as compared their white women. For the study 6500+ volunteers analysed 288,000 posts and labeled the ones that were abusive and problematic (“hurtful or hostile content” that does not necessarily meet the threshold for abuse). For the analysis, each tweet was analysed by three people and was later spot-checked by experts on violence and abuse.

[READ MORE](#)

Supreme Court asks media to refrain from disclosing victims of rape and sexual assault

Coming down heavily on media, Supreme Court ordered media houses to refrain from identifying the victims of rape and sexual assault “even in remote manner”. In laying down clear protocol for mediapersons for coverage of the issues, the bench said while factors such as age (to determine whether the victim was a minor or adult), whether they have passed away, or in certain circumstances, their

mental state should be taken into consideration.

[READ MORE](#)

European Research Council grants 1.5 million Euros to rescue women writing between 1500 and 1780

In a project aimed at recognising the work of women between year 1500 and 1780, Spanish academic, Carme Font has been granted 1.5 million Euros by the European Research Council to rescue the works of female writers from the margins of European thought. Font, a lecturer in English literature at the Autonomous University of Barcelona objective is to scour libraries, archives and private collections in search of letters, poems and reflections by women.

[READ MORE](#)

Gender pay gap widens at Whitehall department, UK

The gender pay gap has widened at nearly a third out of all government departments in UK over the past 12 months, inspite of the pledges to reduce it. Under the rules, which came into force in April this year, five of the departments reported a larger gender pay gap implying that average difference increased in the 12 months to April 2018.

[READ MORE](#)

Record Gains in the House

A record of X number of new women won House seats last month. Most of the new women are replacing men who held these seats before them. These newly elected women join female incumbents who were re-elected to the House. Like the incumbents, the new members are mostly Democrats, who helped their party win the House. These numbers will make the record number of 102 women in the House next year-the largest number in US.history.

[READ MORE](#)

How India’s sex workers prevented an Aids epidemic

Ashok Alexander, author of A Stranger Truth while talking to Reuters about his latest book, talks how Beating aids could not have happened without women. In 2002, a major report predicted an AIDS catastrophe in India. The country would have 20-25 m Aids cases by 2010. This achievement has remained uncelebrated and the crucial role of sex workers has not been appreciated but this book is an attempt to trace that role. The writer stated that “Their selfless contribution will never be recognised because of the stigma that still surrounds this disease. “

[READ MORE](#)

Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies
Jawahar Bhawan, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Road, New Delhi-110 001 (India)
Phone: +91-11-23312456, 23755117/118 E mail: info@rgics.org Website: www.rgics.org

Issue Coordinated by: Jasleen Kaur

Disclaimer: This document has been prepared by the RGICS staff and in no way does it represent the views and opinions of the trustees.

To unsubscribe, please write to us at info@rgics.org