



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





SUMMARY



Women farmers comprise approximately 65 per cent of the agricultural workforce in Indiaⁱ. 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. It is also important 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 to remove barriers, and create of an enabling ecosystem for women farmers to realise their rights.



Issues and Challenges



Gender-specific barriers to equal rights and entitlements:

- Women agricultural workers face a large gender wage gap, earning 50-70 per cent of men's wages; and are trapped in unpaid, underpaid or unskilled work^v.
- Women hold just 13 per cent of all operational landholdings^{vi}.
- Women lack decision-making power in the family, control over family resources, and access to family assets and income.
- Women face unequal access to inputs, seeds, fertilisers, and agricultural extension services, as compared to men.
- Institutional discrimination and gender-biased loan practices 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 vulnerable to climate-related health risks, crop failure, economic crisis, environmental degradation and natural disasters.
- Women are disproportionately affected by poor 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, institutional spaces and public forums.



Particular disadvantages in accessing equal economic opportunities:

- The significant work performed by women farmers remains unacknowledged, invisible and informal, resulting in time poverty.
- Women farmers are risk averse and do not sufficiently invest in their farms for growth, expansion and scale.
- Women cannot take advantage of subsidies, incentives and access to high-value skilled rural employment opportunities created by government and non-government organisations 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 of rural women engaged in agricultural activities^{viii}.
- Women farmers generate a significant proportion of their household's income, leading to improved quality of life, health and education.
- 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 for 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 to achieve SDG goals for 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} guide Member States to strengthen women's economic rights and independence. CEDAW Article 14^{xiv} explicitly calls upon Member States to: a) locally contextualise national priorities for rural women and women farmers; and b) strengthen rights of women farmers to equality. 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) a stronger 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 a 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.



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

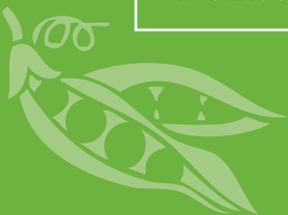
A legal definition of 'woman farmer', including women landowners and women working on others' land, must be operationalised. This definition encompasses a wide range of identity choices such as landowning women cultivators; landless women cultivators working on family-owned land; landless tenant/sharecropping women cultivators; landless agricultural workers; forest-dependent women farmers; livestock-rearing women farmers; and fisheries-dependent women farmers. But most policies and programmes are targeted only to landowners. Therefore, women farmers are organising 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 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 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 5 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. 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.

Mechanisms are needed 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 to ensure 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

ⁱ Census 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

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

^x Ibid.

^{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>