



AGRI MAGAZINE

(International E-Magazine for Agricultural Articles)

Volume: 03, Issue: 05 (May, 2026)

Available online at <http://www.agrimagazine.in>

© Agri Magazine, ISSN: 3048-8656

Women in Indian Agriculture: Invisible Labour, Visible Impact

*Annapurna Singha

Acharyapuram Agri- Business Management School, Greater Noida (U.P.), India

*Corresponding Author's email: annapurnasingh0912@gmail.com

Nearly half of India's workforce is employed in agriculture, which remains the foundation of the country's economy. Women perform an important but mostly unappreciated role in this industry. Women participate in nearly every phase of agricultural production, from planting and transplanting to raising livestock, processing food, and managing the land after harvest. But in institutional records and policy frameworks, their labour is nonetheless invisible, underappreciated, and undercounted.

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023–2024 indicates that women make up 64.3% of all female workers in the agricultural sector, with 76.95% of rural women employed in this industry. Women's ownership of agricultural land remains disproportionately low at 12.8%, despite their overwhelming participation, underscoring the stark contrast between asset ownership and labour commitment. Nearly 80% of economically active women in India work in agriculture, either as cultivators or agricultural labourers, according to figures from the Department of Agriculture (2019).

Nature of Women's Work and Lack of Recognition

Labour-intensive, time-consuming tasks, such as weeding, transplanting, harvesting, and seed picking, are frequently the only jobs available to women in agriculture. According to a 2016 CARE India survey, men are mostly in charge of marketing and automated operations, while women spend much more time on repetitive manual chores. This division of labour perpetuates the idea that women are "helpers" rather than independent farmers.

The profoundly ingrained patriarchal worldview in rural India, where farming is socially regarded as a male occupation, is one of the main causes of this invisibility. Because of this, women are often left out of land records, agricultural databases, and government program beneficiary lists. The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005, grants daughters equal inheritance rights, but customs still favour sons. After marriage, daughters are supposed to rely on their husbands, and land is typically passed to male heirs.

Women-led FPOs as Instruments of Empowerment

To empower women in agriculture, institutional systems that recognize their labour and strengthen their ability to make decisions are necessary. One such revolutionary route is the emergence of women-led Farmer-Producer Organizations (FPOs). Research indicates that organizations led by women encourage greater involvement in production decisions, improve access to financing, and develop leadership skills.

The Sahyog Women Jeevika Agro Producer Company Limited in Nalanda, Bihar, is a prominent example. The FPO had 1,376 female members when it was founded in 2013, with assistance from the Bihar Rural Livelihood Promotion Society. It concentrates on gathering, preparing, and selling nutrient-dense food items, including besan, sattu, lentils, and paddy. Women members have raised household incomes, strengthened their negotiating power, and gained financial autonomy by jointly managing procurement, processing, and marketing. Research indicates that women affiliated with this FPO also reported greater self-assurance and involvement in local government (BRLPS, 2018).

Addressing Gender-Specific Constraints

Due to gender-specific limitations, men and women farmers have distinct experiences with agriculture. The availability of knowledge, training, extension services, financial resources, mobility, and control over time is generally restricted for women. Closing the gender gap in agriculture might boost total agricultural productivity in developing nations by up to 4%, greatly enhancing food security, according to the FAO (2011).

Consequently, customized interventions are necessary for women-led FPOs. Training programs need to be created with participative methods, localized delivery, and flexible timetables. Additionally, as social conventions frequently prohibit women from managing their finances independently, more hand-holding support is required to help them access working capital and share capital.

Case Studies Demonstrating Impact

Women were effectively organized into commercial goat-rearing businesses by a women-owned FPO in Bihar with more than 3,500 female shareholders. Goat mortality rates dropped to less than 2% over the course of four years as a result of better veterinary procedures and collective input procurement, while the FPO's turnover rose from ₹5.8 lakh to around ₹92 lakh.

Stable prices and income security were guaranteed by strong market connections with nearby butchers (World Bank, 2020).

In a similar vein, Apni Saheli Producer Company Limited, Rajasthan (2013), used institutional credit to develop a food-processing business. Value addition and income levels increased as a result of the unit's creation of numerous full-time and part-time job opportunities for female members and its facilitation of market access to metropolitan retail chains.

Women-led FPOs in Maharashtra, like Jeevan Sangini Krishi Vikas Women Farmer Producer Company (2013) and Samridhi Mahila Crop Producer Company, Kota, Rajasthan (2011), have demonstrated how direct marketing, input aggregation, and collective farming can lower costs and increase profitability for small and marginal women farmers.

Role of Cooperatives and Government Initiatives

Women's cooperatives have greatly aided the empowerment of women agricultural workers. A cooperative model has been effectively adopted by the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) to organize women farmers, increase loan availability, and strengthen livelihood security. At the institutional level, the Ministry of Cooperation's National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) is implementing programs such as Nandini Sahakar and Swayam Shakti Sahakar Yojana that encourage young people and women to start their own businesses through cooperatives.

To promote women's involvement in group ventures, Maharashtra has implemented preferred registration for women's cooperative societies. About 810 FPOs in India are run totally by women, and as of July 2024, women make up 38% of all FPO members (SFAC, 2024).

Women are intended to be recognized as direct beneficiaries of government programs such as the National Food Security Mission (NFSM), Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), and Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP). Nonetheless, there is still little formal recognition of women's underpaid and underreported labour.

Education as a Catalyst for Sustainable Empowerment

When it comes to increasing women's involvement in agriculture, education is revolutionary. Women farmers with higher levels of education are more likely to apply sustainable techniques, adopt new technologies, and participate in decision-making at the household and community levels. By encouraging self-assurance, independence, and leadership, education not only boosts productivity but also subverts social conventions.

Conclusion

Gender equality is not the only reason to empower women in agriculture; food security, poverty alleviation, and sustainable agricultural expansion all depend on it. Large unrealized potential can be unlocked by acknowledging women as farmers, protecting land rights, bolstering women-led FPOs, and making investments in institutional support and education. Empowering women genuinely implies empowering the globe because when women farmers prosper, households benefit, communities become robust, and the country advances.

References

1. Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2023–24, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.
2. Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (2019), Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture.
3. CARE India (2016), Women’s Role in Agriculture: A Study on Workload and Drudgery.
4. FAO (2011), The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture—Closing the Gender Gap for Development.
5. Bihar Rural Livelihood Promotion Society (2018), Impact Assessment of Women-led FPOs.
6. World Bank (2020), Enhancing Women’s Livelihoods through Collective Action in Agriculture.
7. SFAC (2024), Status of Farmer-Producer Organisations in India.