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Exploring the role of women in rice cultivation in Imphal west district, Manipur

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Abstract

Women play an indispensable role in rice cultivation, contributing significantly to various stages of the farming process. In many rural communities, women are the backbone of agricultural labor, and rice cultivation is no exception. From the early stages of preparing the fields to the final post-harvest activities, women handle many of the essential tasks that ensure a successful crop. This study examines the role of farm women in rice cultivation in Lamsang sub-division, Imphal West district, Manipur. Using simple random sampling, 120 women were interviewed to assess their physical involvement in various farming activities. Most participants were middle-aged (36-55), educated up to high school, and managed small landholdings (below 1-hectare) with moderate farming experience (10-20 years). Women were actively engaged in key tasks such as seed selection, sowing, weeding, harvesting, and post-harvest operations, while their involvement was lower in field preparation, fertilizer application, and plant protection. The findings highlight the vital contribution of women in rice farming and the need for greater support and recognition.

Keywords: Women, socio-economic, participation

Introduction

In India, agriculture remains a primary source of livelihood for a majority of the rural population, with women contributing substantially to both farm and non-farm activities. They are involved in every stage of agricultural production, including planting, harvesting, processing, and marketing of crops. Women involvement in agriculture is complex and diverse unlike their male counterpart, women are involved in a wide range of activities in agriculture as well as at home, as wives -in their personal lives with their husbands; as mothers -their responsibilities to take care of their children and prepare food for the family.

The extent of women involvement in agriculture varies greatly from region to region, even within the region their wide variation. In Manipur, women are also extensively involved in agricultural activities from being managers to landless laborers. They have been primary seed keepers, processors and are experts and producer of food. Manipur is essentially an agriculture state about 22 per cent of the population are engaged in agriculture. Women contribute productive work force in the economy of Manipur and play a key role in agricultural development, contribution in food security, horticulture, processing, nutrition, sericulture and other allied sectors. Comprising the majority of agriculture laborers, women have been putting in labor not only in terms of physical output but also in terms of quality and efficiency. Their involvement is in all aspect of agriculture operation, from crop selection, to land preparation, to seed selection, planting, weeding, pest control, harvesting, crop storage, handling and marketing. The average female workforce's contribution in Manipur is 43.35%. The

average percentage of female cultivators in Manipur is 44.43%. Women dominate the markets in the rural and urban areas, one of the best examples of this is the women's market in the heart of Imphal city popularly known as "Ema Keithel". Singha (2022) ^[4].

Manipur's unique climatic condition and varied topography, from fertile valley to hilly regions make it well suited for growing a diverse array of rice varieties including aromatic and glutinous types. Traditional farming methods combined with modern technique. Rice cultivation has traditionally been in women domain of knowledge in the North East India. Women-labor plays a significant role in enhancing overall productivity in rice cultivation, as they are involved at every stage of production, starting from nursery development to the final cultivation. Women's participation in rice cultivation in Manipur is indispensable however they face challenges such as limited access to agricultural input, land ownership, credit facilities

Objective of the study

- To study the socio-economic profile of women respondents.
- To examine the extent of participation of women respondents in rice cultivation.

Materials and methods

The study was conducted in the Imphal West district of Manipur to examine the role of women in rice cultivation. Lamsang Sub-division was selected purposefully for the study and four villages were selected randomly in the sub-

division viz. Awang wabagai, Awang potshangbam khullen, Lairenkabi, phayeng. A sample size of 120 was drawn from the pre-selected villages randomly with equal number of respondent from each villages. The respondents were interviewed personally using well pre-tested structured

interview schedule. The data collected were converted to three-point score (Likert Scale), tabulated and analysed.

Results and Discussion

Socio economic characteristics of the respondents

Table 1: Characteristics of the respondents, (N=120)

Sl. No.	Attributes	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age	Young (below 35)	37	30.83
		Middle age (36-55)	57	47.50
		Middle age (36-55)	26	21.67
2	Education	Illiterate	17	14.17
		Can read only	0	0.00
		Can read and write	23	19.16
		Middle school	17	14.17
		High school (up to class X)	32	26.67
		Higher secondary (up to class XII)	16	13.33
		Graduate and above	15	12.50
3	House type	Hut	0	0.00
		Kaccha	45	37.50
		Mixed	54	45.00
		Pucca	21	17.50
4	Land holding	Low (below 1 hectare)	95	79.17
		Medium (1-2 hectare)	21	17.50
		High (more than 2 hectare)	4	3.33
5	Income	Low (below 80000)	42	35.00
		Medium (80000-140000)	52	43.33
		High (above 140000)	26	21.67
6	Extension contacts	Low	48	40.00
		Medium	55	45.80
		High	17	14.20
7	Mass media exposure	Low	40	33.33
		Medium	51	42.50
		High	29	24.17
8	Livestock possession	Low	51	42.50
		Medium	36	30.00
		High	33	27.50
9	Source of agriculture information	Low	41	34.17
		Medium	54	45.00
		High	25	20.83
10	Farming experience	Low	44	36.67
		Medium	55	45.83
		High	21	17.50

The data presented in Table 1, indicated that the majority of respondents (47.50%) belong to the middle age group (36–55 years), while 30.83% are young (below 35 years), and 21.67% are above 55 years. In terms of education, a significant portion has studied up to high school (26.67%), while 19.16% can read and write, 14.17% attended middle school, 14.17% are illiterate and 13.33% have completed higher secondary education. Notably, 12.50% are graduates and above. Most respondents (37.50%) reside in kaccha houses, followed by mixed (27.50%) and pucca houses (17.50%), with no respondents living in huts. A large majority (79.17%) have low land holdings (below 1 hectare), 17.50% having medium land holding (1-2 hectares), while only 3.33% possess high land holdings (above 2 hectares). In terms of income, 43.33% fall under the medium-income category (₹80,000–₹1,40,000), followed by 35% in the low-income bracket (below ₹80,000) and only 21.67% in above ₹140000. Extension

contact levels are largely medium (45.80%), followed by low (40%) and 14.20% in high category. Mass media exposure is distributed across medium level (42.50%), followed by low level (33.33%) and high (24.17%) categories. It reveals that majority of the respondents has low livestock possession group (42.50%) followed by medium livestock possession group (30.00%) and high livestock possession group (27.50%) respectively. Regarding the source of agricultural information, 45% have medium sources, while 34.17% and 20.83% depend on low and high sources. Farming experience varies, with 36.67% having low experience, 45.83% medium, and 17.50% high experience. These characteristics collectively suggest a population with moderate education, medium income, and varying levels of farming experience and information access, which are crucial for understanding their engagement in agricultural activities.

Extent of participation of women respondents in rice cultivation

Table 2: Distribution of women respondents in rice cultivation

Sl. No.	Practice	Extent of participation					
		Individual (3)		Joint (2)		Other (1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Field preparation	0	0	33	27.50	87	72.50
2	Selection of seed	30	25.00	85	70.83	5	4.17
3	Seed treatment	37	30.83	83	69.17	0	0
4	Sowing	0	0	93	77.50	27	22.50
5	Transplanting	0	0	80	66.67	40	33.33
6	Manure and fertilizer application	0	0	0	0	120	100
7	Weeding	0	0	94	78.33	26	21.67
8	Irrigation	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	Plant protection measures	0	0	0	0	77	64.17
10	Harvesting	0	0	71	59.17	49	40.83
11	Threshing	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	Winnowing	0	0	0	0	0	0
13	Post Harvest	14	11.67	106	88.33	0	0
14	Transportation	0	0	63	52.50	57	47.50

F: Frequency, %: Percentage

The above table 2 reveals that women play a crucial role in the agricultural process, particularly in joint participation with other family members or laborers, while their individual involvement is limited to select activities. For instance, in the initial stage of seed selection, a significant proportion of women (70.83%) participated jointly, while 25% undertook the task individually. Similarly, during seed treatment, 30.83% of the women were involved individually, and 69.17% participated jointly. In field preparation, however, none of the women participated individually; 27.5% took part jointly, while the majority (72.5%) reported that the task was performed by others. This trend is even more pronounced in manure and fertilizer application, where 100% of the responses indicated that this activity was carried out entirely by others. Sowing and transplanting are two major operations where women's joint participation is notably high, at 77.5% and 66.67% respectively. Weeding is another activity where women showed substantial engagement, with 78.33% participating jointly and 21.67% relying on others, indicating that this task is commonly performed by women, often in collaboration. Plant protection measures, an area requiring technical knowledge and chemical handling, showed no individual or joint participation from women, with 64.17% indicating that the work is done by others. Harvesting and post-harvest processes showed strong female involvement, especially in joint participation. About 59.17% of women were jointly involved in harvesting, while 40.83% indicated the task was performed by others. Post-harvest activities showed a high level of joint participation (88.33%), and 11.67% of women engaged in it individually. Transportation saw 52.5% of women participating jointly, while 47.5% relied on others. The findings of the result are similar to the findings of (Rammei *et al.*, 2015 and Saikia 2018) [2, 3].

Table 3: Overall extent of participation of women respondents scores in rice cultivation practice

Respondents			
Sl. No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Low	19	15.83
2	Medium	65	54.17
3	High	36	30.00
Total		120	100

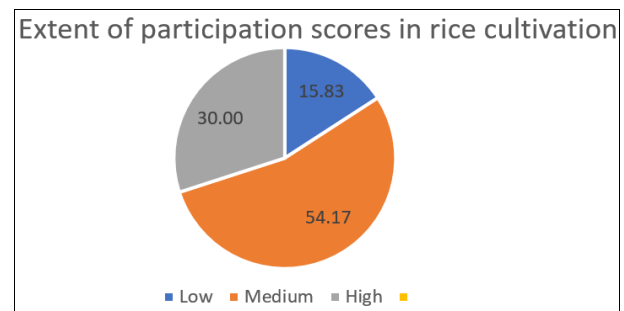


Fig 1: Graphical representation of respondents participation in rice cultivation

Conclusion

The women respondents in the study exhibit significant participation in most of the activities of rice cultivation (seed selection, seed treatment, sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting) excluding few practices such as field preparation, manure and fertilizer application and plant protection measures. Women perform a large portion of the manual labor, such as planting, weeding, and harvesting, yet this work is often seen as an extension of their domestic duties rather than professional agricultural labor. Their efforts are crucial, but they're rarely acknowledged in official statistics or agricultural policies. They often participate in informal networks to share information and resources, helping to overcome some of the challenges they face. In conclusion, women in farming are central to rice cultivation, serving as the foundation of both their household economy and the broader community. These insights underscore the need for targeted interventions and training programs to enhance women's capacity and agency in all aspects of rice cultivation.

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