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### Rural women: Empowerment for sustainable development

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#### Abstract

Women play a vital role in the sustainable development of a nation. Because we know that basic unit of a nation is family. The women are the backbone of the society but worldwide her hard work has mostly been unpaid. Achieving sustainable development means not only reconciling economic and environmental sustainability, but also prioritizing social sustainability. Poverty and exclusion increase the amount and intensity of unpaid care work, as a result of limited access to public services, inadequate infrastructure, the lack of resources to pay for care services and time-saving technology. Unpaid care work is also intensified in contexts of economic crisis, health crises, environmental degradation, natural disasters and inadequate infrastructure and services. A just and sustainable society is one that recognizes unpaid care work by making it visible through statistics and by ensuring that policies are in place to reduce its drudgery, through appropriate public investments in infrastructure and social services, and to redistribute it between women and men within households, and between households and society more broadly. Vocational trainings are being conducted, to impart skills to undertake different vocations. In extension activities the women are now the center point and activities are being planned keeping her in view. Her enlightenment will change the face of rural India. Providing more training opportunities to women will give them ownership of assets like land, access to credit and other inputs, adoption of women-friendly technologies, involving them in planning and decision making at all labels can foster sustainable development of the society.

**Keywords:** Sustainable, environment, vocations, women-friendly technologies

#### Introduction

Women play vital role in the sustainable development of a nation. Because we know that basic unit of a nation is family. Other higher levels are society and country. If we think about families, mothers are the backbone of every family. In this situation family literacy, education and economical self-sufficiency as much important. Women act as the agents who transfer the cultural heritage of nation, various values in society and traditional knowledge etc. Sustainable development of a country determines poverty eradication and environmental conservation. Gender equality is a major fact to get sustainable development. Developed countries are providing equal opportunities and platform for both genders and ensuring women participation in national progress. India also needs to concentrate more and more to empower women by means of educationally and financially.

#### Role of women in Indian Agriculture

In Indian agriculture women perform four different types of roles. She works as worker (a source of power), as operator (a controller), as manager (a farmer), as entrepreneur (a business person).

#### Technology and gender issues

The improved technology package has been developed in the country for agriculture and allied sector but these have selectively been adopted mainly by male farmers. The female farmers remained passive spectator and continued to

adopt traditional practices. The reasons may vary from technological to marketing and social barriers. These issues may be grouped into: Technological Barrier, Passive attitude towards modernization, Marketing system, Training and skill, Credit facilities, Social barrier.

#### Empowerment

This means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one power. Following are the key points, which will help in empowering the rural women. Skill empowerment, Technology development for women, Creation of self-help groups, Projection of contribution of women by collecting and analyzing data, providing Financial Powers.

#### Importance and involvement of women in sustainable development

Now days our country is using male resources as directly and mostly female human resource as indirectly. If we use these female human resources also as a direct manner easily our country can become developed. If women have to contribute in national development first we need to empower them through educationally and economically. Education and Economically self-sufficiency are the two keys for the empowerment of the women.

#### Meaning of sustainable development

Sustainable development is the development that meets the

needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The ultimate aim is – conservation of earth and different types of species. Various systems are involving in the development such as ecological, social, cultural, political etc. Within the society, women have important roles to perform. The roles of women are primarily recognized in the social, political, economic, cultural and religious spheres. In these spheres, when they are to possess efficient skills and abilities, so they are able to render their participation in an effectual manner.

**Rural women are agents of transformative change**

Women have a better understanding of the nutritional and cultural needs of their family and community. They are therefore better positioned to identify the challenges and solutions needed to improve their lives and those of their families and communities in rural areas. If women in rural areas had the same access to agricultural assets, education and markets as men, it could result in an increase in agricultural production and a reduction of the number of hungry people. This is because women reinvest up to 90% of their earnings back into their households – an investment in nutrition, food, healthcare, school, and income-generating activities for their family, which helps to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Promoting the political participation and representation of rural women in decision-making would significantly contribute to reducing poverty, and strengthening food security and climate resilience.

**Initiative of ICAR-CIWA towards Sustainability**

The main mandate of ICAR –Central Institute for Women in Agriculture is to carry out research on gender issues in agriculture and allied fields.

**Research Methodology**

The present study was conducted in Puri, Khorda, Cuttack, Jagatsingpur districts of Odisha state of India. Total 10 villages Kunjar, Mahura, Gadasanput, Nuagaon, Sankilo, Tentalapur, Dubuduba, Sribanapur, Chitra, Sagada from Seven Blocks were randomly selected purposively for study. A total 300 respondents were selected randomly from 10 selected villages. Quantitative and qualitative data were generated through personal interview schedule along with participatory observation, interaction and discussion with key informants, AWWs, school teachers, Asha workers, housewives. Data thus generated were analyzed by calculating simple frequencies, percentages, means etc. along with descriptive analysis.

**Results and Discussion**

It is imperative to know the situational context of farm women; hence socio-economic profile of farm women was studied. It is noted that 60 percent farm women belong to 36 -50 years age group, however 18 percent respondent belonged to 18- 35 years age group. The education level of 42.7 percent farm women was in primary school level and only 19.3 percent up to higher secondary. It is also noted that 71.3 percent respondent had up to 1hectare land i.e., in marginal group and most of them belonged to nuclear family (68.7%). Majority of the farm families belong to small size category i.e., 49.75%.

Agriculture is the main occupation of the farm families, i.e., 77.7% of the respondents belong to this category. In context to family income, 50 percentage of the respondent earn between 50,000 to 1 lakh rupees annually.

In present context regarding the extension contact, it is revealed that Anganwadi worker secured 92.8 score (rank I) followed by Agri scientist who secured 41.3 of total score (rank II). As per the views of the respondents ANM and NGO personnel have secured 37 and 33.4 respectively. In context to mass media, mobile Radio, Television, Mobile, Internet/ Social Media, Kisan Call Center, News paper play pivotal role in dissemination of nutritional related information among the common people. However, it becomes imperative to know the roles of these Media in nutrition awareness creation among the farm women. It is noted that now a day’s mobile contributed mostly on creation of nutritional awareness among the farm women and it was ranked I followed by television (rank-II), Internet/ Social Media (rank III) and news paper (rank-IV).

For creating nutritional awareness among the farm women the ICAR –CIWA took the initiatives to introduce various technologies for enhancing the nutritional status and income generation. Initially nutritional garden, mushroom cultivation, backyard poultry, fishery introduced in their backyard. The interventions were planned such that the nutritional needs of the target families are met round the year. The interventions carried out as per the need, resources availability and willingness of the farm families. For strengthening the knowledge, skill of the farm women, regular training, interaction, home visits conducted in the grass root level.

The level of women empowerment studied by considering some of the indicators like social indicator, Economical indicators, Psychological indicators, Technological indicators. For this a structured questionnaires developed by taking some of the sub indicators. For measuring the level of empowerment of rural women the data was collected.

**Table 1:** Indicators - Social indicators (n = 300)

Sl. No.	Sub- Indicators	Most relevant	%	Relevant	%	Irrelevant	%
1	Family support	252	84.0	48	16.0	-	0
2	Membership in a group or organization	125	41.66	175	58.33	-	0
3	Community participation	197	65.66	68	22.66	35	11.66
4	Exposure to social media	173	57.66	105	35.00	22	7.33
5	Enhanced consumption pattern	225	75.0	75	25.0	-	0
6	Utilization of leisure time	95	31.66	179	59.66	26	8.66

It is revealed that as per the perception of rural women Family support is the most (84%) relevant components where as utilization of leisure time is the least (31.6%) relevant in the category of social indicators for

empowerment purpose. Nayak P., Mahanta B (2012) <sup>[1]</sup> revealed empowering women can be defined as promoting women’s feelings of self-esteem, their ability to determine their own choices, and

their right to influence social change for themselves and others. Priyadharshini A., Thiyagarajan R., Kumar V., Radhu T. (2016)<sup>[2]</sup> Empowering women entails giving them more authority and control over their own life. The

advancement of women’s status in politics, society, economy, and health is essential in and of itself. Furthermore, it is crucial for achieving sustainable development.

**Table 2:** Indicators- Economical indicators (n = 300)

Sl. No.	Indicators	Most relevant	%	Relevant	%	Irrelevant	%
1	Income generation	295	98.33	5	1.66	-	0
2	Employment generation	300	100.0	-	0	-	0
3	Control over use of income	120	40.0	175	58.33	5	1.66
4	Market linkage	162	54.0	105	35.00	33	11.0
5	Credit facility	112	37.33	98	32.66	90	30.0
6	Opening of Bank Account	205	68.33	80	26.66	15	5.0

While interpreting economic indicators it is found that income generation is the most (98.33%) relevant sub-indicators for empowerment.

Economic empowerment is the enhanced ability of poor women (and men) to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from growth (Kabeer 2012)<sup>[3]</sup>.

**Table 3:** Indicators- Psychological indicators (n = 300)

Sl. No.	Sub - Indicators	Most relevant	%	Relevant	%	Irrelevant	%
1	Self- confidence	201	67.0	87	29.0	12	4.0
2	Speaking in public	245	81.66	55	18.33	-	0
3	Decision making ability	187	62.33	101	33.62	12	4.0
4	Achievement motivation	56	18.66	167	55.66	77	25.66
5	Attitude change	213	71.0	87	29.0	-	0
6	Risk taking ability	193	64.33	100	33.33	7	2.33
7	Recreational activity (stress relaxation)	110	36.66	175	58.33	15	5.0

Besides economic indicators psychological indicators is also an important sector to be considered for measuring the empowerment. The data revealed that the farm women preserved that speaking in public is most relevant element (81.66%) in the sub-indicators categories under the psychological indicators.

(Zimmerman, 1995; Thani and Mokhtarian, 2012; Manuere and Phiri, 2018)<sup>[4, 5, 6]</sup>. In their study stated that the empowerment of women is a multidimensional process, which occurs within sociological, psychological, and economic contexts at various levels, i.e., individual, group, and community levels

**Table 4:** Indicators- Technological indicators (n = 300)

Sl. No.	Sub - Indicators	Most relevant	%	Relevant	%	Irrelevant	%
1	Level of knowledge	93	31.0	165	55.0	42	14.0
2	Level of skill expertise	176	58.66	84	28.0	40	13.33
3	Drudgery alleviation	74	24.66	142	47.33	84	28.0
4	Availability of technology	98	32.66	130	43.33	72	24.0
5	Adoption of improved technology	234	78.0	60	20.0	6	2.0

Though there are modern technologies available in the market but adoption level of the women in rural area is not up to the mark due to several factors like market linkage, credit facilities, lack of knowledge, social barrier, reluctant for adopting modern technology. From the data as per the perception of rural women the adoption of improved technology in day to day life is the most relevant for the women empowerment. Technology has empowered women to make choices and shape their own lives in a move toward gender equality (Grabe, 2011)<sup>[7]</sup>. “Technology” refers to digital technologies needing a source of power, such as mobile devices, laptops, and desktop computers (Crompton, 2014)<sup>[8]</sup>.

change the existing position of women and achieve gender equality, which will have a positive spillover effect on the sustainable development of the country. Women empowerment and economic development is closely related. Female economic power also enhances the wealth and well being of a nation. By ensuring women empowerment we not only promote gender equality (SDG-5) but contribute to other goals like- No poverty (SDG-1) good health and well-being (SDG-3), decent work and economic growth(SDG-8), zero hunger (SDG-2) by improving food security. Political empowerment is a key driver for achieving SDG- 16 (peace, justice and strong institution).

**Conclusion**

This paper concludes that attaining development among all the pillars of sustainable development is unthinkable without empowering women and obtaining gender equality, thereby using the entire potential of the country. Thus, this paper suggests that the government needs to work hard to

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