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A study on empowerment level of women engaged in value-added product's sector: Evidence from Valanadu sustainable agriculture producer company private limited, Mayiladuthurai

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Abstract

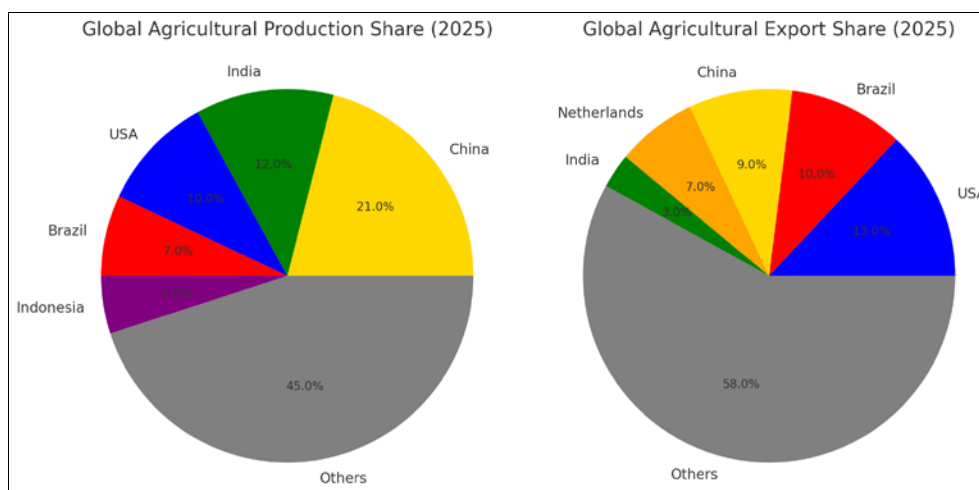
Value-added products play a critical role in empowering women in rural economies (FAO, 2021). In India, women-owned 39% of MSMEs, which focus on value-added sectors like food processing, textiles, and handicrafts (Ministry of MSME, 2024). This study was undertaken to assess the level of empowerment among women in Valanadu sustainable agriculture producer company private limited in Mayiladuthurai district who involved in value addition activities. Totally, 100 women were selected using purposive multistage random sampling to assess key socio-economic and institutional variables such as education, income, training, access to credit, marketing skills, family support, and membership in self-help groups and cooperatives and so on as predictor variables. A well-structured interview schedule is circulated and data were gathered through kobotoolbox app to assess the empowerment level through categorical scoring and major constraints encountered by them via qualitative thematic analysis. The sampling was carried out systematically and data were processed and assessed statistically. The findings are expected to reveal critical factors influencing women's empowerment and provide practical recommendations to enhance their participation and contribution to sustainable rural development.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Value-Added Product and Rural development

Introduction

Value-added products are goods that have been processed, enhanced, or modified to increase their economic value and consumer appeal (FAO, 2021). Value added products are the commodities which undergoes certain changes in order to increase its shelf life to provide better monetary income. Women plays a significant role in this value-added product's sector. Globally, China leads global value-added production with a share of 31.63%, followed by the United States (15.9%), Japan (6.5%), Germany (4.8%), and India (2.9%), according to the World Population Review (2025) report indicating that India is also one of the top five contributor in terms of value-added product's sector. The share of processed food exports increased to 23.4% in 2022-23, up from 14.9% in 2017-18 (Economic Survey of India, 2023-24) This shift highlights the country's increasing focus on value addition in the agricultural food sector, moving beyond raw produce to market-ready products that serves to global demand. India is the 2nd largest agricultural

producer (12%) but exports only (3%) due to low value addition (WTO Global Agricultural Trade Report 2025, FAO Global Agricultural Outlook 2025, USDA Foreign Agricultural Service 2025, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India 2025). This mismatch shows how much potential India has yet to unlock in agro-processing sector. It also shows the alarming need to improve value addition strategies if the country aims to boost its presence in the global agricultural export market. So in order to bridge this gap, women's participation in value-added product's sector is considered as most important for country's growth. Ensuring equal workforce participation in India's agro-based value-added sector holds more economic potential. According to IMF estimates cited by the Financial Times (2024), achieving gender parity in this sector could boost India's GDP by as much as 30%, shedding light on the role of inclusive growth in national development.



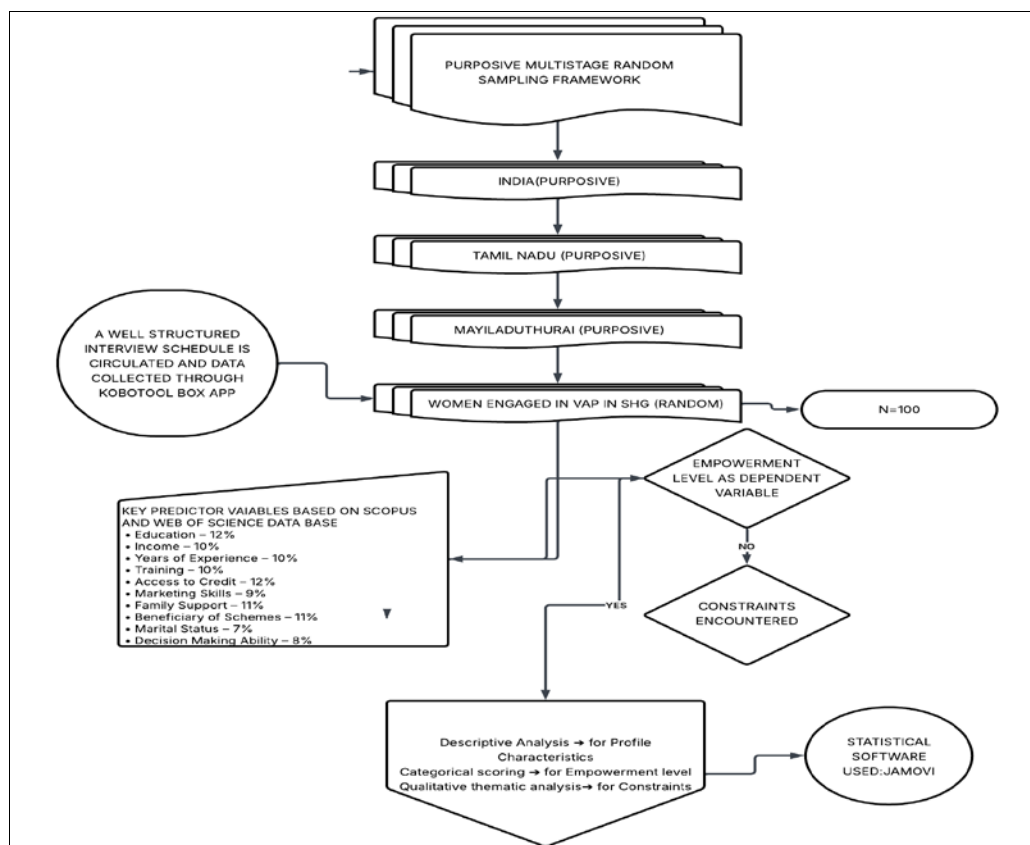
Research Methodology

This study employed a purposive multistage random sampling framework to assess the empowerment levels of women associated with Valanadu Sustainable Agriculture Producer Company Pvt. Ltd. in Mayiladuthurai district, Tamil Nadu.

Tamil Nadu was selected purposively for its strong institutional support for women-led agricultural initiatives, and Mayiladuthurai district was chosen due to its active Self Help Groups (SHGs) and functional women-centric Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs).

At the organizational level, Valanadu FPO was identified as a model for inclusive agribusiness. From this organization, 100 women engaged in agricultural activities through SHGs were randomly selected based on feasibility and existing literature guidelines. The study focused on women's empowerment as the dependent variable, with ten predictor

variables drawn from Scopus and Web of Science literature: Education (12%), Income (10%), Experience (10%), Training (10%), Access to Credit (12%), Marketing Skills (9%), Family Support (11%), Scheme Beneficiaries (11%), Marital Status (7%), and Decision-Making Ability (8%). Data were collected using a pre-tested interview schedule and recorded via the KoboToolbox mobile application to ensure efficient field-level data capture. Analysis was conducted using Jamovi software. Descriptive statistics were used to understand respondent profiles, empowerment was assessed using categorical scoring, and qualitative thematic analysis was applied to open-ended responses to identify major constraints. This mixed-method approach provided both statistical insight and contextual depth, offering a comprehensive understanding of women's empowerment in the rural agribusiness setting.



Findings and Discussions

The study found that 50% of the women had completed secondary education, but only 10% had higher education, suggesting a need to improve access to advanced learning. Most participants (90%) were married, which may influence autonomy but often brings supportive family structures. All women received training, indicating strong outreach of skill development initiatives. However, only 60% had access to credit, and 80% had access to marketing—highlighting that a significant portion still faces barriers in financial and market linkages. While 90% received family support, only 40% benefited from government schemes, pointing to gaps in awareness or access. Decision-making power was evenly split, with half reporting autonomy and half lacking it. The average annual income was ₹66,000, showing wide financial variability, and the average experience was 9.9 years, reflecting sustained engagement in value-added activities.

Constraints encountered

Overall, the respondents expressed satisfaction with the support received from Valanadu Sustainable Agriculture Producer Company Pvt. Ltd., especially in areas such as training, marketing access, and institutional guidance. Most women acknowledged that their association with the FPO had positively contributed to their entrepreneurial journey and empowerment. The structured support system, along with capacity-building efforts, has created a strong foundation for business development. However, some areas still require improvement. A commonly reported concern was the lack of adequate storage facilities, which leads to post-harvest losses and limits their ability to store and sell products at better prices. Additionally, while access to credit has improved for many, a notable proportion of women still face challenges in securing timely and sufficient financial support, either due to procedural barriers or limited awareness of financial schemes. These gaps, though relatively smaller compared to other aspects, need focused attention to ensure comprehensive and sustainable empowerment.

Conclusion

Despite the availability of ample opportunities through the Valanadu Sustainable Agriculture Producer Company Pvt. Ltd., many respondents still perceive it as a secondary source of support. To ensure long-term empowerment and sustainable economic growth, it is essential to shift this perception.

This can be achieved through enhanced awareness campaigns, targeted capacity-building initiatives, and consistent institutional support, encouraging women to view the FPO as a primary driver of their economic and social advancement and value addition as primary source of income.

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