

## GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN AGRICULTURE: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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**Abstract:** Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of men and women, in a given culture or location. Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. Agriculture continues to be the main source of rural employment and women make up 43 percent of the formal agricultural workforce globally. Women produce on average more than half of all the food that is produced (up to 80% in Africa, 60% in Asia; and 30 to 40 % in Latin America and Western countries). Paradoxically, less than 10 per cent of women farmers in own land, only 15 per cent of the world's agricultural extension agents are women and less than 10 percent of credits and loans are directed towards them. Lack of gender analysis, reflects in poor statistics on women's productivity and technology adoption rates. In India, the average wage of female farm workers is 30-50 per cent lower than that of men. Key strategies to address gender equity include simple affordable approaches such as organizing women groups, more women para extension workers, tools for drudgery reduction and collective farming. Institutional and village based capacity building programmes, formation of micro credit groups and cooperative marketing of produce have to be conceptualized. Catering the needs and interests of female farmers will open the gateway for achieving equitable and sustainable development and food security.

**Keywords:** Gender, gender mainstreaming, women, agriculture.

**Introduction:** Agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. But the sector is underperforming in many countries in part because women, who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity. Despite the increasing advocate for women empowerment through equitable policy framework, many women in rural areas still face serious obstacles that frustrate their attempt to secure qualitative livelihood from farming activities. As per Census 2011, Sixty five percent (65%) of the total female workers in India are engaged in agriculture. Of the total cultivators (118.7 million), 30.3 percent are female. Out of 144.3 million agricultural labourers 42.6 percent are Women. In 2001, female agricultural labourers were 21percent which increased to 23 percent in 2011. About two-third (68.84%) of Indian population lives in villages, of which 65 per cent is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Rural women make up the majority of the worlds poor. Much of their work as household providers and agricultural producers is unpaid, making their contribution virtually invisible. They have far less access than men to land ownership, financial services, training and other means of increasing agricultural production and improving family income, nutrition and health. Women and female-headed households are disproportionately affected by economic recession and higher food prices. Social and economic inequalities between men and women undermine food security and hold back economic growth and advances in agriculture. Women make important contributions to the agricultural and rural economies

of all regions of the world. Agriculture continues to be the main source of rural employment and women make up 43 percent of the formal agricultural workforce globally. Women produce on average more than half of all the food that is produced (up to 80% in Africa, 60% in Asia; and 30 to 40 % in Latin America and Western countries). Paradoxically, less than 10 per cent of women farmers in own land, only 15 per cent of the world's agricultural extension agents are women and less than 10 percent of credits and loans are directed towards them. Lack of gender analysis, reflects in poor statistics on women's productivity and technology adoption rates. In India, the average wage of female farm workers is 30-50 per cent lower than that of men.

Gender is defined by FAO as 'the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material. Gender is not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men, but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution' (FAO, 1997). Despite this definition, gender is often misunderstood as being the promotion of women only. However, as we see from the FAO definition, gender issues focus on women and on the relationship between men and women, their roles, access to and control over resources, division of labour, interests and needs.

In all cultures, gender determines roles and responsibilities, as well as power and resources of women and men. Gender equality means that women and men should enjoy equal rights & opportunities, whereas, Gender equity refers to fairness and

impartiality in the treatment of women and men. We need equity to achieve equality. Gender inequality is not just a problem of women, but it is a problem of agricultural productivity, of food security and rural development.

Gender mainstreaming is the public policy concept of assessing the different implications for women and men of any planned policy action, including legislation and programmes, in all areas and levels. Mainstreaming essentially offers a pluralistic approach that values the diversity among both men and women aspects of life. The challenges of gender mainstreaming in agriculture have their roots in everyday family life. It pertains to the misconception that gender work relates to women and that this poses intrusion in private lives. There is therefore need to change mindset or attitude.

The gender perspective looks at the impact of gender on people's opportunities, social roles and interactions. Successful implementation of the policy, programme and project goals of international and national organization is directly affected by the impact of gender in turn, influences the process of social development. Gender being an integral component of every aspect of the economic, social, daily and private lives of individuals and societies and of the different roles ascribed by society to men and women. Therefore in order to enhance agricultural development there is need to take into consideration the gender roles of women and men in the different communities to ensure that persistent gender disparities are not perpetuated. The prospects for gender mainstreaming in agriculture have been shown to be good. However it has been also indicated there are challenges that still need to be overcome in order to effectively mainstream gender in agriculture. The real progress can only be made if these challenges receive attention at national and local levels as an integral part of the regular activities ministry officials, development planners, law makers and enforces, project managers, agricultural leaders, local leaders and key groups in the rural areas.

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