

Women Agripreneurs: An Initiative for Sustainable Development

P. Berline Kingcy

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce
St. Joseph's College of Arts & Sciences
Mettur, Tirunelveli Dt

Abstract

Women contribute to 65-70% of the labour in agriculture, construction industry and in other areas. Most of them are illiterate and unable to attend formal training courses leaving their domestic responsibilities, rural women trail in adopting new technologies and in taking advantage of modern scientific and information technologies. Furthermore, introduction of any new programme for promoting livelihood will further add to their burden, as they are already suffering from drudgery, ill health, suppression and deprivation of their basic rights and status in the society and in families. The farming activities stand in good stead as there are plenty of avenues like Crop production, Forestry, sericulture, Agro-service Centers, Processing of food and forest products. The Production of Agricultural inputs are also considered as one of the most important area for women developmental initiatives such as Bio-fertilizers, Bio-pesticides, Vermicompost, Mushroom spawn production, Seeds and plants and the production of Cattle feeds. It is important that the women segment need to be aware of the changes taking place in the process of farming either in agro-based or in non agro based and prove them to be agripreneurs.

Key words: Women, Suppression, Deprivation.

Introduction

India is a country with over 35-40 per cent of the rural population living in utter poverty where there is no scope for them to have their basic requirements met as they are deprived of basic amenities and food security. They are unemployed or underemployed and this is the primary cause of poverty. Most of them are illiterate, suffer from ill-health, suppressed by vested interests and are deprived of their due share and rights in the development due to poor governance. They are often addicted to alcohol, narcotics and other unwanted habits, which further de-motivate them from involving themselves in sustainable livelihood activities.

Status of women

Women too are affected by these gestures both directly and indirectly due to the prevalence of these affective / influential aspects. Women contribute to 65-70% of the labour in agriculture, construction industry and in other areas. Most of them are illiterate and unable to attend formal training courses leaving their domestic

responsibilities, rural women trail in adopting new technologies and in taking advantage of modern scientific and information technologies. Furthermore, introduction of any new programme for promoting livelihood will further add to their burden, as they are already suffering from drudgery, ill health, suppression and deprivation of their basic rights and status in the society and in families.

Women empowerment should be an important and integral component of the sustainable livelihood programme in rural India. Poverty has a direct influence on food security and the rural poor and women in particular suffer the most during such scarcities and calamities. Thus, ensuring food security through women empowerment should be the primary goal of sustainable rural livelihood. Over 85 per cent of the rural families are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. However, due to denudation of natural resources, sub-division of their land holdings and fluctuations in climatic conditions, the income from agriculture has been dwindling steadily. Furthermore, introduction of new technologies and farming practices have given tremendous benefits to resourceful and educated farmers on the one hand, while depriving the small land holders of such benefits on the other hand.

Women Empowerment

In rural areas, particularly among weaker sections of the society, women are illiterate and suppressed, the women empowerment should focus on the following aspects.

Promotion of Rural Livelihood through Women Self Help Groups: Promotion and development of micro-enterprises and various income generation activities is an important aspect of women empowerment. Although it is extremely difficult to find remunerative self-employment, there are enormous untapped opportunities in the rural sector. These include both on-farm and off-farm opportunities.

Advantages of Agro-Based Activities

1. Women are required to annex themselves with agro-product cultivation as it has easy access to inputs and less skill sets.
2. There is no problem of marketing, as most of the outputs are locally consumed as food.
3. The market outlets for even cash crops have been well established and instant cash is assured for all the produces in the local market.
4. As over 75-85% of the rural families own land and livestock, income generation activities can be initiated immediately without heavy capital investment.
5. Risk of failure due to improper technology, poor quality, low demand and poor price recovery are very low. Hence, the chances of success are high.
6. Infrastructure required for promotion of on-farm activities has been very well established.

Hence, the entrepreneurs can progress even in backward regions, which are deprived of regular power supply and electronic information connectivity.

Opportunities for Rural Micro-enterprises through Women SHGs

On-farm activities:

The farming activities stand in good stead as there are plenty of avenues like Crop production, Forestry, sericulture, Agro service Centers, Processing of food and forest products, The Production of Agricultural inputs are also considered as one of the most important area for women developmental initiatives such as Bio-fertilizers, Bio-pesticides, Vermi compost, Mushroom spawn production, Seeds and plants and the production of Cattle feeds.

Off-farm activities:

There is also good scope for the development of off farm activities through the establishment of Cottage industries: in the areas of Pottery, smithy, carpentry, Textile and production of building materials.

Services:

Automobiles hire and repairs, Electrical works, civil construction and consumer stores.

Support Needed for Promotion Micro-enterprises

It is important to find ways and means to support the women in the process of developing the said micro enterprises, they are:

1. Motivation of the target communities, particularly women
2. Formation of Self-Help Groups and their Federations
3. Introduction of drudgery reduction activities
4. Gender sensitization
5. Training and capacity building
6. Micro-finance . provision of credit facilities and linkage with banks
7. Development of infrastructure, particularly through the SHG Federations to provide necessary support services and marketing
8. Trade networking and establishment of market outlets
9. Village level Information Centre / e-Chaupal for dissemination of useful information
10. Multimedia- a new recipe for enabling Farm women

Agripreneurs

Gone are the days when women were recognized as subtle and submissive in all aspects. It is the “Era of Women Empowerment” empowering them not only with credit access but also enabling them to be better entrepreneurs. Women are now playing a pivotal role in all fields including agriculture as managers, decision

makers and skilled farm workers. It is estimated that women are responsible for 70% of actual farm work and constitute up to 60% of farming population. They are considered to be 'Agripreneurs' as they manage, organize and assure responsibilities for running both their farm.

Challenges

In spite of all these efforts, it is most unfortunate to note that involvement and participation of farm women in Transfer of Technology (TOT) has been neglected so far. Hence it is the need of the hour to empower farm women in technology dissemination programmes to achieve a holistic empowerment of the society. One cannot reject the fact that we are in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) world depending much on computer and allied modern electronic gadgets for execution of our day to day activities. This scenario warranted the use of ICT to build a knowledge enriched rural society and to ensure reaching the hitherto un-reached. This paves way for enhancing agricultural production and to achieve faster growth of the sector.

The speed of diffusion of novel agricultural technologies could only be achieved through active involvement and participation of farm women with the help of computer-based user friendly Interactive Multimedia Compact Disc (IMCD). IMCD is a modern electronic gadget which demonstrates complex farm technologies in simpler terms using text, graphics, audio and video. User friendly IMCD is a device encompassing labeled instructions helping the user to learn the contents, structure and information using the mouse without depending on the help of facilitator to learn its contents.

Conclusion

Farming is the traditional activity and has moved little ahead with changes due to innovations and creative spirit. It is important that the women segment need to be aware of the changes taking place in the process of farming either in agro-based or in non-agro-based. The active involvement and participation of women in farming is to be supported and strengthened to ensure a sustainable livelihood in all areas that will ultimately make them empowered.

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