

ABSTRACT

Koch Bihar is located on the northern part of West Bengal along the foothills of Himalayas. This district is the gateway to Assam from West Bengal and also Bangladesh. Koch Bihar district is geologically composed by new alluvial soil. The climate of this district is hot and humid summer, moisture in air during rainy season and cold winter. The major rivers flow from north-west to south-east. Six river systems (Tista, Jaldhaka, Torsa, Kaljani, Raidak and Gadadhar) cut through the district flowing in a south-easterly direction. In Koch Bihar district male population is 51.49% and female population is 48.51% (Census 2011). Koch Bihar is an agricultural district. The female main workers in Koch Bihar district the majority of women are involved as agricultural labourers forming 48.83%. 23.3% of women are engaged as cultivators. Among the female marginal workers in the district 23.64% women work as cultivators, 52.77% women are involved as agricultural labourers (Census 2011). Women population share abundant responsibilities and perform wide spectrum of duties in running family, maintaining households, agriculture and allied fields in this district. Although rural farm women contribute monetary and non-monetary inputs toward family income, however, they occupy low position in the socio-economic index. To meet the family's daily requirements of food, firewood, water and fodder, the women in the villages work in agricultural fields, pastures etc., apart from the jobs they work in household, the unpaid activities in the domestic-sphere. Farm women are extensively involved in agricultural activities. However, the nature and extent of their involvement differs with the variations in agro-production systems. The present study was conducted among 1200 respondents in Koch Bihar district to study the level, extent and nature of participation of rural farm women in home, farm and livestock production activities as well as decision making process. Random sampling technique was adopted for collecting the data and the study based on primary data and documentary sources. The result revealed that in the Koch Bihar district female work participation rate was highest in Sitai block (31.77%) and lowest in Cooch Behar-II (14.84%) as per Census 2011. Most of the farm women were largely engaged with some farm activities such as threshing (84%), winnowing (84%), weeding (82%), sowing (78%), thinning (70%) etc. Almost all the farm women (88.33%) had doing allied activities such as poultry and animal rearing. 74.17% farm women did not try an entirely new method in farming which involves risk. 66.5% farm women willing to grow

large number of crops to avoid greater risks. The study revealed a negative attitude to taking risk of the farm women. After doing 8 hours. agricultural work farm women worked for her own family and also did livestock activities. Farm women's participation in terms of doing was more than of supervision in case of all agricultural and animal husbandry activities. Although rural farm women played a vital role in agricultural, domestic & livestock activities but for decision making their view was very negligible. There is a tendency to see men as farmers and women as farmer's wife or helper and highlight their supportive roles rather than productive roles. Farm women experienced also drudgery effect of agricultural activities mostly through the processes of weeding, transplanting, harvesting, threshing, cutting, carrying and storing grains. Eleven problems were identified in the study area which reflects the barriers in case of involving the women in any agricultural system. The field survey revealed 96.97% of farm women faced the problem of gender disparity in wages. 77.80% of the respondents were faced negligence in decision making. 74.17% of the farm women had more involvement in house hold work for this they had problems to do agricultural work with household activities. 71.74% of farm women had limited land ownership. 68.86% of farm women were faced the problem of lack of gender-neutral agricultural tools, 60.45% farm women had limited access to capital, resource and credit. There is an immediate need to improve extension facilities to train the farm women regarding the best risk management practices for deciding the choice of a particular crop such as growing short-duration crops as well as climate-resistant crop varieties. Storage facilities and weather-based crop insurance are necessary that can effectively address farmer's challenge and improve risk taking capabilities of a farmer. Farm women need to more interact with scientific oriented persons or agricultural extensions to update themselves about the crop science and agricultural technologies. There is a need to work on transforming the less socio-economic condition to high socio-economic condition which will motivate farm women to fully devote their effort to increase their income to lead a satisfied life. Farm women needs to come out on the dependency form their male counterpart in decision. It is high time for planners, policy makers and extension personnel to realize the immense potential of farm women resources in agriculture and develop appropriate policy measures. Beside this, it is necessary to provide need based educational programmes and market linkages to farm women so as to get additional income and employment opportunity in the days to come.