

**Socio – Economic Development of Rural Women in Tamil Nadu: Empowerment Through Agriculture**

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**ABSTRACT**

India has a predominantly agrarian economy. Agriculture is the backbone of our country. Agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. 70% of her population is rural; of those households, 60% engage in agriculture as their main source of income. In this significant agricultural sector woman plays a vital role, because it is largely a household enterprise. Women in India are major producers of food in terms of value, volume and number of hours worked. Nearly 63 percent of all economically active men are engaged in agriculture as compared to 78 per cent of women. Almost 50 percent of rural female workers are classified as agricultural labourers and 37% as cultivators. About 70 percent of farm work was performed by women. In the present paper an endeavor has been made to analyze the present status of women empowerment through agriculture. It is observed that women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including, main crop production, live-stock production, horticulture, post-harvesting operations, agro/social forestry, fishing etc. Empowering rural women will go a long way to improving the economic life of the women and also the well-being of individuals, families and the rural communities. Social, cultural traditions and agricultural constraints can limit rural women's economic status. Rural women's limited access to productive resources, low educational level and illiteracy are contributors to rural women's poverty. Illiteracy affects their chances to benefit from newer, non-traditional methods such as: information and communication technologies. The promotion of agricultural development should be through the provision of useful and relevant information to the farming communities by the extension services. Agricultural extension efforts should help women improve food production while allowing them to shift more of their labor to export production. Similarly, changes in legal, financial, and educational systems must be undertaken in order to enhance women's social and economic contributions to rural development in the long term.

**Keywords:** Rural women, Empowerment, Agriculture production, Social and Economic development

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy. Women play a vital role in building this economy. Over the years, there is a gradual realization of the key role of women in agricultural development and their vital contribution in the field of agriculture, food security, horticulture, processing, nutrition, sericulture, fisheries, and other allied sectors.

Rural Women form the most important productive work force in the economy of majority of the developing nations including India. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural

enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but they are essential to the wellbeing of rural households. Statistical data are available regarding their participation in the agricultural sector and allied activities but their impact on the home environment has been completely ignored.

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but they are essential to the well-being of rural households. Keeping the above background in mind an attempt was made to analyze the socio-psychological traits of women empowerment in agriculture Socio – economic empowerment of rural women in through agriculture.

## **2. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The study was conducted at chellampatti blocks of Madurai district in Tamil Nadu. A total of 120 respondents were selected for this study. Ex post facto design was followed in this study. An interview schedule was developed by incorporating all the selected variables in consultation with experts and available literature to collect relevant data. Before finalizing the interview schedule, it was pre-tested with respondents practicing cultivating paddy for more than one decade in a non-sampling area in order to remove ambiguity if any, in the interview schedule. Data were collected by personal interview with respondents in their farm and home. In addition to percentage analysis, cumulative frequency, correlation co-efficient and multiple regressions were the statistical tools employed.

## **3. RESULT & DISCUSSION**

Women empowerment is about rights and equitable societies. Social and economic empowerment increase women’s access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skill development and market information. Women farmer groups engaged in development activities have the potential to empower their members through the provision of knowledge, skills, motivation, and competencies that underpin sustainable agriculture.

The present study has evaluated the performance of women farmers’ agricultural activities with the following specific objectives, to evaluate the social and economic advantages of women farmer empowerment. Table 1 indicates nearly two-thirds of the respondents (61.70per cent) were found in the old age category, remaining respondents found to be young and middle age categories. Majority (79.20 %) of the respondents were literates and their educational level varied from primary to secondary educational level. Majority (84.20 per cent) of the farmers were practicing agriculture as their secondary occupation. A meager proportion (15.00 %) had high level followed by low level (13.30 %) of farming experience. Thus the finding reveals that, majority of the farmers had medium level of farming experience followed by high and low level of farming experience.

**TABLE 1**  
**SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN FARMERS**

**n=120**

PARTICULARS	CATEGORIES	TOTAL	
		FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Age	Young (up to 35 years)	27	22.5
	Middle ( above 35 and up to 45 years)	19	15.8
	Old (above 45 years)	74	61.7
Education	Illiterate	12	10.00
	Functionally literate	13	10.80
	Primary education	24	20.00
	Middle education	15	12.50
	Secondary education	45	37.50
	Collegiate education	11	9.20
Occupation	Agriculture as the Primary occupation	19	15.80
	Agriculture as the Secondary occupation	101	84.20
Annual Income	Low	61	50.80
	Medium	41	34.20
	High	18	15.00
Farming Experiences	Low	16	13.30
	Medium	86	71.70
	High	18	15.00
Area under SRI	Up to 2.5 acres	98	81.67
	More than 2.5 acres	22	18.33

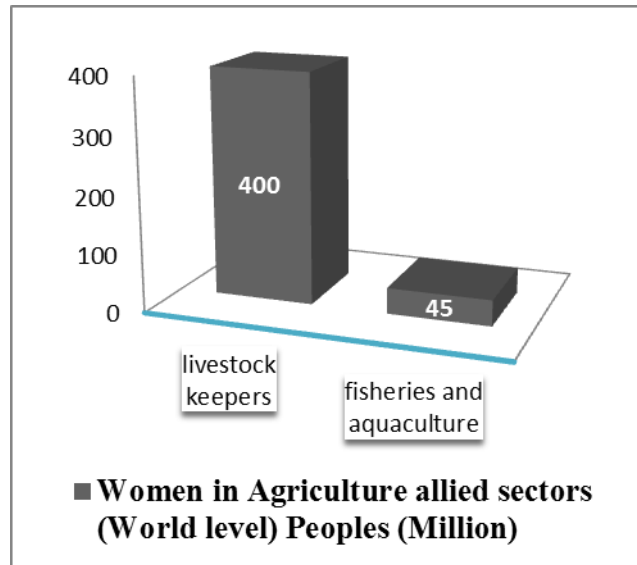
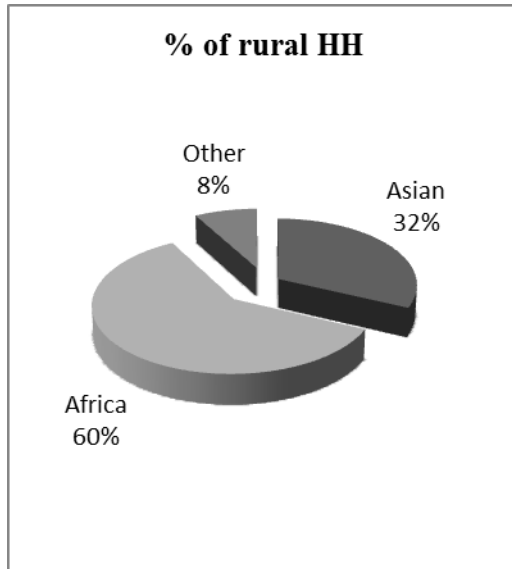
Table 2 indicates nearly 82.00 per cent of the respondents who had medium level of social participation and only 17.50 per cent had high level of social participation. The membership of farmers association, self-help groups, co-operative milk society, agricultural credit society and panchayat contributed for the high level of social participation. More than 85.00 per cent of farmers possessed medium level of scientific orientation followed by 10.00 and around 6.00 per cent who had high and low level of scientific orientation respectively. Fifty five per cent of the farmers had medium level of risk orientation behaviour and around 60.00 per cent of the farmers had medium level of extension agency contact. The reason for medium level of contact with extension agencies might be due to the need for technical guidance to understand the risky and complex nature of technologies.

**TABLE 2**  
**SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS AND INFORMATION SOURCE**  
**UTILIZATION**

**n=120**

PARTICULARS	CATEGORIES	TOTAL	
		FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Social Participation	Low	1	00.80
	Medium	98	81.70
	High	21	17.50
Scientific orientation	Low	7	05.80
	Medium	101	84.20
	High	12	10.00
Risk orientation	Low	21	17.50
	Medium	66	55.00
	High	33	27.50
Credit orientation	Low	12	10.00
	Medium	84	70.00
	High	24	20.00
Innovativeness	Low	12	10.00
	Medium	84	70.00
	High	24	20.00
Extension agency contact	Low	27	22.50
	Medium	82	68.30
	High	11	09.20

Women play a significant role in the agricultural labour force and in agricultural activities, although to a varying degree. Consequently their contribution to agricultural output is undoubtedly extremely significant, although difficult to quantify with any accuracy. It has often been claimed that women produce 60-80 percent of food. 40 Per cent of the agricultural labour force in the developing world. The Asian country average is dominated by China, where the female share of the agricultural labour force has increased slightly during the past three years female share in India 30 %. Women make up almost 50 percent of the agricultural labour force in Africa. Time contribution of women to agricultural activities ranges from about 30 percent Africa country 60 – 80 % in Asia, estimates range from 32 percent in India to over 50 percent in China.



Now-a-days money makes everything; peoples are divided only based on their economic status only, a person respect comes from his economic status. So, the increase in income makes a change in farming woman’s mind to participate in any of the social activities because their wants are more, a person who is self sufficient, only will get an idea about the society and social activities.

**4. CONCLUSION**

The empowerment of women decreases toward low level from medium level. Moreover, women who were illiterate/less educated were less empowered. Education plays an important role in bringing about awareness on women’s rights. Education and employment are better described as “enabling factors” or “sources of empowerment”. Hence, the education should be major motive for holistic empowerment of rural women. As farmers, agricultural workers and women form the backbone of agricultural rural economy.

Women farmers represent more than a quarter of the world’s population. Women comprise, on an average, 43 % of the agricultural work force in developing countries. Yet women have less access than men to agriculture related assets, inputs and services. Had they enjoyed the same access to productive resources as men, women could boost yield by 20-30 % and also raising the overall agricultural output by 2 ½ to 4%. Women play a major role in agriculture and continue to remain as an important source of livelihood for women. Women lack access to extension services needs of women and men vary considerably. Men and women have differential access to assets, information, markets, credits and other services. Hence, need training programmes for staff on gender difference in agriculture. Employ more women extension staff, preferably female para-extension agents. Target women as clients for agricultural extension and organize separate programmes and provide with the micro-capital assistance for enterprise development to the groups of farm women

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