



The Role of Rural Women in Agricultural Marketing in India

Anish Sunwar

M.Sc. Ag in Rural Development and Planning

Department of RDP, School of Agricultural Sciences, Nagaland University, Medziphema, 737106

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8200282>

Abstract

The rural economy and agriculture in particular, is supported by women. In India, 80% of all women who are economically engaged in the agricultural sector; 33% of these women work in the agricultural labor force, and the rest 80% are independent farmers. This paper reviews the part rural women play in agriculture in India, and their participation in agricultural marketing which makes it critical for the development of the rural economy. There are several challenges that rural women face in this field, including discrimination, a lack of access to the market, and a lack of negotiating power. To support rural women with agricultural marketing, a number of initiatives have been taken, including the formation of self-help organizations, the promotion of mobile technology, and the creation of government programs. These initiatives have enhanced women's access to markets, bargaining skills, and awareness of their rights. The future of rural women's participation in agricultural marketing is bright.

Introduction

India is a predominantly rural and a developing country, with over 60% of the population living in rural areas. Women are the foundation of the agricultural labor force and are a crucial piece of the Indian economy. Women are the backbone of the rural panorama and agriculture in particular. In India, the agricultural sector supports 80% of the total economically employed women; 33% of these women work in the agricultural labour force, and the rest are independent farmers. They are also involved in all aspects of agricultural production, from planting and harvesting to processing and marketing. Women in rural areas labour as wage-earners, farmers and business owners. They make up a large portion of the agricultural workforce. Their social and economic empowerment can have a powerful impact on productivity and agriculture-led growth. Women from local, indigenous, and tribal communities are frequently the keepers of traditional information that is essential for the survival, resilience, and culture of their communities. Their contributions are unique and vital



especially in the context of natural resources management, agriculture and forestry sectors that are critical for both mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of rural women in agricultural marketing. This is due to a number of factors, including the increasing participation of women in agricultural production, the growing demand for agricultural products, and the changing marketing landscape.

Despite their active participation in most of the agricultural activities, women have little access to sales proceeds as most of the marketing is done by the male members of the family. This is because of illiteracy and lack of knowledge of marketing. They have no representation in agricultural marketing committees. The female farmers in India have to face a double whammy situation when it comes to their positioning in the agricultural markets. This situation manifests from two assumptions, first, farming is predominantly a masculine profession, and second women can't be involved in direct agricultural roles but can only play supportive roles.

Rural women in India face significant challenges in agricultural marketing, including:

- **Market accessibility issues:** Rural women frequently lack enough market access. This is because rural areas lack basic infrastructure like roads and transportation. It might also be as a result of inadequate market opportunity knowledge.
- **Limited negotiating power:** Rural women frequently have little influence when negotiating prices. This is because they frequently only sell single items in tiny amounts. Additionally, they might not be aware of their seller's rights.
- **Discrimination:** Market discrimination against rural women is a possibility. This is a result of gender prejudices that hold women to be less capable in business than males.

Despite these challenges, rural women are playing an increasingly important role in agricultural marketing in India. They are becoming more involved in the production, processing, and marketing of agricultural products. They are also becoming more aware of their rights as sellers.

Impact of rural women's participation in agricultural marketing

The participation of rural women in agricultural marketing has a number of positive impacts. It can help to:

- Improve the lives of rural women and their families by providing them with more income and possibilities.
- Increase the demand for agricultural goods and create jobs to strengthen the rural economy.
- Give women more say in the production and marketing of agricultural products to raise their



quality.

- Give rural women a voice in the marketplace and raise their awareness of their rights to empower them.

The following are some strategies for helping rural Indian women participate in agricultural marketing:

- Upgrading market access: This can be accomplished by upgrading rural infrastructure, such as roads and transportation. It can also be accomplished by informing rural women about market opportunities.
- Empowering rural women: This can be accomplished by giving rural women with training in business skills such as bargaining and marketing. Raising awareness of prejudice and gender stereotypes is another way to accomplish this.
- Promoting women's organizations: Women's organizations can play an important role in assisting rural women with agricultural marketing. These organizations can offer women assistance, education, and training. They could also assist in promoting the market rights of rural women.

For rural development in India, rural women's role in agricultural selling is crucial. We can help rural women and their families live better lives by assisting them with agricultural marketing. Additionally, we may assist to India's general development by boosting the rural economy.

Here are some specific examples of rural women in India participating in agricultural marketing:

- Forming producer groups: Rural women are increasingly forming producer groups to market their agricultural products. These groups can help women to pool their resources, negotiate better prices, and access new markets.
- Using mobile technology: Mobile technology is being used by rural women to market their agricultural products. This technology can be used to connect with buyers, track market prices, and get information about market opportunities. Other digital social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp etc., which are easily accessible via mobile phones allows rural women to connect with buyers and sellers to market their products.
- Participating in government programs: Numerous initiatives from the Indian government assist rural women in agricultural marketing. These initiatives give women financial support, education, and training.



The future of agricultural marketing in India is bright. With the support of governments, businesses, and NGOs, rural women can play an even greater role in this sector. This will enhance the quality of life for rural women, their families, and the rural economy as a whole.

Collective action: Simply put, collective action is any voluntary action made by a group of people to further their shared interests. It refers both to the process by which voluntary institutions are created and maintained and to the groups that decide to act together.

It aims to provide evidence on women's participation in, and benefits from, collective action (CA) in agricultural markets, and on which strategies are effective in promoting and sustaining benefits for women smallholders, in order to influence the thinking and practice of development actors.

Women smallholder farmers have varied motivations and capacities to join groups that may help them to access or engage in agricultural markets. Their choices are influenced by individual circumstances, as well as by the broader living conditions of their families. They must have a surplus to sell. This depends on whether they have the resources and equipment to produce a surplus, and whether they can reach markets or traders can reach their communities. Many rural women, lacking the resources or capacities to produce, or the time to participate in additional activities, are unable to engage in collective marketing of agricultural produce. Women with more resources may prefer individual trading.

Patterns of CA differ between types of crop and production, regions, and communities: there need to be attractive market opportunities available to justify groups coming together. There also need to be opportunities of which women can take advantage. Some communities have stronger social ties and networks than others, such that there are fewer barriers to forming and joining organisations; networks also vary between men and women. In some communities, social attitudes make it difficult for women to participate in activities outside the home, or in mixed groups. External factors including government agencies, traders or companies, and NGOs are important catalysts for CA. The legal and policy framework surrounding co-operatives, associations, and enterprises defines membership criteria, permitted activities, etc., and so affects how farmers especially women can organise, gain formal recognition, and operate as economic actors.

Where women do participate, and CA groups function effectively, with women in leadership positions, this may lead to positive benefits or outcomes for group members such as access to training, agricultural inputs, and equipment, sales in new or more profitable markets, or cheaper access to loans and other services. There may also be less tangible benefits, in terms of strengthened



social support networks. However, there are also costs and trade-offs, such as demands on women's time and exposure to new risks.

Depending on how any profits from CA are distributed and invested, and on the degree to which women can maintain control of the resources acquired, women farmers may gain benefits from CA in terms of increased income, secured assets (e.g. savings to buy livestock, access to group land holding), or empowerment (greater self-confidence, recognition, decision-making influence in the household or community).

Some government initiatives for rural women in agricultural marketing in India:

Self Help Group Approach

The concept of the Group approach is to organize small farmers especially women farmers to collaborate to increase productivity as well as bargaining power. They can achieve productivity in acting jointly rather than individually and can help spread the risk of farming among a larger number and increase production and marketing opportunities. In India, several organizations are promoting market-led extension among women farmers through the formation of self-help groups (SHGs). The self-help group movement strives to empower rural farmers through their efforts to better utilize resources, access information, enhance savings, and also avail credit. Marketing is an important area of functioning of SHGs that helps farmers to realize reasonable returns from the produce minimize the transportation cost and improve the product value and marketability. Therefore, the market-driven extension initiatives carried out by SHGs are intended to increase the social and personal empowerment of rural farmers. Self-help groups are increasing rapidly in our country. Especially in rural India it works very well and shows a good effect on the economy and society. Women SHG members are more likely than nonmembers to participate to the same amount in production, grading, standardisation, packaging, and distribution operations (Tehra, 2014).

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana

'Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana' (MKSP) was introduced by the Ministry of Rural Development in 2011. The scheme, a sub-component of DAY–NRLM seeks to quickly integrate no less than one woman into the self-help group (SHG) organisation for every designated impoverished rural household. The main goal is to increase the involvement and efficiency of women in farming and associated industries in order to create chances for sustainable livelihoods. In order to help farmers gain greater market access, MKSP in 2018–19 concentrated on boosting ecological farming practises through organic certification and marketing. The MKSP has been instrumental in increasing the visibility of women in allied activities as an interest group where women SHG members are



trained to become Pashu Sakhi for improved rearing and management of goats. The activity resulted in the creation of weekly haat for the sale and purchase of animals, which especially benefited landless and single women.

Collective marketing

The continuity and success of collective marketing depend on decisive factors like learning the rules of the market, price information for various items, marketing channels, timeliness of product delivery to market, on-the-spot calculation of selling value, and price negotiation with the buyer (Landesa 2013). In Muzaffarpur, a group of female vegetable growers profit from collective marketing by avoiding middlemen and investing more money directly into their companies and families. In partnership with the JEEViKA programme of the Government of Bihar, Techno Serve has implemented the Women Economic Empowerment initiative with financing through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF). By openly utilising their aggregation advantage, the team has worked to build the all-female "Samarpan Jeevika Mahila Kisan Producer Company Limited" (SJMKPCL), a farmer producer organisation (FPO) made up of smaller producer groups. One of the main advantages of the intervention is on-time payment and cashless transactions. The project is helping smallholder producers achieve higher prices and direct market access by removing intermediaries and adopting best practices, including collective marketing, quality control, and transparency in weighing and pricing.

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is using the internet to help rural women in India market their products. SEWA has developed an online platform called SEWA Bharat, which allows women to sell their products to a wider audience.

Women become catalysts for change when they are given social and economic sway. Active involvement in decision-making empowers women both financially and socially and ensures their right to a life of dignity right over productive resources. In a developing nation like India, where agriculture is the mainstay, contributing 13.5% of GDP and employing 55% of the labour force, the contribution of women in agriculture cannot be disregarded. Female employees and agricultural labourers make up a sizable portion of the workforce, at 55.21 percent, according to the 2011 Census. M.S. Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist describes that "It was woman who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. While men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those from the point of view of food, fodder, fibre and fuel." Women played an important role in decision making in traditional agriculture.



Women participation rate in the agricultural sector in India is about 47 percent in tea plantations, 46.84 percent in cotton cultivation, 45.43 percent growing oil seeds and 39.13 percent in vegetable production. According to small-scale research done in the Indian Himalayas, a man usually works for 1212 hours on a hectare while a female could work for 3485 hours and a team of bullocks labour for 1064 hours (FAO, 1991). This demonstrates how crucial a role women play in agriculture. Of course, it differs from nation to nation. 50 percent of the food produced in Asia is produced by women. Additionally, women in Sub-Saharan Africa generate between 60% and 80% of the region's essential food supplies. India's 2011 Census indicates that, although other employees make up a large share of the workforce for men (47.20%), agricultural labourers make up a large portion of the workforce for women (55.21%).

The agricultural sector is the largest employer of women. They make up 32 percent of the total workforce in the Indian economy. Majority of the female workforce (84 percent) works in rural India (NSS, 2004-05). Women's participation in agriculture is growing relative to men in post liberalisation period.

Table-1 State Wise Women Participation in Agriculture and Non-Agricultural Activities

State	Female workers in Non-Agriculture (%)	Female workers in Non-Agricultural Activities (%)
Andhra Pradesh	73.44	26.56
Himachal Pradesh	82.47	17.53
Rajasthan	81.07	18.93
Manipur	55.59	44.41
Madhya Pradesh	79.45	20.55
Karnataka	61.11	38.89
Tamil Nadu	59.30	40.70
Maharashtra	74.53	25.47
Gujarat	57.12	42.88
Odisha	60.47	39.53
Punjab	24.51	75.49
Kerala	21.27	78.73
West Bengal	32.62	67.38

Source: Agricultural Statistics in India



Contribution of rural women in the marketing of agriculture in the future

Rural women's involvement in the marketing of agricultural products has a promising future. With the support of governments, businesses, and NGOs, rural women can play an even greater role in this sector. This will help to:

- Further improve their lives and also their families.
- Maintain economic growth in rural areas.
- Boost the production of agricultural commodities' grade.
- Increase their influence in making decisions about agricultural resources, management, productivity, and revenue.
- Encourage them to work together to develop leased property and take independent roles as farm managers.

Conclusion

The development of the rural economy depends on the participation of the female of the rural areas in agricultural marketing that are essential to India's agricultural industry. But there are a lot of obstacles that women must overcome in this industry, such as discrimination, limited market access, and weak negotiating power. Several actions have been done, such as the creation of self-help groups, the promotion of mobile technologies, and the provision of government programs, to assist rural women in agricultural marketing. These programs have improved women's awareness of their rights, their ability to bargain, and their access to marketplaces. Rural women's involvement in agricultural marketing has a promising future. Rural women may contribute even more to this area with the help of governments, companies, and NGOs. This will enhance the quality of life for rural women, their families, and the rural economy as a whole.

References

- Anderson, C. L., Reynolds, T. W., Biscaye, P., Patwardhan, V. and Schmidt, C. 2020. Economic Benefits of Empowering Women in Agriculture: Assumptions and Evidence. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 57(2): 193-208.
- Anderson, C. L., Reynolds, T. W., Biscaye, P., Patwardhan, V., & Schmidt, C. (2021). Economic benefits of empowering women in agriculture: Assumptions and evidence. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 57(2), 193-208.
- Baden, S., and C. Pionetti. 2011. Women's collective action in agricultural markets. Synthesis of preliminary findings from Ethiopia, Mali, and Tanzania. Oxfam, UK: Oxford.
- Dangi, P., Arun, And Malik, J. S. 2021. Women farmers and market linkage through group approach. In book: Kumari, V., Valamannavar, S., Mandapaka, R. T. and Junuthula, S. Em (Powering Farm Women: Powering Agriculture (E-book). Hyderabad: National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad, India, pp-57-62.



- Das, L. 2015. Work Participation of Women in Agriculture in Odisha. *IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 20(7): 66-78.
- Das, S., Kumar, B. V., Joshi, A. T., Deshmanya, J. B. and Lokesh, G. B. 2019. The Role of Women in Production and Marketing of Agricultural Products. *International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology*, 7(viii): 411-415.
- Gender Justice. 2018. Move over 'Sons of the soil': Why you need to know the female farmers that are revolutionizing agriculture in India. [Women Empowerment - Female Farmers are Revolutionizing Agriculture in India | Oxfam India](#).
- Ghosh, R. 2021. The role of rural women farmer on the economic development of India. Thesis for: Bsc. (HON) Economics, Department of Economics, Xavier University Bhubaneswar. DOI:[10.13140/RG.2.2.12710.45123](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12710.45123).
<https://www.ficciflo.com/research-publication/flo-report-women-participation-indian-agriculture-2019-2020/>
- International Labour organization. 2018. Rural women at work: Bridging the gap. <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/equality-anddiscrimination/publications>
- Kakati, B. K. 2013. Livelihood and its interrelationship with indigenous knowledge and gender role among tribal communities. *TUI - A Journal on Tribal Life and Culture*, XVI(2): 28-39.
- Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana. 2017. <https://www.undp.org/india/publications/mahila-kisan-sashaktikaran-pariyojana>.
- Patil, B. and Babus, V. S. 2018. Role of women in agriculture. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 4(12): 109-114.
- Pattanayak, U. and Mallick, M. 2016. Agriculture and Women Empowerment: The Challenges and Perspectives. In book: Rural Health, Women Empowerment and Agriculture: Issues and Challenges, New Delhi Publishers, pp-1-10.
- Rani, A. 2021. Women's Participation in Agricultural Activities: A Study of Haryana, India. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Economics and Business Law*, 10(3): 57-77.
- Shinogi, K.C., Krishnankutty, J. and Kaleel, F. M. H. 2013. Market-led extension for empowerment of farmers. *Agriculture Update*, 8(1 & 2): 61-63.
- Sunitha, N. H., Naik, C. and Hanumanthappa, D. 2018. Role of farm women in Indian agriculture. *International Journal of Plant Sciences*, 13(2): 265-270.
- Sylvia, E. 2021. Building systems to improve and reward higher-quality agricultural products. J-PAL, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab
- TechnoServe. 2017. For Women Farmers in India, Collective Marketing Means Individual Gains. (<https://www.technoserve.org/blog/collective-marketing-individual-gains/>)
- Tehra, R. V. (2014). An Empirical Case Study of Women Self Help Group (SHG) functioning in Nanded City. *Multi Disciplinary Edu Global Quest (Quarterly)*, 3(4).