

A Critical Review on Indian Agricultural Policies with Special Reference to Women Farmers

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Abstract

Due to out-migration of male labour role, responsibility and participation of women in agriculture at household level are expanding day by day. According to OXFAM report, women, who are economically active in India 80% women engaged in Agriculture and allied activity. But till women's labour remained unrecognized and invisible in the agricultural sector. In this context, proper planning, efficient policies, play a significant role to carry out agricultural activities effectively. After Independence the government introduced the different initiatives in the form of Five Years Plans, Schemes etc. which emphasized to empower Women farmers with food security and motivated to organise SHGs to enhance access to their technological, entrepreneurial skills and access micro-credit facilities. These plans concern with principle aim of reducing gender gap in agricultural and allied sector, ensuring their land rights, eradicating women's work drudgery. National Commission on Farmers, National Policy on Women farmers have been facing new challenges in the capitalist farming system with traditional patriarchal values. The Women Farmers Entitlement Bill, 2011 focused on land rights, water rights, credit and technological rights. Government of India has taken several steps to improve the overall condition of agriculture in India. Because of unsupportive social system, caste system, and in efficient administrative practices, the policies initiated by the Government are yet to achieve desired goals.

Key words: Feminisation of agriculture; women farmers; gender gap in agriculture; household labour; agricultural extension; right to access to land, credit, technology; National Policy on Women; Five year Plan.

I. Introduction

India possess only 2.4 percent land area in the world, in spite of that India is popularly recognised as global agricultural powerhouse. India is the largest

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producer (25% of global production), consumer (27% of world consumption) and importer (14%) of pulses in the world.² One of the main significant features of this agricultural and allied sector is the dominance of women.³ Women have always played crucial and varied roles in agriculture as farmers, co-farmers, family labourers, and wage labourers and also as managers of farms. Their role and participation are expanding day by day in agricultural sector because men are engaged in other sectors of the economy and their out-ward migration has become a prominent feature on account of lack of prospect in agriculture. IHD reports (2014) have revealed 70% of all women engaged in cultivation in the house-hold level due to male migration.⁴ National policies, planning have been remaining an imperative force for overall development of the country. National Policies, implementation is very important aspect to carry out their activities effectively. In India, the government has taken up several steps to improve the condition for women farmers' overtime through different policies and law. *This paper aims to explore* how women farmers are linked with different agricultural policies and programmes initiated by the Government of India that they stabilize themselves and stimulate action in the agricultural activities.

II. Agricultural activities vis a vis Women

According to The Women Farmers Entitlement Bill, 2011 '**Agriculture**' means and includes, all activities related to cultivation of crops, animal husbandry, poultry, livestock rearing, apiculture, gardening, fishing, aquaculture, sericulture, vermin-culture, horticulture, floriculture, agro-forestry, or any other farming activity carried out through self-employment, tenurial cultivation, share-cropping, or other types of cultivation including shifting cultivation, collection, use and sale of minor or non-timber forest produce by virtue of ownership rights or usufructory rights;⁵. Traditionally women have always played crucial and varied roles in agriculture as farmers, co-farmers, family

²<http://www.fao.org/india/fao-in-india/india-at-a-glance/en/>

³ Available at <http://ncw.nic.in/pdfreports/impact%20of%20wto%20women%20in%20agriculture.pdf> accessed on 16th October, 2017 at 8.53 PM.

⁵ Section 2(a), THE WOMEN FARMERS' ENTITLEMENTS BILL, 2011.

labourers, and wage labourers and also as managers of farms. But till women's labour remained unrecognized and invisible in the agricultural sector. Their role and participation are expanding day by day in agricultural sector because men are engaged in other sectors of the economy and their out-ward migration has become a prominent feature on account of lack of prospect in agriculture. According to OXFAM report, women, who are economically active in India 80% women engaged in Agriculture and allied activity. They comprise 33% of the agriculture labor force and 48% of the self-employed farmers. About 60-80% food production are controlled by rural women.⁶ By the term **Agricultural Activity** it means any activity related to agriculture.⁷ And most important part of this bill is that definition of 'Farmers' explained in Section 2(c), The Women Farmers' Entitlements Bill, 2011. According to bill Farmers are those who

- i)* engaged in agriculture directly or through the supervision of others; or
- ii)* contributes to conservation or preservation of agriculture related varieties or seeds or breeds of farm animals; or
- iii)* contributes through traditional knowledge to any type of innovation, conservation or to propagation of new agricultural varieties or to agricultural cultivation methods or practices or to the practice of crop-livestock integrated farming system; or
- iv)* promotes agro-processing, and value-addition to primary products.

The recognition of the different allied activities and tenurial process within the sphere of 'Agriculture' and diversified contribution in the integrated farming system is an acknowledgment that both male and female are inseparable labour force in agriculture.

III. Women Agricultural Workers and Five Year Plans

⁶ Available at <https://www.oxfamindia.org/women-empowerment-india-farmers> access on 30.03. 2020. at 3.00p.m

4. id.

⁷ Section 2(b), The WOMEN FARMERS' ENTITLEMENTS BILL, 2011.

The Constitution of India (1950) incorporated the principle of equality of all regardless of caste, creed or gender (Article 14 and 16) and provided for mandatory instruments for affirmative action by the state in the form of reservations and special measures under Article 15 (3) in favour of women and children. This particular strategy for achieving equality is further through the inclusion of Directive Principles of State Policy in the body of **Part- 4** of the Constitution.

Under the Planning Commission of India, provides for the following:

- a. The Fourth Five Year Plan (1969–74) for the first time women farmers have been addressed to link with the ‘Farmers Training and Education Programme’ for meeting the differential technological needs of women.
- b. Putting the women’s issue in the mind in the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79), Training and visit (T&V) System of Extension was introduced. But it was in vain. In the meantime, 1974 the government of India set up the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) to assess the gender equality.
- c. In the Sixth Five Year Plan (1978-85) ‘employment of women’ was seen as vital indicator of developmental strategy. In the 1981 census report brought a new dimension in the definition of the employment category to identify marginal workers where women workers in the agricultural activities could be included. But identification and recognition of the activities have been remained very slow.
- d. In the Seventh Plan (1985-90) felt to improve science and technological issues towards women farmers especially who are engaged in the post harvesting activities, horticulture, plantation etc.
- e. In the Eight (1991-96) and Ninth plan (1997-2002) period was very crucial for women farmers. In this time period women farmers are motivated to organise SHGs to enhance their technological, entrepreneurship skills and access micro-credit facilities. This period has a path breaking entity not only agricultural sector but also whole economic situation. With the participation of the Uruguay Round of World trade Organisation India was interconnected with global economic system. It led to unstable situation in subsistence agriculture and drastic transformation of cash crops replaced by food crops.

f. 2001 and 2003 were landmark years for women farmers. In 2001 National Policy for Empowerment of Women was incorporated in the Ninth Plan and it put emphasis on empowering of female labour at the household level with proper food security. In 2003 The Manila Declaration of the International Conference on Women in Agriculture has asked national agricultural planners to recognize the gendered impacts of trade policies and has called for urgent action on a number of fronts including guaranteeing women's right to basic livelihood resources, support services and market opportunities; establishment of mechanisms for participation, access and accountability in trade negotiations participation, access and providing capacity building for women farmers.⁸

g. Next, the Tenth plan was initiated with principle aim of reducing gender gap.

h. 11th (2007-2012) Five Year Plan was concern with the increment of women's employment in agricultural and allied sector, ensuring their land rights, eradicating women's work drudgery by implementation new gender sensitive technology. This plan also scrutinizes gender based wage differentiation and other type of exploitation.

i. Next in the 12th (2012-2017) five year plan put emphasis on reduction of poverty.

III. National Commission on Farmers (NCF), 2005⁹ and Women Farmers

The National Commission on Farmers (NCF) was constituted on November 18, 2004 under the chairmanship of Professor M.S. Swaminathan. The Terms of Reference reflected the priorities listed in the Common Minimum Programme. The fifth and final report was submitted on October 4, 2006. The reports contain suggestions to achieve the goal of "faster and more inclusive growth" as envisaged in the Approach to 11th Five Year Plan. The NCF is mandated to make suggestions on issues such as food and nutrition security, increase flow of rural credit, special programmes for dry land farming; with overall countrywide

⁸ Edited by R.K.Punia, " Women in Agriculture" Vol-2: Education, Training and Development, Northern Book Centre,1992 New Delhi,

⁹KaushikiSanyal, PRS Legislative Research, available at <http://www.prsindia.org/parliamenttrack/report-summaries/swaminathan-report-national-commission-on-farmers-662/>, accessed on 10th August, 2017 at 6.44 PM

enhancing productivity profitability, and sustainability of the major farming. Apart from the general recommendations, this report was enriched with some gender based strategy. Such as-

- Proposal for conferment of right for women to land ownership
- Recommendation to be made for the credit, knowledge, skill, technological and marketing empowerment of women,
- Empowering male and female members of the Panchayettoincrease their important role in conserving and improving the ecological foundations for sustainable agriculture
- Village women and their associations should be encouraged to assume responsibility for all development schemes relating to drinking water, sanitation, primary education, health and nutrition

IV. National Policy for Farmers

The National Commission on Farmers submitted its final report in October 2006. National Policy for Farmers, 2007 neglected many points regarding upliftment of women farmers as these were recommended by National Commission for Women in the time of policy frame work. A brief discussion over the draft policy 2008 is as under.

A. Draft National Policy on Women in Agriculture, 2008¹⁰

Increased feminization of agriculture and commercialisation of agricultural productivity women have been facing new challenges in the capitalist farming system with traditional patriarchal values. National Policy on Women in Agriculture, 2008 recommended many new additional dimensions for women farmers:

The Policy had four main dimensions

1. *Natural Resource Assets*
2. *Production System*

¹⁰Available at ncw.nic.in/Comments/Agricultural_Policy.pdf, accessed on 21th April, 2016 at 10.33 AM

3. *Agricultural Marketing and Trade*
4. *Agricultural organisation Science and technology*

Natural Resource Assets

The Rural women are solely responsible for half of the world's food production, and in developing countries, it is as much as 80% of food crops.¹¹ In spite of that, women are devoid of agricultural assets like most crucial elements land, seed, water and forest rights.

Land Rights

First of all, policy recommended for ensuring the rights of land both homestead and agricultural property for women and single women headed households including widows, abandoned and deserted women by eradication gender discriminatory provisions from all personal laws. A special emphasis has been given to not only given to the distribution and recording of joint pattas but also providing access to information about joint title to land and family property. It is also said that in case of dissolution of marriage, maintenance shall be worked out to include women's right to joint patta. Transfer and sale of any common agricultural or homestead land, whether owned privately or collectively, shall be done with the prior and explicit consent of both spouses.

Displacement and Rehabilitation

Gender concerns shall be prioritized and taken into account when environmental and social impact assessments are done of any land alienating projects. Women shall have equal right to compensation and rehabilitation in case of the sale or transfer or alienation of privately or collectively held land. Women shall be recognized as "interested parties" and separate entities for any compensation and rehabilitation package. Care shall be taken to see that all widows, single, abandoned and separated women are also registered as separate entities. Basic social infrastructure shall be provided in all rehabilitation packages. It shall be mandatory for all rehabilitation packages to include the formation of a Mahila welfare fund to which contributions shall be made by both government and project holders.

¹¹Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (1997). *Women and Food Security*. FAO FOCUS.

Seeds and Biodiversity

Indigenous knowledge and skill of rural women should be recognised, encouraged, protected through women's self-help groups and seed banks and also integrated into agricultural research in the public domain supported by a strong intellectual property rights

Water

Women farmers must have the conservation and equal distribution of all water resources through the formation of women's groups and SHGs by the help of Panchayet. Women agricultural workers from families of landless and small and marginal households shall have the first right over biomass augmented from watersheds.

Production System**Production of Food grains**

In connection with Women's right over production and food grain women's cooperatives shall be given priority in leasing or sale of uncultivated lands for agro-forestry or integrated and biological farming and develop land and soil conservation practices in order to increase the production of women farmers.

Labour and Livelihood

In Gross Domestic Product, unpaid work of women in family, farm and non-farm activities shall be identified and recognised and accounted for in Health care, childcare, and old age pension shall be provided to all women agricultural workers. All women agricultural workers shall be recognized and registered as workers for this purpose. Then appropriate status and rights shall be given to Seasonal and migrant women agricultural workers too. Minimum and equal wages are very important dimension in this struggle. It was recommended for formation of cooperatives, group enterprises and SHG for processing of agricultural produce.

Inputs for Agriculture and Allied Activities

Apart from land seed, fertilizer, nurseries, pesticide water and electricity are the basic conditions for improving agriculture. So all these facilities shall be restored, supplied and additional support shall be given to women headed

households through various agencies like KrishiVigyanKendras. SHGs and SGSY groups. Electricity should be given at free of cost to Single women headed households, small and marginal farmers.

Agricultural Marketing and Trade

Policy Support for Market Protection

Women farmers should be protected in trade and retailing marketing from unfair competition by Corporations.

Procurement of Agricultural Produce

Proper linkages should be incorporated among women led local mandis to the Food Corporation of India through women's SHGs.

Procurement of Produce of Allied Sector

A Price Commission shall be set up to determine and administer minimum support prices for different farm products. And women's cooperatives and SHGs shall be formed and promoted to carry out procurement and trade in these products.

Retail Marketing and Trade

Women retailers should be protected by establishing 'women kisanhaats', by financial and tax incentives, by strengthening its linkages with KVIC and small scale industries cooperation and others supportive Policy and legislative measures. Women retailers shall be provided regular market information through field level schools and IT kiosks.

Agricultural Organisation, Science and Technology

Debt Relief, Rural Credit and Investment: Debt Relief Commissions shall be formed at the state level in order to help indebted families facing agricultural distress especially in areas where there are repeated farmer suicides and women who are abandoned, deserted or rendered homeless because of farmer's suicides. A Gram Mahila Welfare Fund shall be formed in order to create common health, education and child care facilities at worker sites for women workers in agriculture and allied sectors.

Agricultural Extension: A cadre of women agricultural extension workers shall be created in order to ensure that women farmers have greater access to technology and knowledge that will reduce their labour time while increasing their productivity. Women SHGs shall be linked with the agricultural extension service in order to expand its scale and scope,

Research, Science and Technology: Science and technology organisations shall encourage and promote Women's knowledge of biodiversity in agriculture and allied sectors. Pro-women technologies and new experiments like bio-farms, integrated and organic farming shall be promoted for overall development of the women farmers.

B. The MahilaKisanShashaktikarnPariyojana, 2011

The MahilaKisanShashaktikarnPariyojana (MKSP) is a sub component of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and it was launched in 2011. Main objective of this scheme is empowering women in agriculture through strengthening community institutions of poor women farmers. It provides strategies on assisting women with a focus on empowering women in agriculture by to gain more control over the production processes and manage the support systems, enhance access to inputs and services from government and others. Women represent more than 40%The MahilaKisanShashaktikarnPariyojana was later announced with a start-up fund of 100 crore by then Finance Minister, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee in his budget speech in 2010-11. The MKSP seeks food and nutrition security at a household level through improvement in women's control over production processes and resources. It is also a programme that moves beyond providing information to women to creating institutions for women farmers for investments in livelihood activities and enhancing their assets. MKSP aim at:

- improved food and nutrition security of women and their families,
- increased incomes with sustainable agriculture practices to improve the quality of assets,
- access to productive resources such as land, credit, information, reduced drudgery of women farmers through use of gender friendly tools, and

- improved visibility of women farmers in the region by strengthening their institutions and supporting entrepreneurship.

The basic objectives translated through various guidelines of MKSP are to¹²:

- Create sustainable livelihood institutions of women around agriculture and allied activities;
- Create sector-specific geography specific sustainable package of practices;
- Create a wide pool of community resource persons for scaling up livelihood interventions in the entire country;
- Promoting and enhancing food and nutritional security at Household and Community level;
- Sustainable increase in income from primary sector livelihoods (Rs. 30,000 to 50,000 per annum);
- Drudgery reduction for women farmers;
- Poorest of poor focus – specific initiatives for the POP-landless, small and marginal farmers as project participants;
- To enable women to have better access to inputs and services of the government and other agencies.

The funds earmarked in the programme are therefore to CREATE THE HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL, while physical, natural and financial capital will be made available through convergence with other programmes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, RashtriyaKrishiVikasYojana, National Food Security Mission, and Agriculture Technology Management Agency etc.

C. Gaps under NRLM and MKSP:

- NRLM and MKSP do not explicitly state the goal of women's empowerment for gender equality,
- They do not carry any gender analysis in their strategy unlike say the education for women's equality programme. It was only in some of the civil society organizations linked to women's movements.

¹² Available at www.aajeevika.gov.in/.../MKSP-Agriculture-Guidelines, accessed on 24th May, 2017 at 9.16 PM.

- The MKSP rests on the assumption that a lack of knowledge of agriculture technologies among owners of resource poor lands and households is primarily responsible for their inability to reduce costs of investments.

The Women Farmers Entitlement Bill, 2011: The acute distress of the “suicide widows” of different states, who would be left with debt ridden households, get dispossessed of their lands, disowned by their marital families and forced into waged labour had a very deep impact among the policy framers of India. On the basis of the recommendations of Dr. Swaminathan, the Chair of the Farmers Commission, the government of India tabled the ‘Women Farmers Entitlement Bill (2011) in the Rajya Sabha. Though the bill finally lapsed, the bill intended to provide for the gender-specific needs of women farmers, protect their legitimate needs and entitlements, and empower them. The Bill among other things provided definitions of women farmers along with definition of farmers and includes the followings:

- women will enjoy land rights (every woman shall have equal ownership and inheritance rights over agricultural land in her husband's family);
- water rights (a woman farmer shall have equal right as men to water, water resources, and irrigation facilities for farming);
- legal access to credit, technology and other agricultural inputs; and funds for support services.
- The Act provides Central Agricultural Development Fund for Women Farmers (CADFWF) for support services to empowered of women farmers.
- This Act recognises market facilities, training and capacity building program for women farmers
- The Act is also death with responsibilities of Central Govt., State government and also local authorities. It is also told about establishment of effective institutional mechanisms at the taluka or tehsil or block level.

The Draft National Policy on Women, 2016

The policy focuses on the financial inclusion of women. It felt the women should have the access to financial services such as credit sources, saving services, insurance, pension schemes aimed towards poor women (with contributions), special financial literacy programmes for the poor women and also availing of the transfer of benefits and subsidies that are offered by the Government. It also mentions as Follows:

- The draft policy aims to recognize women's unpaid work in terms of economic and societal value and the rights of women farmers in agriculture and its allied sectors and related value chain development. The policy aims to put its effort to support women in their livelihood, their visibility and identity, secure their rights over resources, ensure entitlements over agricultural services and provide social protection cover.
- It was proposed for '**KrishiSakhis**' for utilization of skills and capacities of successful women farmers.
- Women's traditional knowledge about conserving genetic diversity should be encouraged and incentivized by SHGs and cooperatives.
- Women farmer's collective farming activities will be incentivized by providing support for post-harvest storage, processing and marketing facilities, marketing of crops produced by women farmers.
- Existing legal provisions have been recommended to amend the existing legal provisions incorporating the provisions of:
 - Prioritization of women in all government land redistribution;
 - Land purchase and land lease schemes;
 - Joint patta;
 - Joint registration of land with spouses;
 - Incentivisation of transfer of land in favour of women through concession in registration fee and stamp duty to be introduced;
 - Tenancy laws should also be amended to ensure rights of the women;
 - Steps to be taken to involve women farmers in on farm participatory research for agricultural technology and the development of women friendly implements or tools;
 - Special packages to be introduced for the wives of farmers who committed suicide on account of failure of crops or heavy

indebtedness and are left behind to take care of their children and family.

All above recommendations had been discussed in details in draft of National Policy on Women in Agriculture, 2008.

Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Government of India has taken up some necessary measures for women farmers.¹³

- **Support to States Extension Programme for Extension Reforms 2010:** Under the centrally sponsored program it was decided minimum 30% resources were ensured to utilize for women farmers. Farmers' Advisory Committee at block and district level has been provided under the scheme guideline.
- **Sub Mission on Seed and Planting Material (SMSP) Program:** It was implemented under the National Mission on Agricultural Extension and Technology (NMAET) with the aim of development of entire gamut of seed production chain. Under this (SMSP) scheme training facilities have been provided where women farmers are also beneficiaries.
- **National Food Security Mission (NFSM):** It was launched in October 2007 was grant successful. According to the guideline of this scheme training on cropping pattern is necessary for women to create awareness on improved technology for increasing production and productivity of crops. This scheme is implemented 28 states and also ordered that 30% of allocation of fund would be spend for women farmers to enhance economic level of household.
- **Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM):** Under this scheme, the women farmers are trained for the new drudgery reducing technologies for women in agriculture invented and promoted by ICAR. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has established a network of 645 KrishiVigyanKendras (KVKs) in the countrywide.

¹³ Press release of Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Government of India, on 02-August-2016 <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=148196> access on 05.04.2020. 1.p.m

Women beneficiaries are also provided 10% additional financial assistance for purchase of various agricultural machines and equipment.

- **National Horticulture Mission:** To improve nutrition development National Horticulture Mission was launched in 2005-06 from central Government. Here technological & extension supports are provided to women through Self Help Groups for enriching their self-reliant.

V. Conclusion

On the basis of above discussion, it may be stated that the Government of India has taken several steps to improve the overall condition of agriculture in India. It also has undertaken a comprehensive planning to empower women at the instance of feminisation of agriculture in Indian society as taking place in other parts of the world. Because of unsupportive social system, the policies initiated by the Government do not get much success. Since the rights over agricultural land is yet to be recognised so women are deprived of the benefits of different Government schemes like KCC, Soil Health Cards, FasalBimaYojna associated to achieve success in agriculture in West Bengal.