



Securing Rights of Women Farmers: **DEVELOPING A ROADMAP FOR ACTION**





SUMMARY



Women farmers comprise approximately 65 per cent of the agricultural workforce in India.ⁱ However, gender-specific barriers do not allow women farmers equal economic rights and opportunity, and they remain under-resourced, under-represented, unacknowledged and almost invisible. A comprehensive framework for addressing gender gaps in laws, institutions, policies and programmes in the agricultural sector is essential for recognition and empowerment of women farmers and equal human rights for all, as well as for achieving national and global development goals for food and nutrition security, poverty eradication, and sustainable development. The National Commission for Women (NCW),ⁱⁱ Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM – Forum for Women Farmers’ Rights)ⁱⁱⁱ and UN Women^{iv} have come together in a unique partnership to collectively review legislation and policy frameworks, and advocate for removing barriers, as well as for creation of an enabling ecosystem for women farmers to realise their rights.



Issues and Challenges



Gender-specific barriers in accessing equal rights and entitlements:

- Women in the agricultural workforce face a large gender wage gap, earning up to 50-70 per cent of men's wages; and are trapped in unpaid, underpaid or unskilled work^v
- Women lack land ownership and control, holding a meager 12.78 per cent of all operational landholdings^{vi}
- Women's poor decision-making power in the family leads to lack of control over family resources, assets and income
- Women face inequality in access to inputs, seeds, fertilisers, and agricultural extension services as compared to men
- Institutional discrimination and gender-biased loan allocations prevent women's equal access to credit
- A large proportion of women farmers are from the most marginalised and socially excluded sections; 81 per cent are Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC)^{vii}
- Women carry the burden of domestic care work, which occupies a large part of their productive hours
- Women are more susceptible to climate-related health risks, crop failure, economic crisis, environmental degradation and natural disasters because of underlying vulnerabilities
- Women are disproportionately affected by lack of infrastructure and basic services such as education, health care and social services
- Women farmers lack access to networks that support their growth, expansion and access to profitable markets
- Women farmers are underrepresented and have limited voice and agency in decision-making and institutional spaces and forums



Particular disadvantage in accessing equal economic opportunities:

- The significant work performed by women farmers remains unacknowledged, invisible and informal and their time poverty is high
- Women farmers are risk averse, and unable to invest in their farms for growth, expansion and bringing their operations to scale
- Women cannot take advantage of subsidies, incentives and access to high-value skilled rural employment opportunities created by government and non-government interfaces due to gender-neutral policies
- They are unable to find avenues for expression of their unique needs and demands in legislation, institutions, policies and programmes.
- Women farmers are prevented from accessing domestic and global agricultural supply chains, or remain confined to lower nodes with low economic returns.



Why Support and Promote Women Farmers?

In India, women are central to the agriculture sector, which is a source of livelihood for a large section of the population, and the vehicle for development, food and nutrition security, and poverty eradication:

- Women comprise 65 per cent of the agricultural workforce, with 79 per cent rural women engaged in agricultural activities^{viii}
- Women farmers generate a significant proportion of the household's income, leading to improved quality of life, health and education indicators
- Women produce a large proportion of food consumed locally and contribute to the food and nutrition security of families and communities
- Women's equal access to agricultural inputs will increase their agricultural productivity by 20 to 30 per cent, and raise total agricultural production in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 percent^{ix}
- Gender parity in agriculture can reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12 to 17 percent, or 100 to 150 million people, thereby contributing to global food security^x
- Women farmers are important actors in agricultural and rural enterprises, fuelling local and global economies





Supporting women farmers is essential for achieving India's national and international commitments:

- The Constitutional commitments of right to life, right to equality and right to livelihood can be achieved only by ensuring equal human rights, entitlements, and economic opportunities to women farmers
- Agenda 2030^{xi} recognises rural women as the key agents for transformational economic, environmental and social change necessary for sustainable development, and provides a strong mandate for member states to address the root causes of inequality, with a clear focus on the most marginalised. The achievement of gender equality is essential for achieving the goals related to poverty reduction, food security, inclusive growth and environmental sustainability
- The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)^{xii} and Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)^{xiii} guides member states to strengthen women's economic rights and independence. The CEDAW Article 14^{xiv} explicitly calls upon member states to: a) locally contextualise the national priorities around rural women and women farmers; and b) strengthen the rights of women farmers to ensure equality. The CEDAW General Recommendation No. 34^{xv} on Rights of Rural Women recognises rural women's entitlements and rights to: a) access, control, manage and own natural and productive resources, e.g. land; b) decent work and social protection; c) health care; and d) strengthen the women's role in production, processing, distribution, market access, trade and investment
- The UN Secretary General's High Level Panel (UNHLP) on Women's Economic Empowerment^{xvi} launched its report^{xvii} in September 2016, emphasising that sustainable development cannot be achieved without addressing the challenges faced by women in the agriculture sector

National Priorities and Policies



The National Policy for Farmers (NPF), 2007^{xviii} provides the framework for broadening the definition of the 'farmer', and envisions economic wellbeing of farmers by ensuring access to productive assets and marketable skills, as well as child-care facilities and nutrition for women farmers



The draft National Policy for Women in Agriculture, 2008^{xix} addresses gender inequalities and social disadvantages faced by women farmers



The draft National Policy for Women, 2016^{xx} seeks to strengthen policies for women in agriculture by ensuring their rights over resources, services and social protection



RECOMMENDATIONS

A comprehensive framework for establishing gender-responsive laws, institutions, policies and programmes in the agriculture sector is essential for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women farmers

1. VOICE: Identity, citizenship and leadership

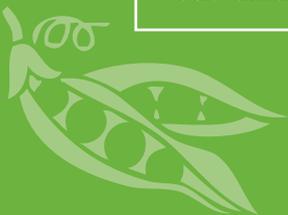
A legal definition of 'woman farmer', including women landowners and women working on others' land must be operationalised. This definition encompasses a wide range of identity choices such as landowning women cultivators; landless women cultivators cultivating on family-owned land; landless tenant/sharecropping women cultivators; landless agricultural workers; forest-dependent women farmers; livestock-rearing women farmers; fisheries-dependent women farmers, but policies and programmes are targeted only to landowners. Therefore, women farmers must be organised into networks and collectives in order to increase their voice, agency and bargaining power. Women farmers and their collectives must be given equal institutional space for participation in decision-making.





Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM): Forum for Women Farmers' Rights

MAKAAM, an alliance comprising over 120 individuals, organisations and networks from 24 states of India, has been active since 2013 to give visibility to women farmers especially smallholder marginalised women.. The challenges of women farmers in India stem from the gender discriminatory norms and practices in society and the the lack of recognition of women's work, skills, knowledge for food and nutrition security. Despite the increasing numbers of women agricultural workers in India, labour force participation rates for women have not increased, but in fact fallen drastically, leaving many women without decent work opportunities. MAKAAM's development vision for women farmers is based on principles of social justice, plurality of knowledge systems and sustainability driven by ecological approaches, and guided by feminist principles, to create and secure rights over livelihood resources (land, forests, seeds, water etc.) as well as entitlements of all public services and social protection. MAKAAM is collaborating with UN Women and NCW in the regional consultations to provide a platform for women farmers collective voice and representation in framing the agenda for gender just policies and programs to ensure empowered, self-reliant, sustainable women's livelihoods.



2. CHOICE: Access, ownership and control of productive resources

Women farmers and their collectives must have equal rights of ownership and control over livelihood resources such as land, water resources and seeds, as well as equal access to agricultural inputs, credit and finance, and support services such as skills development and marketing, especially through institutional support for cooperatives, producer companies and other organisations of women farmers. Special schemes that address the unique needs of women farmers such as redistribution of unpaid domestic care work, and social security schemes must be developed, along with extending equal labour and work-related rights to reduce invisibility and informality of women farmers' work.

3. SECURITY: Freedom from all forms of violence

Women farmers must be extended comprehensive security by ensuring them right to property, livelihood and dignity, as well as extending protection from all forms of violence and trafficking, prevention of distress migration, and forcible displacement for development.

It is also necessary to put in place mechanisms for gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation of all programmes and policies in the agricultural sector in order to close gender gaps in design and implementation, as well as establish grievance redressal and accountability mechanisms for ensuring ethical standards, labour rights, codes of conduct and decent work for women.

ABOUT THE PARTNERS



National Commission for Women (NCW): The NCW is the apex national level organisation of India with the mandate of protecting and promoting the interests of women.



Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM): MAKAAM is an alliance of individuals, organisations, networks, campaigns, movements and people's collectives across 24 states of India, working towards ensuring empowered, self-reliant and sustainable women's livelihoods.



UN Women: UN Women was created in 2010, as a UN entity, to accelerate progress on gender equality and the realisation of women's rights, and is a champion for women and girls, providing them with a powerful voice at the global, regional and local levels.



ENDNOTES

ⁱCensus 2011. http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-Documents/PRIMARY%20CENSUS%20ABSTRACT_Final.ppt

ⁱⁱ<http://ncw.nic.in>

ⁱⁱⁱ<http://www.makaam.in>

^{iv}<http://www.unwomen.org/en>

^v“Report on Employment and Unemployment Survey”. NSSO 2009-10. http://labourbureau.nic.in/Final_Report_Emp_Unemp_2009_10.pdf

^{vi}Agriculture Census 2010-11. <http://agcensus.nic.in/document/agcensus2010/allindia201011H.pdf>

^{vii}“Women Workers in Agriculture: Expanding Responsibilities and Shrinking Opportunities”. Asia Pacific Working Paper Series. ILO 2010.

^{viii}“Report on Employment and Unemployment Survey”. NSSO 2009-10. http://labourbureau.nic.in/Final_Report_Emp_Unemp_2009_10.pdf

^{ix}“The State of Food and Agriculture Report. FAO 2010-11. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e00.htm>

^xIbid.

^{xi}<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

^{xii}<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

^{xiii}<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

^{xiv}<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm#article14>

^{xv}<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm>

^{xvi}<http://www.womenseconomicempowerment.org>

^{xvii}<http://www.womenseconomicempowerment.org/assets/reports/UNWomen%20Full%20Report.pdf>

^{xviii}<http://archive.indianstatistics.org/ncf/npf2007.pdf>

^{xix}http://ncw.nic.in/Comments/Agricultural_Policy.pdf

^{xx}<http://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/draft%20national%20policy%20for%20women%202016.pdf>