



‘Securing Rights of Women Farmers:

Developing a Roadmap for Action’

CALL FOR MAKAAAM REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS

Women farmers, in India, play a crucial role in food production and processing. Over 65.5% of economically active women in India are engaged in agriculture, constituting about 37% of the total agricultural work force¹. About 60-80% of food production and 90% of dairy products are produced by women producers². Additionally, women also engage in important on-farm activities that are not solely cultivation-oriented. The tasks of keeping milch animals, small ruminants and backyard poultry (which can be important sources of supplementary income for poor farm families and agricultural laborers) are typically performed by women in the household. Yet they are not recognised as farmers. Legal recognition of farmers in India comes from land ownership. According to agriculture census 2010-11, only 12.69 per cent of operational holdings are in the hands of women³. As this includes land lease data, it is understandable that secure land ownership of women in rural India is abysmally low.

Woman’s low land ownership limits her access to government schemes, subsidies, agriculture resources, credit etc. Often, legal recognition shapes social recognition and vice-versa, and further limits women farmers’ participation in the agriculture training programs, decision making at private and public level, and participation in the community based institutions. For example, when a woman farmer commits suicide, she is neither counted nor is her family compensated— because she doesn’t own land. The 2014 National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data on farmer suicides shows that of the 5,650 farmers who committed suicide, only 472 were women, recognising women as farmers through land titles⁴.

¹ Census of India, 2011

² Role of women in agriculture, 2011. FAO

³ Agriculture census, 2011

⁴ Catch News: 100,000 women, 10 years, one demand: let us own our farmland; SABITA PARIDA & SAVVY SOUMYA MISRA | 2 October 2015

Non-recognition of women as farmers often makes them invisible in macro agriculture policies and investment into agriculture. Investment usually favours mechanised farming and big machineries that are often controlled by men, over small agriculture equipment where women's participation is overwhelming⁵. Women farmers' recognition and access to resources can significantly change the status of hunger and malnutrition for an agriculture dependent and malnourished country like India⁶.

Furthermore, unequal wage payment and increasing unpaid care burden are few of the constraints women farmers and agriculture labourer's face in rural India. Gender wage gap is highest in the farming sector⁷. Women farmers are also increasingly facing time poverty for managing both field and housework⁸. Women farmers' empowerment is critical for improving India's performance in Gender Inequality Index, Global Gender Gap Index⁹.

Besides, changing climate is posing additional threats for women farmers. India with 650 million populations dependent on rain-fed agriculture has been identified as one amongst the 27 countries which are the most vulnerable to the impacts of global warming related accelerated sea level rise¹⁰. A report issued by the World Bank suggests that India's economic progress could be severely hampered, with an additional 45 million pushed into poverty, due to the effects of climate change¹¹. Women farmers are discriminatorily impacted by changing climate due to socio-cultural norms and existing structural barriers.

⁵ <https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/05e2d719-aaea-4842-9379-3a491fe7f928>

⁶ According to FAO, if women have equal access to productive resources, agriculture productivity of developing countries can increase by 2.5- 4 percent and can reduce number of undernourished people in the world by 12-17 percent (The State of Food and Agriculture, 2011: FAO). Recent report of FAO "The State of Food Insecurity in World" states that India is home to 194.6 million undernourished people, the highest in the world. Global Hunger Index (GHI) released by the International Food Policy Research Institute rank India in the 97th spot in a ranking of 118 countries⁶. A third of women of reproductive age in India are undernourished, with a body mass index (BMI) of less than 18.5 kg/m²⁶.

⁷ <http://www.firstpost.com/india/gender-pay-gap-india-numbers-salary-index-report-2788234.html> ; The Gender Gap in Agricultural Wages in India: Spatial Variation, Caste and Non- Farm Employment, September 2011, http://www.isid.ac.in/~pu/conference/dec_11_conf/Papers/KanikaMahajan.pdf

⁸ in the period 2011-12, for the females aged 15-29 time spent in domestic work has been increased from 54.8 percent to 57.5 percent and for 30-44 year age group it increased from 52.5 to 65.8 per cent (http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_204762/lang-en/index.htm)

⁹ India ranks 130th among 188 countries in Gender Inequality Index (GII) with 0.563 score (2014). India fares badly in GII in comparison to its' South Asian neighbors Sri Lanka (72), Bhutan (97), Bangladesh (111) and Nepal (108). In Global Gender Gap Index produced by World Economic Forum with score 0.664 India ranks 108 among 145 countries⁹. Global Gender Gap Index measure countries' performance in four areas- economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment. Among the four criterion, India performs worst in economic participation and opportunity and scores as low as 0.383.

¹⁰ Climate Change and coastal ecosystem in India. Issues in Perspectives. Senapati & Gupta. Vol 5. No 3. International Journal of Environmental Sciences

¹¹ Shock Waves: Managing the Impact of Climate Change on Poverty. 2016. Hallegatte et al. The World Bank

Women's workload increases in times of hardship; women's workloads were found to increase in times of low rainfall/drought because of the extra work involved in collecting water and firewood, and because of the need to undertake casual work to buy food and make ends meet. Socio-culturally women and girls are appointed as the water provider in the society. With changing climate, erratic rainfall, drying up of the ground water forces women to travel faraway places to collect water. In the recent drought in India in 2016, in many districts of Maharashtra women used to travel more than 10-12 kilometre to collect drinking water. Women and children account for more than 75 per cent of displaced people following natural disasters and are vulnerable to sexual violence in transit and in refugee camps¹². Climate change leads to migration and majorly male migration which left women behind in the rural areas to take care of dual job of agriculture and unpaid care work. Due to out-migration of men, women headed or women managed households are now about 32 percent of rural households¹³.

In this context the National Commission for Women (NCW), Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (Makaam) and UN Women, are partnering together to hold five regional consultation and one national consultation on '**Securing Rights of Women Farmers: Developing a Roadmap for Action**' to bring women farmers, government official, civil society organizations and policy makers together to address the issues and challenges faced by women farmers in India.

The Dates for the Regional Consultations are as follows:-

- 1. Southern Regional Consultation- 20th and 21st January 2017, YMCA in Chennai**
- 2. Eastern Regional Consultation- 21st and 22nd February 2017, Navjoyti Niketan in Patna**
- 3. North Eastern Regional Consultation- 15th-16th March, Bosco ReachOut Centre in Guwahati**
- 4. Western Regional Consultation – April 2017, in Pune**
- 5. Pahaad Regional Consultation- June 2017**
- 6. National Consultation- July 2017, in Delhi**

We hope and look forward to your presence in the upcoming consultation with women farmers, for you to share your perspectives and interventions, and to strengthen this initiative.

¹² http://www.wunrn.org/news/2009/09_09/08_31_09/083109_climate.htm

¹³ Census, 2011