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Empowering Youth & Women in Agriculture: Cultivating Equality, Innovation & Resilience

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India's agricultural sector is witnessing a silent revolution—led by its women and youth. While women make up nearly 33% of cultivators and 47% of agricultural labourers in India, they own less than 13% of land. Meanwhile, rural youth, often viewed as disengaged from farming, are returning to agriculture as entrepreneurs, researchers, and innovators. If women and youth are given equal access to resources, technology, and credit, agricultural productivity can increase by up to 30%. This shift not only transforms farming but also uplifts entire rural communities, making agriculture a path to resilience and prosperity.

The Current Scenario: Data Speaks

Indicator	Statistic
Women in agriculture (India)	33% of cultivators
Women in agricultural labor	47%
Land owned by women	~13%
Youth in farming (15–29 years)	~35% in rural labor force
Yield increase with equal access	20–30%

These numbers highlight the **inequality** and **untapped potential** in India's rural economy.

Policy Support and Technological Innovations

a. Digital and Technical Training: Modern platforms like **Digital Green** provide peer-to-peer training for over 150,000 farmers, most of them women. Through locally made videos and mobile apps, farmers learn best practices in cropping, nutrition, and marketing. Such platforms also help connect farmers directly to buyers, reducing dependence on middlemen.

b. Women-Centric Programs

- **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP):** Strengthens the role of women in agriculture through training, sustainable practices, and mechanization.
- **Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP):** Reaches over 25,000 women in Maharashtra and Bihar, encouraging climate-resilient farming and local enterprises.

c. Financial and Entrepreneurial Support

- **PM-FME Scheme:** Offers credit-linked grants for food processing businesses led by women and youth.
- **State Initiatives:** States like Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh are promoting rural women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) by offering microloans and business incubation support.

Real-Life Inspirations: From Margins to the Forefront

Yamuna Kumari, Jharkhand: At just 23, Yamuna transformed her family farm into a ₹10 lakh enterprise using drip irrigation, organic composting, and polyhouse farming. Today, she mentors other women in her village, promoting scientific farming and financial independence.

Women Eco-Groups in Lohardaga: Women from over 40 panchayats shifted to organic farming methods after receiving training in natural input preparation. The shift improved soil health, reduced input costs, and brought surplus nutrition into households.

Millet Revival in Andhra Pradesh: A grassroots women-led initiative revived traditional millet farming and set up local processing units. These groups now supply millet cookies and porridge mixes to school meal programs and urban outlets, doubling their incomes.

Scientific Insights: Why Empowerment Works

Factor	Impact on Agriculture
Land ownership for women	Enhances decision-making and productivity
ICT access	Improves knowledge, market linkages, and yield
Youth innovation	Drives adoption of drones, AI, climate-smart tech
Access to credit	Boosts yield by 11–14%

Studies show that when youth and women access **training + finance + market**, yield and income improvements follow. For instance, in regions with high female ownership of agricultural enterprises, average farm productivity is significantly higher.

Challenges That Remain

Despite government efforts, several structural and cultural issues persist:

Challenge	Suggested Action
Limited land ownership	Promote joint land titles and inheritance rights
Digital divide	Expand rural digital literacy programs
Gender norms	Community sensitization and role model promotion
Financial exclusion	Women-focused credit schemes with minimal collateral

Youth also face hurdles in accessing loans and technical support to launch agribusiness ventures. Addressing these challenges requires more inclusive policies and grassroots awareness.

The Road Ahead: A Gender-Just, Youth-Driven Agriculture

To truly unlock India's agricultural potential:

- **Strengthen Women's SHGs:** Offer them market linkages, incubation support, and enterprise training.
- **Promote Agri-Startups:** Provide youth with seed funding, mentorship, and digital tools.
- **Integrate ICT with Agriculture:** Expand mobile-based services for weather, pest alerts, and crop advice.
- **Decentralize Extension Services:** Involve women and young agri-entrepreneurs in KVK and FPO leadership.

Empowerment must move beyond slogans to structure: access to land, training, markets, and decision-making.

Conclusion

Empowering youth and women in agriculture is not just about equity—it's about national growth, innovation, and resilience. Whether it's Yamuna's drip-irrigated farm, a millet SHG in Andhra, or a group of young agri-tech graduates launching startups—these examples show what's possible when support meets potential.

"When women and youth lead, agriculture becomes more than a livelihood-it becomes a legacy."

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