



Women Empowerment through Agricultural Extension: Bridging the Gender Gap in Rural Development

*Jitendra Kumar Meena and Payal Choudhary

Rajasthan College of Agriculture, MPUAT, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India

*Corresponding Author's email: jitendrameena414@gmail.com

Women constitute nearly half of the global agricultural workforce and play a pivotal role in ensuring food security, nutrition, and rural livelihoods. Despite their significant contributions, women in agriculture often face systemic barriers, including limited access to land, credit, technology, and extension services. Agricultural extension services, traditionally designed with a male-centric approach, have frequently overlooked the unique needs and challenges faced by women farmers. Integrating gender-responsive strategies into agricultural extension is essential to bridge this gap, empower women, and foster inclusive rural development.

The Role of Agricultural Extension in Women's Empowerment

Agricultural extension services serve as a conduit for disseminating knowledge, technologies, and best practices to farmers. When tailored to address gender disparities, these services can:

- **Enhance Access to Information:** Provide women with timely and relevant agricultural information, enabling informed decision-making.
- **Facilitate Skill Development:** Offer training programs that build technical skills and confidence among women farmers.
- **Promote Leadership:** Encourage women's participation in farmer organizations and decision-making bodies.
- **Improve Resource Access:** Assist women in accessing inputs, credit, and markets.

By adopting a gender-sensitive approach, agricultural extension can transform the agricultural landscape into a more equitable and productive sector.

Strategies for Bridging the Gender Gap

1. Gender-Specific Training Programs: Tailoring training sessions to address the specific needs of women farmers ensures higher participation and effectiveness. For instance, the Support to State Extension Programmes for Extension Reforms (ATMA Scheme) under India's Sub-Mission on Agriculture Extension (SMAE) conducts skill training courses in agriculture and allied areas for women farmers through National Training Institutes.

2. Formation of Women Self-Help Groups (SHGs): SHGs empower women by providing platforms for collective action, savings, and credit access. In Uttar Pradesh, the State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM) has trained women as local leaders, enabling them to guide fellow villagers in adopting SHGs, improving financial literacy, and undertaking sustainable livelihood projects.

3. Inclusion of Landless Women Farmers: Recognizing landless women as farmers is crucial for equitable access to resources. Organizations like Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (Makaam) advocate for the inclusion of landless cultivators in official farmers' registries, ensuring their eligibility for government schemes and benefits.

4. Leveraging Technology for Outreach: Utilizing digital tools, such as mobile applications and community radio, can overcome barriers related to literacy and mobility. For example,

the 'Drone Didis' initiative in Varanasi trained women to operate drones for spraying fertilizers and pesticides, enhancing agricultural productivity and providing new income opportunities.

Success Stories

1. Yamuna Kumari: A Trailblazer in Jharkhand: Yamuna Kumari, a 23-year-old geography postgraduate from Bero village near Ranchi, transformed her family's five-acre farm by adopting scientific techniques such as drip irrigation and polyhouse farming. After joining the Millionaire Farmer Development Programme (MFDP) by Transform Rural India in 2021, she diversified crop cultivation to include high-value produce like strawberries and marigolds. Her annual income now ranges between ₹10-11 lakh, and she mentors other women, promoting smart farming practices.

2. 'Drone Didis' of Varanasi: In Varanasi, a pioneering group of women known as the 'Drone Didis' is transforming agriculture by using drones to spray fertilizers and pesticides. Trained at the Drone Academy of Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University, these women have provided drone spraying services across 2,581 acres, earning approximately ₹3.38 lakh in ten months. This initiative not only enhances agricultural productivity but also empowers women economically and socially.

3. Millet Network of India: Reviving Traditional Crops: The Millet Network of India, initiated by a group of women, promotes millet cultivation due to its low water requirements and resilience. The network provides training on organic farming practices and advocates for policy changes to include millet in subsidized food programs. Their efforts have empowered women farmers and gained national recognition.

Challenges and the Way Forward

Despite notable progress, several challenges persist:

- **Limited Access to Resources:** Women often lack access to land, credit, and inputs, hindering their agricultural productivity.
- **Cultural Barriers:** Societal norms may restrict women's mobility and participation in training programs.
- **Data Gaps:** Insufficient gender-disaggregated data hampers the design of targeted interventions.

To address these challenges:

- **Policy Reforms:** Governments should implement policies that recognize and support women farmers, including land rights and access to credit.
- **Capacity Building:** Investing in education and training programs tailored for women can enhance their skills and confidence.
- **Inclusive Extension Services:** Developing gender-sensitive extension services that consider women's specific needs and constraints is essential.

Conclusion

Empowering women through agricultural extension is not only a matter of equity but also a catalyst for sustainable rural development. By addressing gender disparities and promoting inclusive practices, agricultural extension services can unlock the full potential of women farmers, leading to enhanced productivity, food security, and community well-being.

References

1. Dr. Neelam Patel and Dr. Tanu Sethi. "Rural Women: Key to Agricultural Extension." NITI Aayog.
2. "23-yr-old woman farmer breaks gender barrier, inspire communities." *The Times of India*, May 12, 2025.
3. "'Drone Didis' of Kashi take self-reliance to new heights." *The Times of India*, May 10, 2025.
4. "Millet Network of India." *Wikipedia*.
5. "Demand to include landless women tillers in farmers' registry." *The Times of India*, May 10, 2025.