



KERALA AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

Centre for Gender Studies

in Agriculture and Farm

Entrepreneurship Development, (CGSAFED)

Women in Agriculture Policy Brief-3

NEED FOR WOMEN INCLUSIVE PLANNING IN AGRICULTURE

Lack of statistics on women in agriculture

Though women in Kerala have acquired undeniable visibility in the farming scenario of Kerala in the last two decades, the Census 2011 also has reported low employment participation rate for Kerala women. Unfortunately, to establish increase in the work participation of women in the farming sector, the concerned departments of the State do not have any comprehensive database on women in agriculture. For some academic purpose or out of curiosity, if anyone checks data of farm women population engaged in the sector, it is simply not possible to get a true picture! The related documents of agricultural statistics and planning in the state also do not provide any information on the number of farmers or families engaged in the sector. As part of the national policy, the state is expected to practice gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in agricultural planning and programme implementation. Availability of sex disaggregated data of the participants of a sector is a minimum requirement for effective implementation of gender responsive budgeting. It is high time to recognize that the work participation of the different categories of women engaged in the farming sector is largely unaccounted due to the inadequate definition of 'farmers' adopted under census and the national sample surveys. If timely attention is not bestowed to correct the noted lacuna, the invisibility of the farm women in related statistics will remain unchanged, in spite of the considerable increase in the real participation of women in the field. As a result, the present under reporting by all means will continue to support the status quo non inclusion of women's priorities in the planned development of the farming sector. This invisibility of women in agriculture is in fact enough to nullify the women empowerment goal of gender mainstreaming policy as such. The check introduced under gender budgeting to assess what percent of the budget is targeted to women under planned efforts is supposed to be followed by a gender audit of checking its extent of utilization among women as well. Without a realistic sex disaggregated data base of the beneficiaries in the farming sector, how far these steps will attain the expected results? Hans *et al* (2008) had rightly pointed out that lack of data on women is a major obstacle for effective gender budgeting in India. Lack of clarity among the development functionaries on the purpose and need of gender budgeting and lack of monitoring guidelines to collect sex disaggregated data of the participants in the published reports are other noted constraints in the context. It is high time the concerned agencies recognize that without reliable statistics on the women and men participants engaged in different livelihoods in the farming sector of the state, and the sex disaggregated data of men and women participants covered by development programmes, effective gender budgeting and women inclusive planning cannot really happen.

Who constitute Women in Agriculture?

Contextually relevant conceptualization and categorization of women's roles in agriculture are of utmost importance to introduce programmes which target the needs and challenges of various categories of women in agriculture. In this regard, it is important to define who constitute women in agriculture? In view of the major roles they play, the women in agriculture can be classified into five major categories- women farmers, women co- farmers, women agricultural workers, women agribusiness operators and women farmer groups. The 'women farmers' mainly belong to the women headed farm families and about 21 per cent of households in the State are female headed families (Census, 2011). KAU studies have shown that in men headed farm households, women family members also participate daily in 3 to 4 hours of unpaid farm work. Thus around 40 per cent of the annual farm family income of such households is due to the unpaid earning of the women's farm work (Geethakutty and Bindu, 2000). Hence the women counterparts of such farm families have right to be recognized as 'co-farmers'. Apart from the above mentioned two categories of women farmers, recently a large number of rural women who were not active in the farming sector have entered the scene as 'women farmer groups'. The website of the Kudumbashree indicates that the Mission has mobilized around three lakhs of women under the NABARD scheme of Joint Liability Group (JLG) farming and about 92 percent of these women are engaged in hired land farming. Majority of the members of these

groups are from BPL families and are engaged in group farming activities on 'hired land' of "un-cultivating land owners". Hence it is important to check to what extent these 'women groups members' who are engaged in farming are treated as farmers in related efforts of planned development!

Above all these, women form the majority of the wage earning labour force in the organized and unorganized farm sectors of the State. In Kerala, 93.37 percent of the labour engaged in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is women and the works are predominantly land development related. Women are also the primary workforce in agriculture related industries of coir, cashew, fishing and plantation sectors. Of late, women have registered active participation in various agri- businesses ventures as part of self-help group (SHG) activities of SGSY, Kudumbashree and NGO programmes. In the animal husbandry sector, the women perform more than 95 per cent of the work in the rural households that earn a livelihood through the rearing of cattle, poultry, ducks, quail and rabbit. As part of SHG programme, women are engaged in managing dairy farms, goat rearing, poultry rearing and buffalo/calf rearing units etc. on a group basis. The women of fisher communities are actively engaged in vending of fish, mending of fishing nets and fish processing in the coastal fisheries sector. Women participate equally in inland fishery with men in farm ponds and streams in rural areas, besides in mussel cultivation, ornamental fish cultivation and clam and crab collection. Women are also the major actors of the traditional farming in the tribal sector and among them those women living on the fringes of forests earn a living, collecting non timber forest products.

Though women are the major performers, as indicated earlier, none of the sectors have any database of the women participants engaged in these farm based livelihoods. It is important to note that each category of women involved in agriculture is with different priorities of needs and challenges which otherwise underline the need and relevance of adopting gender perspectives. **Hence a proper data base on these different categories of women in agriculture, if developed at the level of *grama panchayaths*, will be a breakthrough support for practicing gender responsive planning and budgeting. The recommendations of Kerala Agricultural University and Kerala Women's Commission (2012) in the context of women inclusive farmer policy for introducing registration and farm livelihood cards for women in agriculture is a viable approach for the required database development from the grassroots.**

Box No.1. Introduce Registration and farm Livelihood Cards for Farming Sector :

Women who earn a livelihood in different regions through agriculture and allied activities ought to be registered in the respective offices in the Local Self-Government Institutions such as grama panchayath/ municipality/corporation, and they must be provided with cards (Women's Farm Livelihood Card). These cards would be provided on a joint basis by the agriculture and allied offices (agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, forest, etc.) and the Local Self-Government Institutions in the area concerned. The cards should provide specific information about the particular area of work (agriculture, dairy farming, fisheries, forest produces collection), besides other personal details of the individual. The card must indicate the socio-economic status of the holder such as female-headed household, tribal family, agriculture worker, etc. These cards should be recognized as valid document to access loans, production inputs, equipments, cattle feed subsidies, market and insurance from the respective institutions without having to submit further documents such as lease agreements, title deeds, etc. (KAU & KWC,2012)

Why Women's Concerns in Farming Demand Special Attention?

The target of women exclusive programmes and quota allocation for women in agriculture are aimed to overcome the socioeconomic and gender biases encountered by the women engaged in the sector. The evaluation study of the Central Sector Women in Agriculture Programme implemented in Kerala during the 1995-2005 revealed that low access of women to farm information, inputs, subsidy, land, water, credit, market and technologies existed (Geethakutty et al, 2007). The study also highlighted the positive socio-economic and gender impacts and appreciation of women farmers' efforts created among development functionaries by the women exclusive agricultural programme. The lesson learnt from the referred intervention of agricultural sector is that such practice of positive discriminations in development (through an exclusive programme) can help to ensure that at least a critical mass of women get opportunities for participation in the development efforts. Anyhow, with policy context and the 'experienced' increase in the participation rate of women in farming, it has become imperative to recognize while framing our farm development policies that all the approaches and plans are to be kept as suitable and accessible to the women participants of the concerned sector. A concern highlighted is that the majority of the women in the rural sector are active actors of different agricultural related livelihoods and hence the effective participation of women is inevitable for sustained development of agriculture and their living in the present day context. In fact, the new entrant women farmers are filling the void created in the farming scene by the abandoning of farming by the land owners, who are mostly men. Hence, for sustaining the agricultural development of Kerala, an approach that envisions women as major partners in the

agriculture sector has become unavoidable. The 'gender mainstreaming approach' of planning, and programme implementation wherein the specific concerns of women and men are taken into account in all dimensions of development is what we need in the present context.

Box.2. Practice Gender Mainstreaming and Women Inclusive Planning

As part of the gender mainstreaming policy of the nation, the general stream programmes and systems are also expected to be structured with gender sensitive guidelines and criteria so that the women can also avail the particular benefits or opportunity along with men counterparts. The application of gender sensitive intervention in a given context of farming can be illustrated by the change required in the eligibility criterion of selecting farmer representatives to the local farmer committees. At present, farmers (who own land) only get included as representatives in farmer committees under the development departments. Most of the women farmer groups engaged in farming in the state is landless; but they are cultivating on hired land in the locality and naturally are stakeholders of the decisions taken by the farmers' committees. Hence it is important that these women also get included in the committees so that they can utilize opportunities in the decision making of the farmer committees. In such a situation, context specific modification is to be made in the eligibility criterion of such committee membership to accommodate representatives of the 'women farmers cultivating on hired land' also as members. Similar proactive reforms are required in the context to enable the women who cultivate on hired land to access farm inputs, subsidy, and insurance and produce procurement support. In this way, auditing of the existing programmes and support service systems of farm development sector through a "gender lens" will be helpful to identify critical issues which lead to discrimination of women as farmers and enable resolving of those constraints by the introduction of appropriate corrective criterion, reforms and/ or new guidelines. Such interventions in effect can enable the women also to avail the development opportunities as equal to men or other groups of farmers in the mainstream context.

The premise of gender mainstreaming lies in realizing that if agricultural plans in the mainstream are not targeting and enabling the effective and efficient participation of the women participants along with men, the resulting gap in the skill and competitiveness among women farmers will be exasperated. This will ultimately lead to the underutilization of women's potential resources and in turn, leading to the reduced contribution of the GDP share of the concerned sector. Hence it is the need of the hour that the development approaches in agriculture and related sectors visualize women as major stakeholders of agriculture at the cutting edge and strengthens the relationship between women and their means of livelihood. Under international commitments (Convention on Elimination of all forms Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Millennium Development Goals (MDG) etc, India is bound to practice gender mainstreaming and women empowerment approaches in planned development.

The two prong approach of practicing women empowerment and gender mainstreaming can expedite the advancement of gender equity in farming sector. The observation of the FAO assumes significance here which reads: *'Closing the gender gap in agriculture would generate significant gains for the agriculture and society. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30 percent and raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5- 4 per cent (FAO, 2011).* The standing guidelines for ensuring 30 percent participation of women in all central sector programmes (DAC, 2011) and the gender budgeting approach of checking what percentage of funds and benefits are allocated for women and actually availed by women beneficiaries under each sector are some of the monitoring mechanisms introduced for enabling the women farmers to access development support and services. But the studies conducted by the KAU have shown that the development personnel in the R&D sector of the state have scant awareness about this special requirement! It is important to identify that interventions for building competency of gender sensitivity and gender inclusion among the development personnel of the farming sectors are needs of the emerging systems under Agricultural Innovation Systems (World Bank, 2006). Imparting trainings of development personnel and education of graduates in farm universities with gender inclusive curriculum are two potential interventions to be adopted towards this end. Emphasis on research agenda of socio economic and gender analysis of the farming sector and women friendly technologies is another major requirement in the context from the R&D system.

Women Targeted Programmes of Agricultural Development

In examining agriculture development programmes currently implemented in the state, it is found that there are no special comprehensive schemes or any special quota adopted for women farmers in agriculture and allied sectors. Also, the major development projects of the agriculture and related departments do not have any special criteria to consider women as a segment entitled to special focus. Central sector programmes of agriculture such as RKVY do not keep any priority for farm women empowerment (Geethakutty *et al* 2014). The only project specially envisaged for women farmers in the State is being implemented not by the Department of Agriculture, but by the Local Self Government. The Mahila Kissan Swashaktikarana Pariyojana (MKSP) under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) scheme of the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) is being launched as group farming of Kudumbashree and the same is implemented by the Department of Local Self

Government (LSG). As the ambit of the scheme has been limited to only women engaged in group farming of agriculture crops, the benefits are not available to those women engaged in allied farming activities. It is important to note that the scheme does not have any target for individual women farmers. Related reviews have shown that except for a few local self-government institutions that have launched schemes to benefit women farmers, the facility of the Women Component Fund, was not being utilised effectively to benefit women in agriculture in the state.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Introduce registration of women and men who are earning livelihoods from the agriculture and allied sectors and notify their roles/activities in the sector. Such a mapping of women in agriculture and allied sectors if done through panchayath level registration, the database will help enabling the agencies to make informed planning and implementation of development programmes from grassroots.

- Comprehensive farm women status study and database development from grassroots on farm women's needs, challenges and gender inclusive planning should be a priority under agriculture and allied sectors.
- Introduce gender mainstreaming in development projects of the agricultural and allied sectors. Amendments, guidelines and criteria that address women's discrimination or deprivation are to be incorporated in the existing governing, development and research institutions in the agriculture and allied sectors of the state and capacity be built into the systems.
- Introduce comprehensive women exclusive development programmes in agriculture, animal husbandry, dairy and fisheries
- Ensure specific focus, guidelines, quota and fund for women oriented projects under planned efforts of research and development in the agriculture and allied sectors.
- Development projects are supposed to be evolved from grassroot level planning as women inclusive. Hence it is important that the elected representatives of Panchayathi Raj are imparted training for identifying specific needs and constraints of women in agriculture.
- In a state with very limited surplus land resource like Kerala, leased land farming is the only available choice before a large number of new entrant women farmer groups in the state. Since lease farming as such is legally banned in the state, these women are now involved in informal hired land farming for which no formal guidelines and procedures exist and hence face dilemmas and exploitation of serious nature. Introduction of formal land hiring guidelines by government is the need of the hour.
- Introduction of gender inclusive curriculum in the related universities of the farming sector is essential for building skills for gender analysis and gender budgeting among the functionaries of agriculture and allied sectors.

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