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## **AGRARIAN REFORM AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN**

### **ABSTRACT**

Rural Women in India plays an integral role in contributing for the economic development of rural areas. Whether their role in agriculture, participating at local levels or representing their communities and solving the core problem of rural areas. However, the study addresses the core issues like Social Inequalities, limited access to education, Patriarchal norms, discrimination and so on, which affects the women's autonomy, their rights and interests. The study aims to empower the rural women and provide them a platform where they can raise their voices and can address the issues of their families and community at the grassroot levels. Though rural women have contributed at large in agricultural development but they lack direct control over ownership of land. And their direct Participation in decision- making can ensure them to implement best agrarian policies and programs which in turn can help in fostering the growth of deprived areas. This Paper describes how the implementation of agrarian policies can uplift women and can make them self-sufficient. The results have indicated that many countries including India, have proved to be effective at representing women at local levels and had reserved 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of electoral seats in the PRIs. These results

suggest that though women have got certain opportunities at large but critical access to economic empowerment, participation in influencing agrarian policies and to advocate their rights and interests are still the matter of discussion and action.

**Keywords-** Agrarian Policies, Deprived areas, Grassroot level, Decision-making roles, Discrimination, Social Inequalities.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Rural Women are the torchbearers for social, economic, environment transformation for New India. Agrarian reform, political participation and women empowerment are all interconnected and essential for the rural development. This paper briefly reviews the concern for the rural women in Agriculture, their direct participation in political activity and to empower them across regions and communities. Women in Rural areas are more involved in practising agriculture than urban women's as they had a burden to look after the entire livestock, and other household chores. So, they must get adequate access to it and their hard work should not get unrecognized. According to Food and Agriculture Organization, 2011<sup>1</sup> women comprise on an average 43 per cent of the agricultural workforce globally. Yet they have less access to assets, inputs and agricultural related services.

In the same way, their active participation in political activity gives them a chance to represent themselves and to raise their voices solely and to participate in shaping laws, policies and programs. In a related context, women empowerment being dependent on complex sociological and economic issues, needs to be measured in terms of specific parameters like 'access to resources', 'decision making capability' and 'ability to take a stand'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Empowering women in Agriculture (2012) by Amrit Patel, Dy. Gen. Manager, Bank of Baroda, currently international Consultant, Rural Credit, based in Mumbai*  
Available at: [www.insightsonindia.com](http://www.insightsonindia.com)

<sup>2</sup> *Women Empowerment Index: International Journal Management Volume:7 Issue: 1,2018*

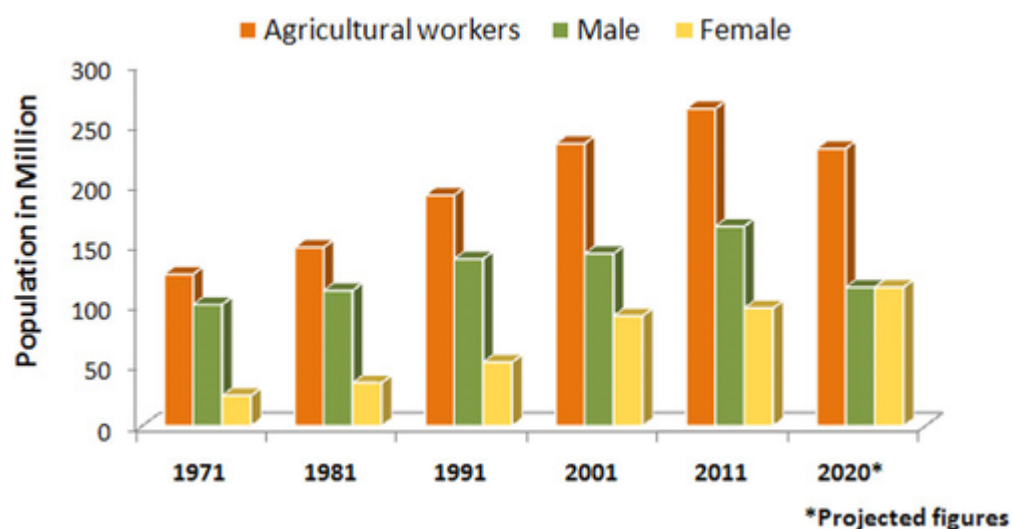
## II. RURAL AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT

### i. RURAL WOMEN WORKFORCE IN AGRICULTURE-

Rural Agriculture considered to be the backbone of Rural Economy. As agriculture is the primary source of livelihood on which half of India's population rely upon. Studies have indicated that out of 33 percent women are engaged in agricultural work force and 48 per cent are self- employed farmers. Additionally, women invest much time than men in agricultural fields for the sake of livelihood and had major responsibilities in managing their children and other household chores. So, empowering them will have a direct impact on agricultural productivity and enhancing food security.

Rural women are engaged in different activities like Processing, packaging, harvesting, production and other certain activities require in the agricultural field. Their daily tasks involve intense physical labor and mental fatigue. Women are involved in both crop and livestock production at subsistence and commercial levels. They produce food and cash crops and managed mixed agricultural operations. (FAO,2010)<sup>3</sup>

Fig1: Population dynamics of women in Indian agriculture (Vision 2050, CIAE Bhopal.)



<sup>3</sup> FAO, Agri Gender statistics toolkit, 2010.

Available at (<http://www.fao.org/gender/arigender/agri-gender/toolkit/it/>)

In the study mentioned in Fig:1 clearly states that how the share of female workforce in agriculture have drastically increased from the time period between 1991-2020 which is approximate 50 percent of the agricultural workforce.

Though the workforce has increased in agriculture for the women's but certain loopholes are still a challenge for the women and considered to be the important concern which has not only kept women in a vicious circle of low productivity but also has thrown up questions about inclusive and sustainable growth of the sector.

## **ii. AGRARIAN POLICIES**

The substantial involvement of rural women in agriculture, primarily as unpaid or contributing family workers highlights the importance of developing certain policies and programs that constraints the need and interest of women in agriculture.

As per the Prime minister's vision in AatmaNirbhar Bharat, the Government of India has prioritised Gender mainstreaming in Agriculture and schemes to rural women.

Schemes of Ministry of agriculture and farmers, and welfare of ministry of rural development encourage the participation of women in agriculture. schemes like- <sup>4</sup>

- THE MAHILA KISAN SHASHAKTIKARAN PARIYOJNA SCHEME(MKSP): scheme was launched by Ministry of Rural development to impart skill development and capacity building programmes for rural women. This scheme was introduced as a sub component of Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojna across India.
- THE DEEN DAYAL ANTYODAYA YOJNA-NATIONAL RURAL LIVELIHOOD MISSION(DAY-NRLM): under this scheme training on use of latest agriculture, allied techniques, Agro-ecological best practices are being imparted to women farmers through community resource persons and extension agencies.
- BIOTECH-KRISHI INNOVATION SCHEINCE APPLICATION NETWORK(BIOTECH-KISAN): initiated by the Department of Bio technology and has provided scientific solutions to the farmers especially women farmers or the small and marginal farmers of the region to avail innovative agricultural technologies in the farm.
- Likewise, Farmers Producer Organisation (FPO) and Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) played significant role in dissemination of these programmes amongst rural women.

Now the question arises Can these Agrarian Policies could shape the agriculture in rural areas and empower the women?

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<sup>4</sup> Rural Women: Key to new India's Agrarian Revolution by Dr. Neelam Patel and Dr. Tanu Sethi (Senior Advisor, Agriculture, NITI Aayog)  
Available at: <https://www.niti.gov.in>

**Definitely Yes**, better agrarian policies can shape the agriculture and empower the women in rural areas to bring a paradigm shift in economic growth or the rural development. Securing women's rights and interests is vital since they have the right to work in agricultural sectors. But it's our responsibility to acknowledge the significant contribution that women make to agriculture and to collaborate in order to improve productivity in deprived areas, which consequently can contribute to the sustainability of agriculture. Although, these agrarian policies were implemented by the government, but our focus must not be in the quantity but in the quality, or the diligent implementation of these policies to uplift the rural women.

### **iii. AGRICULTURAL CHALLENGES: HURDLES TO SUSTAINIBILITY**

- **LAND CONSTRAINTS<sup>5</sup>-**

The prejudice against women's tenure has a tendency to be strengthened by land reforms and resettlement. Women are more prone than men to lack title, stable tenure, or the same rights to use, improve, or dispose the property, which contributes to the prevalence of land shortages among them.

The study finds that in 2014, women owned land in only 16 per cent of the household across regions (8 percent of these households also had male owners, while 84 percent had no female owners at all). <sup>6</sup>

- **LACK OF ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY-**

Many rural women use traditional technologies like mortar, grinding stones etc. in food processing, packaging and other related activities. As these technologies are so time consuming, low productive.

For an instance the adoption of HYV seeds after the implementation of green revolution found to be disadvantageous for many poor and landless women. Women were paid less than men and were given the more labour-intensive tasks of weeding, transplanting and harvesting. <sup>7</sup>

- **INSUFFICIENT AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES-**

Compared to males, women farmers have less interaction with extension services, particularly in situations where there are cultural barriers between men and women. In actuality, husbands and wives share agricultural expertise either ineffectively or not at all.

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<sup>5</sup> *Challenges and prospects of rural women in Agriculture, A journal of contemporary research*, 10(2), 183-190, 2013 ISSN: 1813-2227

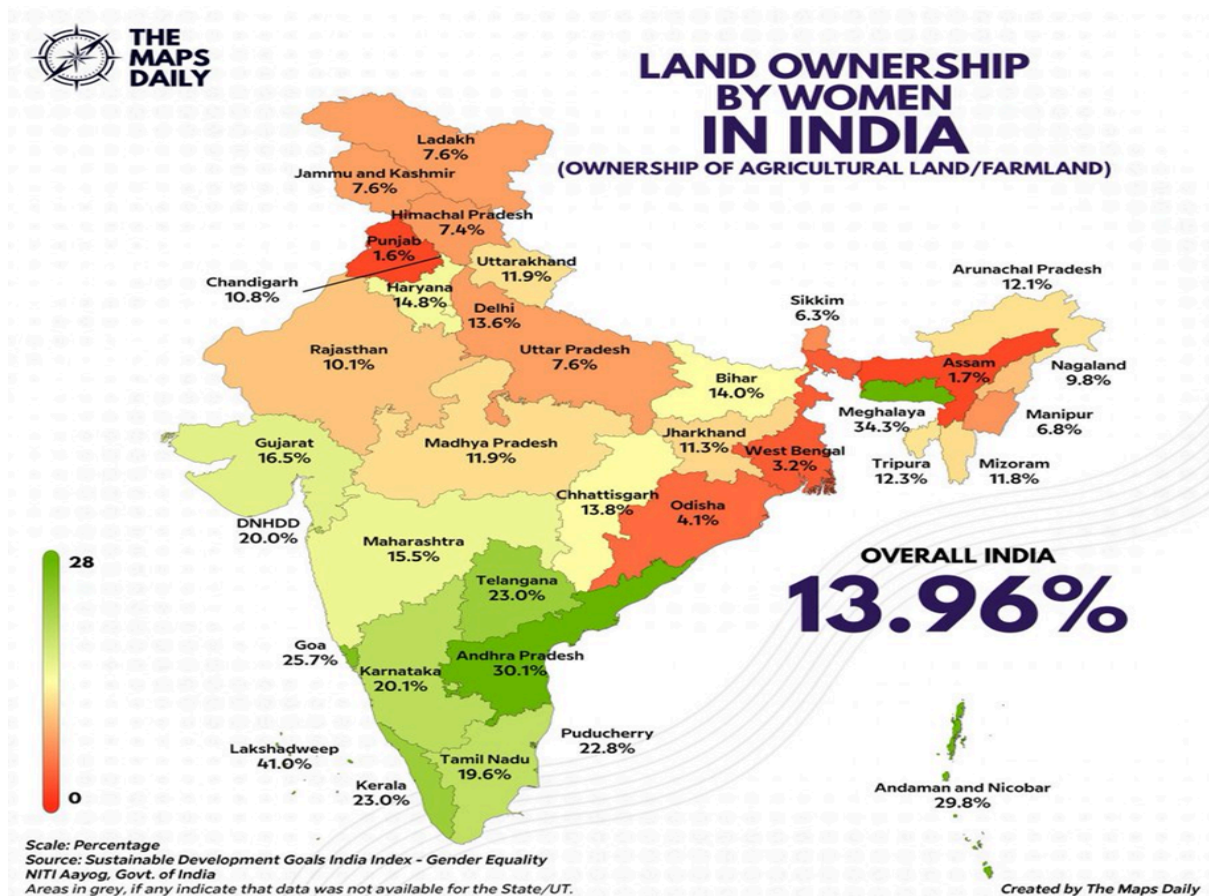
<sup>6</sup> Bina Agrawal, Pervesh Anthwal and Malvika Mahesh (2023, December 24) 'Agricultural land Ownership among rural women in India'

Available at: <https://www.indiawaterportal.org>

<sup>7</sup> FAO Focus. *Women and Food Security*. n.d. <http://www.fao.org>

- **LACK OF ADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURAL FACILITIES-**  
Social amenities including schools, power, hospitals, excellent access roads, pipe-borne water, and housing facilities are typically neglected in rural areas. Since women and children make up the majority of rural residents and perform almost all subsistence tasks. However, infrastructural facilities are vital for growth.
- **SOCIO ECONOMIC FACTORS-**  
Due to patriarchal societies, it is evident that rural women's low socioeconomic level limits their ability to participate extensively in agricultural production, other factors such as their assigned duties as caregivers, homemakers, and child bearers also contribute to this limitation.

However, women are a crucial component of the farming system, but they have been mainly marginalized by policymakers who have neglected the gender aspect at great expense. Among all these challenges one of the crucial Challenge been faced by these rural women is **lack of access to ownership of land**, which the below given map clearly depicts.



This Fig:2 (Map of India) clearly states the number of women owning land in India. which means in overall India where maximum number of women are engaged in agriculture involves just 13.96% of women to own the land which is a clear reminder of gender inequity present in our country.

#### **iv. OVERCOMING BARRIERS-**

Studies show a positive correlation between the increasing labour force participation of women and rise in GDP. The ILO estimates that reducing gap in labour force participation rates between men and women by 25 percent by the year 2025, could raise global GDP by 3.9 percent.<sup>8</sup>

- ☐ Hence, their direct participation in agriculture must be enhanced by providing safety, health, security, education, skill development and equal rights.
- ☐ India has extended its facilities of banking to the rural areas and has made it accessible and feasible to increase rural women confidence and opportunities for economic engagement by implementing a profound scheme PRADHAN MANTRI JAN DHAN YOJNA(PMJDY).
- ☐ Adopt comprehensive, integrated strategies centred on a human rights framework, paying particular attention to the wider circumstances required for women to achieve economic success.
- ☐ Equal access to and management of productive resources, including land and financial services should be provided.
- ☐ Make sure that the rural women are economically empowered, giving them access to minimum salaries and specific guaranteed income programs for public work projects.
- ☐ To speak up against misconceptions and encourage more equitable family sharing of childcare and domestic duties especially addressing rural women's time poverty.

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<sup>8</sup> Rural women at work: Bridging the gaps, International Labour Organization  
Available at- [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

- Make sure rural women have more organization, voice and representation that can bring collective action for economies of scale in production and also offering a forum for participation in policy discussions and decision making.
- Increase rural women's access to social finance and push financial institutions to implement gender-responsive practices.
- Implement practical steps to stop and deal with workplace harassment and violence.

Thus, we may lessen the difficulties experienced by women in rural regions and promote rural development by carefully implementing these critical measures.



### **III. WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT FOR AN INTERDEPENDENT RURAL PROSPERITY**

“Enhancing the credibility of rural women requires Political empowerment”. Through this rural woman can assert their rights to land, leadership and the ability to influence laws, rules, policies and programmes. Encouraging rural women’s participation in leadership roles is crucial for bolstering country’s democracy and promoting economic development of the region. Also, they don’t participate in community elections or political events because they lack information or understanding of their legal and political rights and have less decision-making power and are underrepresented in leadership, government and institutions.

India’s 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment act empowered local self- governments (Panchayati Raj Institutions) and reserved one- third of electoral seats for women. Over 1.45 million women in India influence local decision making, making it one of the top nations for female engagement in local government. Research shows that having more women in politics leads to more effective policy outcomes, reduced corruption, and less conflict; Women leaders tend to foster economic and developmental growth while promoting more inclusion of women in the labor force.<sup>9</sup>

Women are crucial in highlighting local objectives, influencing the results of development, and guaranteeing sustainable development in line with the principles of decentralized governance. Since the amendment, India has witnessed increased women’s participation in local governance by breaking stereotypes. However, it seems that there is a conspiracy of silence regarding the great work that these local bodies do, as women are largely undervalued and neglected so when women hold elected office, this becomes more noticeable.

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<sup>9</sup> Kevin Kruse, *New research: women more effective than men in all leadership measures*, March 31, 2023 Available at- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2023/03/31/new-research-women-more-effective-than-men-in-all-leadership-measures>

The committee for the status of women in India, in its report titled ‘**Towards Equality**’ (1974)<sup>10</sup> strongly highlighted that the concerns and viewpoints of rural women had not received adequate consideration in the government’s plan and development policies.

States like Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan have introduced (Mahila) women gram sabhas to strengthen women’s participation. Due to a combination of social barriers and a lack of knowledge of rights and entitlements, women’s participation in gram sabha meetings across states has remained low.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, women leaders have emerged as crucial forces behind social transformation in many Indian villages, while being ingrained in traditional cultural contexts.

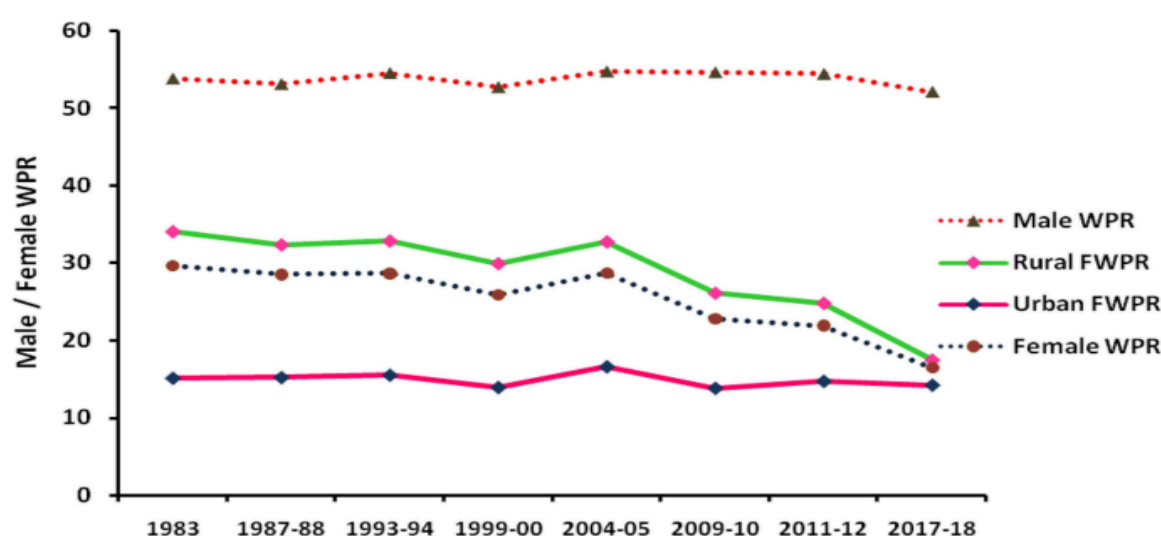


Fig:3<sup>12</sup> clearly states the female workforce participation rate which has drastically increased between 1983 to 2005 and has seen a reduction since the year 2009-2018 due to various barriers these rural women have been facing.

<sup>10</sup> Report on the committee on the status of women in India, Ministry of Education and social Welfare, Government of India, December 1974

Available at- <https://plindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Towards-Equality-1974-Part-1.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Jitendra, 'Democracy's Better Half', Down to earth, December 15, 2014

Available at- <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/democracys-better-half-47462>

<sup>12</sup> Source: NSSO, 68<sup>th</sup> Round, Report No. 554, Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, 2011–12 and Periodic Labour Force Survey, 2017–18, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, National Statistical Office, Government of India

## **v. BARRIERS IN PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS-**

- One of the main barriers for the rural women is that they are less educated, and are ignorant of the current political events.
- A survey showed that female panchayat members give a substantial portion of their time to household work in comparison to panchayat work, while male panchayat representatives can devote more time to panchayat work.<sup>13</sup>
- Unlike their male counterparts, who have some prior experience in politics, the majority of the female members are first time candidates with no training or experience.
- Gender and societal norm or social constraints, less engagement in decision making process in household and other field are extremely huge hurdle in the way of political participation and empowerment of rural women.
- If the barriers to equality are removed, rural women have enormous potential to grow the economy and improve GDP.
- In contrast to men, who are more likely to obtain information from government agencies, the media, panchayat office bearers, women are more likely to rely on family members and neighbours in order to complete their tasks and obtain information.
- It is believed that rural elite women get into politics through family ties and considered to be the proxies of family members instead of being seen as capable leaders.

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<sup>13</sup> Nirmala Buch, 'Women Experience in New Panchayats: The Emerging Leadership of Rural Women,' Centre for Women's Development Studies, occasional paper No. 35

But there is still more work to be done especially in addressing the inequalities and difficulty that currently exist in ensuring women that women are meaningfully represented in local governments systems.<sup>14</sup>

## **vi. REPRESENTATION OF RURAL WOMEN: CALL TO ACTION**

- **AWARENESS, EDUCATION AND TRAINING<sup>15</sup>-**

The majority of rural women lack the necessary political consciousness, knowledge, awareness, education and training to effectively engage in politics. Also, majority of them have no idea how institutions manage the populace or how politics operate. It is imperative that individual is made aware of their legal and political rights. This can only be done by educating them and encouraging their participation in training programmes with the aid of NGOs, women political education forums, self-help groups, awareness campaigns and women democracy networks.

- **SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN PARTICIPATION-**

Several long standing social, cultural and traditional norms prevent women from taking part in the electoral process as voters or candidates. These barriers, practices, discriminatory laws discourage women to participate and become leaders. Removing and lessening this discrimination may pave the path for engagement in society activities such as other political events.

- **COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT-**

Through organizing seminars, training programmes, skill development initiatives and political party support, rural women can be inspired to develop the competency to increase women's political participation and access to political institutions related to electoral process and political events. Thus, supporting political analysis, advancing

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<sup>14</sup> 'Elected Women Representatives in Local Rural Governments in India: Assessing the impact and challenges', January 31, 2024, Sunaina Kumar and Ambar Kumar Ghosh  
Available at – <https://www.orf.online.org/research>

<sup>15</sup> "Rural Women's Political Participation and its Impact on Society", (Aparna Singh) International Journal of Political Science, Volume 7: Issue 2: 2021 (Singh, 2021)  
Available at- [www.arcjournals.org](http://www.arcjournals.org)

human rights and maintaining skill development are crucial instruments for enhancing rural women's managerial, financial, leadership and communication abilities.

- **PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY-**

Women do gender discrimination now and then in every field due to the reflective nature of male-dominated society that restricts women from being participating in political events. We may lessen gender inequality by encouraging equitable parenting of boys and girls, raising public awareness, enforcing the law more strictly and assuming political leadership roles.

- **SAFETY ISSUES-**

Women typically don't feel comfortable working outside due to concerns about their safety and the news they about the growing number of rapes and cases of sexual harassment. In addition, women may find it more difficult to get police counselling and legal assistance in rural regions.

#### **IV. WOMEN RISING: A TIDE FOR TRANSFORMATION**

Empowerment is the process of giving someone authority and power. Therefore, giving disadvantaged women is leverage is referred to as women's empowerment. Along with economic, social, and civil freedom, this entails giving women effective decision-making authority and the ability to influence the decisions of others. By definition, empowerment means having more power to exercise that power.

However, education, social justice, and status better health, economic or financial stability and political engagement are important factors that support women's empowerment. Let's talk about women's empowerment in relation to rural agriculture and political participation.

##### **vii. Women's Empowerment in Terms of Political Participation<sup>16</sup>**

Women's empowerment in political participation is a critical issue that has gained significant attention in recent decades. It is essential for fostering gender equality, promoting democratic values, and ensuring that diverse perspectives are represented in decision-making processes. This research will delve into the factors that influence women's political participation, the challenges they face, and the strategies that can be implemented to enhance their involvement in political life.

#### **FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

##### **Socio-economic Status:**

Women's economic independence and educational attainment are crucial factors in determining their political participation. Access to resources and opportunities can significantly influence women's ability to engage in political activities.

##### **Political Institutions:**

The structure and functioning of political parties, electoral systems, and government institutions can either facilitate or hinder women's political participation. Inclusive political systems that promote gender equality are more likely to encourage women's involvement.

##### **viii. Challenges Faced by Women in Political Participation**

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<sup>16</sup> Available at: Norris, P., & Lovendal, J. (2004). *Women's Political Participation: A Global Perspective*. Cambridge University Press

**Discrimination and Harassment<sup>17</sup>:**

Women in politics often face discrimination, harassment, and violence, both within and outside political institutions. This can create a hostile environment that discourages women from entering or remaining in political life.

**Stereotyping and Gender Bias:**

Women are often subjected to stereotypes and gender bias, which can undermine their credibility and effectiveness as political leaders. These stereotypes can perpetuate harmful assumptions about women's abilities and qualifications.

**Limited Access to Resources:**

Women may face limited access to financial resources, networks, and support systems that are essential for political campaigns and leadership roles. These disparities can create unequal playing fields for women in politics.

**Lack of Awareness:**

Rural women do not take part in elections or other community political events because they lack the information or awareness of their legal and political rights. Rural women have less decision-making authority and are underrepresented in leadership, government, and institutions.

**Household Constraints:**

The majority of female representatives are married. Compared to male representatives, this has an impact on the amount of time they can devote to their profession. According to poll, male panchayat work, but female members of panchayats devote a significant amount of their time to home chores.

**Lack of Experience and Training:** Unlike their male counterparts, who are more likely to have a history of involvement in local politics, the majority of female members are first-time candidates with no training or experience.

**ix. Strategies for Promoting Women's Political Participation:**

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<sup>17</sup> Available at: *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)*: <https://www.unwomen.org/en> , *Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)*: <https://www.ipu.org/>

- **Gender-Sensitive Electoral Laws:** Ensuring that electoral laws are gender-neutral and do not discriminate against women.
- **Capacity Building:** Providing training and support to women aspiring to political careers.
- **Education and Awareness Raising:** Education programs and public awareness campaigns can help to challenge harmful stereotypes and promote gender equality in politics.
- **Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics:** Implementing measures to protect women from violence and intimidation.
- **Support for Women Candidates:** Providing financial support, training, and mentorship programs can help women candidates overcome the challenges they face and succeed in elections.
- **Inclusive Political Institutions:** Creating inclusive political parties, electoral systems, and government institutions that can foster a more welcoming environment for women in politics. This includes ensuring that women have equal access to decision-making processes.

## **x. Benefits of Increasing Women's Participation in Politics<sup>18</sup>**

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<sup>18</sup> *Challenging the Political Order: Women's Movements and Political Change* by Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward



- **Enhanced Decision-Making:** Women's participation can lead to better decision-making, as their perspectives can help address issues that may have been overlooked.
- **Increased Accountability:** Women's presence in government can increase accountability and transparency, leading to better governance.
- **Diverse Voices:** Women's participation helps ensure that diverse voices are represented in government, leading to a more inclusive and democratic society.
- **Role Models:** Women in leadership positions can inspire younger generations and challenge gender stereotypes.
- **Economic Growth:** Studies have shown that countries with higher levels of women's political participation tend to have stronger economic growth.
- **Increased Social Cohesion:** Women's participation in politics can help promote social cohesion and reduce conflict.
- **Improved Human Rights:** Women's participation in politics can help advance human rights, including women's rights.

Overall, increasing women's participation in politics is essential for building a more just, equitable, and inclusive society. By empowering women to participate in the political process, we can create a better future for everyone.

## V. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN AGRICULTURE: ADDRESSING POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION IN INDIA

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Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en> ; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA): [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Institute\\_for\\_Democracy\\_and\\_Electoral\\_Assistance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Institute_for_Democracy_and_Electoral_Assistance)

Women in India play a pivotal role in agriculture, often bearing the brunt of agricultural labor while facing significant challenges related to poverty, inequality, and discrimination. Empowering women in agriculture is essential for achieving sustainable development, reducing poverty, and promoting gender equality. This research aims to explore the current state of women's empowerment in Indian agriculture, identify key challenges, and propose strategies for addressing these issues.

## **xi. WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO AGRICULTURE**

Women in India constitute a substantial portion of the agricultural workforce, often engaged in a wide range of activities, from land preparation and sowing to harvesting and processing. Their contributions to agricultural production are indispensable, yet their roles are often undervalued and underappreciated.

According to the 2011 Census of India, approximately 29.9% of female workers are engaged in agriculture, forestry, and fishing. However, this figure does not fully capture the extent of women's involvement in agriculture, as many women work on family farms without formal employment. Women as agricultural workers act as change agents and resilience builders.

## **xii. SETBACKS**

Women in agriculture face a myriad of challenges that hinder their empowerment and limit their potential. Some of the key challenges include:

### **LAND OWNERSHIP:**

Despite their significant contributions to agriculture, women in India have limited land ownership rights. This lack of land ownership can restrict their access to resources, credit, and decision-making power. According to the 2011 Census, only 11.7% of agricultural land is owned by women.

### **ACCESS TO CREDIT AND MARKETS:**

Women farmers often face difficulties in accessing credit and markets, limiting their ability to invest in agricultural inputs and sell their produce at fair prices. This can perpetuate a cycle of poverty and inequality.

## PATRIARCHIAL NORMS

Outdated gender stereotypes trap women in domestic roles, denying them equal access to education, economic empowerment and decision-making power.

## LIMITED ACCESS TO EDUCATION

35% of women farmers lack formal education (FAO, 2017). The vast majority of our women continue to be ignorant, illiterate, exploited in the home and in society, helpless and dependant, unable to understand their rights or responsibilities. While rural women in India, by and large, still remains enveloped in darkness, the urban scenario presents a gleam of hope. These rural women are receiving education that leaves a lot to be desired, and the medium of instruction aims to distance them from the general public. Women farmers often have limited access to education and training, which can hinder their ability to adopt improved agricultural practices and adapt to changing environmental conditions.

## DISCRIMINATION<sup>19</sup>

Gender-based discrimination and harmful stereotypes can hinder women's participation in agricultural activities and decision-making processes. These stereotypes can limit their potential and create barriers to their empowerment. Due to prevalent prejudice and gender norms, women frequently bear an enormous workload, with a large portion of their labor going unappreciated and unacknowledged. Through its efforts on standards and norms, statistics and information, policy discourse, capacity building, FAO helps to lessen gender inequalities.

## POVERTY

Given the multifaceted nature of rural poverty, FAO employs an integrated strategy for rural women's economic empowerment that concurrently tackles the various elements contributing to rural women's disadvantageous status as farmers, business owners, value chain participants and change agents. The strategy makes sure that initiatives to increase rural women's access to market opportunities, services, and productive resources are supported by initiatives to increase their agency, self-assurance and voice in decision-making processes as well as complementary steps to establish a supportive environment at the institutional and policy levels.

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<sup>19</sup> "Empowering rural women: Powering Agriculture" by Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations, Sustainable development goals  
Available at: [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

### **xiii. Strategies for Empowering Women in Agriculture<sup>20</sup>**

Several strategies can be implemented to empower women in agriculture and address the challenges they face. These include:

#### **LAND REFORM**

Implementing land reform policies that grant women equal ownership rights can empower them and improve their economic security.

#### **ACCESS TO CREDIT AND MARKETS**

Providing women farmers with access to credit and markets through financial institutions and cooperatives can help them invest in their farms and sell their produce at fair prices.

#### **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Promoting education and training programs specifically designed for women farmers can equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to improve their agricultural practices and livelihoods.

#### **GENDER SENSITIVE EXTENSION SERVICES**

Providing gender-sensitive extension services can ensure that women farmers have access to information and support tailored to their needs.

#### **POLICY ADVOCACY**

Advocating for policies that promote gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture can create a more enabling environment for women farmers.

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<sup>20</sup> "Empowering Women in Agriculture: A Guide to Policy and Program Development" (FAO, 2012)

Available at: [www.fao.org/gender/en](http://www.fao.org/gender/en)

## **VI. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN RURAL AREAS**

Agricultural transformation, women's empowerment and political engagement are interconnected for rural development. Women's empowerment is a necessary aspect which depends on their ability to access land, natural resources etc. and to participate in larger arena to be the voice in agrarian policies and programs and with this, they can speak up in favor of their interests and rights.

When we discuss to empower the women, we frequently assert that if they work, money will be made and they will inevitably become self-sufficient. Additionally, there will be fewer arguments in the family when there are one or more breadwinners. The males in the family tend to feel less pressure to perform their duties which will generate more money into their homes that could suffice their needs.

Studies have indicated that the female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) rate in India, which refers to women who are either working or looking for a job is just below the global average of 47 percent for several years<sup>21</sup>. Though it still not at par with global average, however it's improving over years. The latest report of periodic labour force survey 2021-22 is evident of increased female labour force Participation rate in India.

According to the annual PLFS report, 36.6% of female aged 15 years and above in rural areas are participating in labour force against 78.2% males.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, women's contribution to agriculture is essential for food processing, Grading, Packaging etc. might help them to reduce world hunger- a problem that India faces. In the view of all these links, women will engage in politics to defend their rights and interests which will have a domino effect and empower other women as well. They will also participate at higher levels and be more aware and vocal about Policies related to agriculture that can help in the comprehensive growth of rural areas.

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<sup>21</sup> *Female Labour Utilization in India, April 2023*

<sup>22</sup> *Annual Periodic Labour force survey reports, Ministry of statistics and programme implementation*  
*Source: Annual PLFS Report, MOSPI*

## CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the preceding discussion underscores that for gender equality, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development in rural areas, agrarian reform and women's involvement in rural development are essential. In order to promote equitable rural development, the findings emphasize the necessity for policymakers to give women's land rights, loan availability and social services first priority. Though "laws are good and sound in our country, but the enforcing agencies are not coordinating their efforts, nor are they competent enough to deliver the goods". (Kant, 2016)

Prioritizing agricultural reform and giving rural women the tools they need to take charge of their own lives are essential if we are to create a more just and sustainable rural future. It is imperative that international organizations, policy makers work together to remove the structural obstacles preventing rural women from achieving their full potential.

The hardships and victories of rural women are a striking reminder of the transformational power of community led projects and grassroot organizations. We are prompted to reconsider established structures and advance inclusive, participatory methods by the convergence of agrarian reform and women's empowerment in rural development.

Thus, experiences of rural women are crucial in forming a more just and equitable world as we consider the connections between land, gender and power.

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