

# Women in Agriculture

The policy brief provides insights on women working in the agriculture sector. It highlights the challenges faced by them and the policy provisions for their welfare. The brief also illustrates cases where the said provisions have been successfully implemented.

## Introduction

The Women Farmer’s Entitlement Bill, 2011 highlighted that while women constitute more than 60% of the workforce in agriculture, their entitlements are often neglected. In fact, the Census of India does not define the term ‘farmer’. It classifies women in agriculture as ‘cultivators’ or ‘labourers’. A woman cultivator is engaged in cultivation of land owned or held from government/ private person / institutions for payment in money, kind or share. A woman labourer is someone who works on another person’s land for wages. While women cultivators have right of lease or contract over land, a labourer has no such right. 65% of female workers are engaged in agriculture and the majority are labourers. Furthermore, while number of women cultivators has decreased over the years, the number of women labourers has increased. This implies increase in vulnerability of women in agriculture.

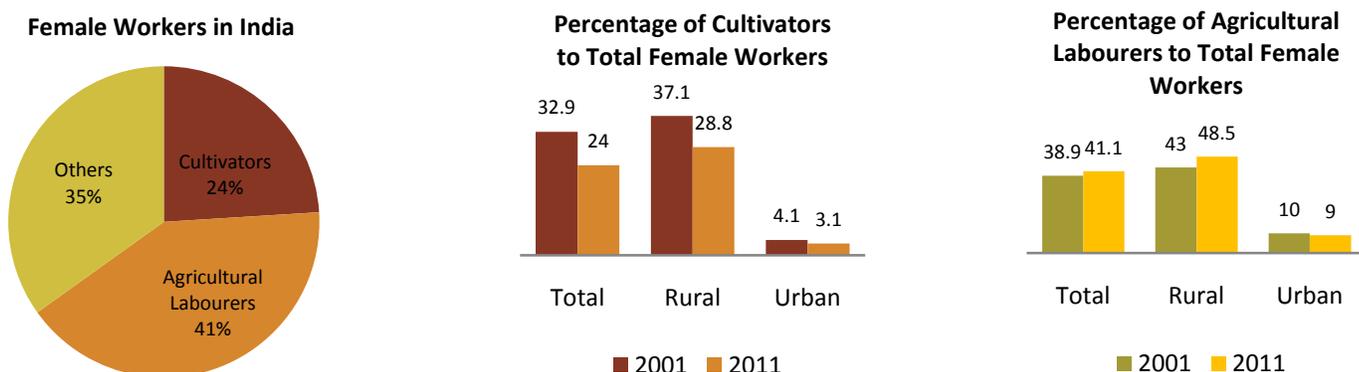


Figure 1: Women cultivators and labourers in India

## Challenges faced by women in agriculture

While women play a significant role in agriculture, they have to face a progressive set of challenges. These range from access to resources to land ownership. Below outlined are a few major issues:

- The *State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11* argues that there is a productivity gap between men and women farmers because of different levels of access to productive resources and assets. For example, in rural

India, **inadequate banking facilities** and **lack of gender neutral financial markets** restrict the access to capital for women. 21% bank accounts in commercial banks belong to females. The share (in terms of amounts deposited) of females in total deposited amount is **10.3%**. Women also lack access to sufficient market information about prices, inputs and competitors, as well as support services they can leverage. According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20%-30%. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4%.

- Absence of land ownership also contributes to the poor economic status and lack of financial independence. According to Food and Agriculture Organization data, **only 9 per cent of rural Indian women own land**. Lack of entitlement to land (and other assets) is a severe impediment to efficiency in agriculture for women cultivators because in the absence of title women cannot get credit or be entitled to irrigation and other inputs
- Work-related wage discrimination is prevalent in agricultural activities undertaken by men and women in rural India. On an average, **women's wage rates are 75% of men's wage rates**. Lower wages than their men counterparts undermines the effort put in by women workers and can even act as a deterrent for women seeking employment where a woman might ultimately decide it being more beneficial to remain at home and not seek employment. Below are the comparative salaries for each gender, separated by task.

Activity	Ploughing	Sowing	Harvesting	Horticulture Workers	Animal Husbandry Workers
<b>Men</b>	Rs. 259	Rs. 219.5	Rs. 217.9	Rs. 215	Rs. 178.8
<b>Women</b>	Rs. 185.4	Rs. 179.7	Rs. 182.4	Rs. 152.2	Rs. 133.8

Fig 2 : Agricultural Wages

While challenges remain, there are several policy initiatives being taken to tackle the same. One of these is the *Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojan*, being implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development. Given below are the details of the scheme.

## Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)

MKSP was launched in 2011 as a sub-component of National Rural Livelihoods to improve the present status of women in agriculture and provide opportunities to women farmers for their empowerment. The scheme aims at providing extension services and production assets to women farmers. It also targets improvements in skills and capabilities of women in agriculture to support farm and non-farm based activities.

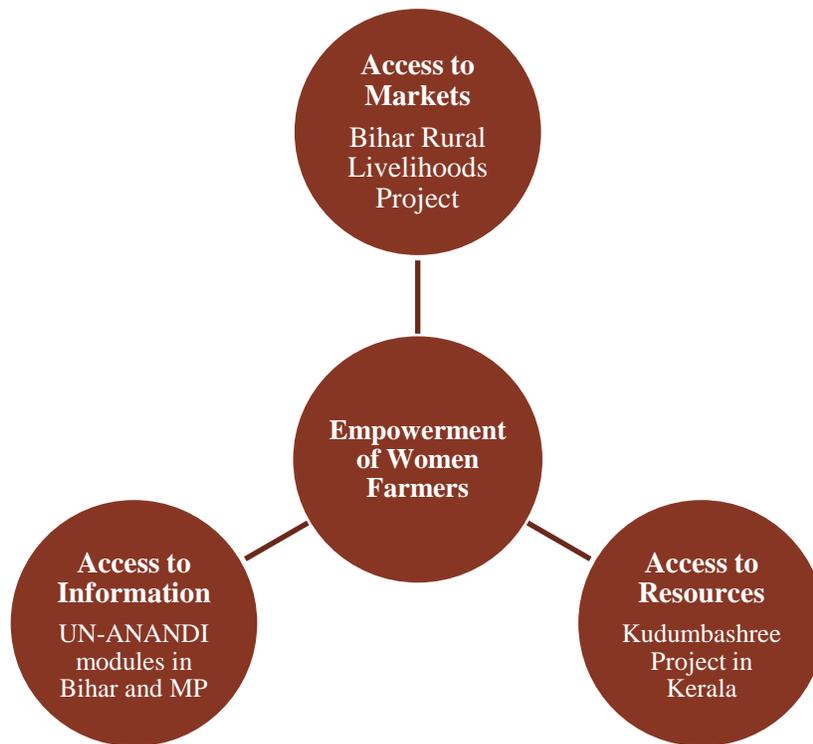
The implementation framework is similar to National Rural Livelihoods Mission, where Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs) are identified at the state level and are responsible for implementing the projects under the scheme. Ministry of Rural Development provides **funding support of up to 75%** to the project cost submitted by the State Government or Project Implementation Agency. Balance is to be contributed by respective governments

or any national / international donor agency. The steps involved in the implementation of the scheme are depicted below.



### *Successful Approaches under the Scheme*

The scheme is being implemented in 14 states across the country. Outlined below are some of the successful approaches adopted under the scheme which can be replicated in other regions as well.



#### *1. Improving access to markets through autonomous organizations of women*

- Implementation of MKSP by ***Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project*** has enabled women farmers in Bihar to procure seeds, food grains, and have access to the markets.
- This has been made possible through the setting up of Procurement Committees (***Kharidari Committee***) with women members responsible for *sampling, bargaining, and procuring* inputs on behalf of all members.
- Under the programme, training is arranged for members of the committee on seed technology, plantation techniques as well as market knowledge.
- Along with augmenting skills, confidence and bargaining power of women farmers, the initiative is also transforming gender and social relations in the community.

#### *2. Enhancing access to productive resources through land leasing to women farmers*

- The **State Poverty Eradication Mission** was launched by Govt. of Kerala to improve livelihoods and food security of landless women through land leasing. The **Kudumbashree intervention** under the project involved setting up of women's federations at village, block and district levels. Currently, the Kudumbashree initiative is supporting women farmers as a Project Implementation Agency (PIA) of MKSP.
- Members of grassroots organizations within the existing multi-tier structure were encouraged to take up lease land farming as individual and groups. Women who were interested in taking land on lease forwarded their applications to **District Level Federations**. Gram panchayats then mediated the terms between land owners and federations for procuring fallow land on a lease basis. The scale enabled women's collectives to lease land on standardized rates between **Rs 4000-8000 per acre** depending on season and type of crop.
- After leasing land, women selected the crops to be grown in the leased land. They were also provided training by Kerala Agricultural University. Furthermore, the sale of produce was also facilitated by government of Kerala. Group based collective farming led by women fostered consensus building and peer learning amongst women. It also led to reduction of input costs.

### 3. Empowering women's voice and agency through access to information

- **ANANDI (Area Networking and Development Initiatives)**, is strengthening women collectives under MKSP in partnership with UN Women South Asia and Ministry of Rural Development by creating training modules.
- State Rural Livelihood Missions (in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh) are implementing gender and livelihoods training module developed by ANANDI and UN Women based on **Participatory Action Learning Systems (PALS)**. This aims to enable women to collect, analyze, and use information to gain more control over their lives.
- One of the problems targeted by the training modules is women farmers' *access to entitlements*. The modules aim to provide information on job cards, kisan credit cards, BPL cards, ration cards, as well as provisions under other government schemes to women farmers.

### Performance of the Scheme

As of November 2014, 14 states have been covered under the scheme impacting close to **28.5 lakh beneficiaries**. Amongst the states, **Andhra Pradesh has the maximum** number of beneficiaries impacted at 23,49,966. This involves a total budget of Rs 289.90 crore across 23 projects in 22 districts and 653 blocks. This is followed by **Kerala** with 2,45,124 beneficiaries and a total budget of Rs 140.52 crore across 3 projects in 14 districts and 152 blocks. To ensure greater impact, the scale and reach of the scheme has to be improved.

While MKSP is a novel initiative with a focused approach on women farmers, there are **many challenges** being faced by the scheme, which need to be kept in mind like the absence of a clearly spelt out strategy on convergence. Project Implementation Agencies (PIA) is responsible for the convergences. Interestingly, without convergence with other government schemes such as MGNREGA, National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture, and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, the impact on women farmers would be limited. Additionally the scheme also puts a lot of focus on providing information and strategies to women farmers. While this is necessary, efforts need to go beyond the same, to ensure that women farmers are being able to utilize the strategies in a sustainable fashion.

MKSP is a welcome move seeking to empower women farmers. The program offers wonderful opportunities to create sustainable and long term impact on women's livelihoods empowering them economically and socially.

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