



Feminization of Agriculture

This editorial is based on [“India’s natural farming policy should recognise women’s new role”](#) which was published in Hindustan Times on 01/08/2022. It talks about the feminization of agriculture in India and benefits of women’s participation in natural farming.

For Prelims: Feminization of Agriculture, Natural farming, Sustainable Development Agenda, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Gender Budgeting, Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP).

For Mains: Causes of Feminization of Indian Agriculture, Women’s Participation in Natural Farming, Recent Government Initiatives Related to Women Empowerment and Agriculture.

As per the **2011** census, approximately **33.7% of rural males migrate in search of employment and better economic opportunities**. The **increasing migration of rural men has led to the feminization of the agriculture sector**, with the participation of women in agriculture and allied activities becoming more significant.

To address this changing scenario, it becomes essential to **keep women at the center of India’s policy initiative**.

What are the Causes of Feminization of Indian Agriculture?

- **Gender-Division of Work:** Women are **more willing to accept low-paid irregular work, are easy to hire and fire**, are thought to be docile and hardworking, and certain jobs are typified as women’s work.
- **Social Mobility and Migration - Reserved for Males:** Men are generally perceived as **breadwinners**, as they **receive more education opportunities** and are **preferred for physical labor**.
 - As a result, in the Indian rural belt, **males are more likely to migrate and move from rural to urban areas in search of better jobs**, while **females** are primarily responsible for **household chores** and **agriculture**.
- **Poverty:** Because of **poverty**, women often work as agricultural laborers or domestic laborers in order to **supplement the family’s income**, or as **domestic laborers**.

What are the Impacts of Feminization of Agriculture on Women?

- **Work Overload:** In line with patriarchal social roles, **women are responsible for reproduction and care activities**. With male out-migration, women have additionally taken on the role of agriculture.
 - This means that they now have to take care of their own family and also work as agricultural wage laborers.

- **Socio-Cultural Isolation: Women who take up traditional male roles** to sustain the family after men migrate are often **frowned on in communities** because they have **transgressed sociocultural norms**.
- **Insufficient Time for Child Raising: Work overload** leaves women with inadequate time for their children. Despite economic gains derived from male migration, **parental absence** may lead directly to **decreased care and supervision, negatively affecting [child rearing](#)**.
- **Mental Health Issues:** Spousal separation due to male migration, **lack of companionship**, and **increased household responsibilities** may trigger **[mental health](#)** problems in left-behind female spouses of migrant workers.
- **No Recognition and Ownership: Women manage work at both household and farm levels**, including **maintaining [livestock](#)**, and selling milk and other produce in the market. But, unfortunately, they are never recognized enough and continue to be **marginalized in terms of [land ownership](#)**.

How Women's Participation in Natural Farming can be a Win-Win Situation?

[Natural farming](#) uses **methods based on natural or ecological processes through natural inputs**. It is a promising tool to **minimize farmers' dependence on purchased inputs** while increasing their incomes, delivering ecological benefits, and **maintaining nutritional [food security](#)**.

- **Women Empowerment:** Women's Participation in Natural Farming Initiatives can help them to **boost their incomes and their involvement in decision-making**. It would also positively impact the health and **[nutritional status of the family](#)**.
 - Studies have indicated that there is a **direct correlation between women's control over [agricultural resources](#)** as a primary producer **and the socio-economic characteristics of their household**.
- **Effective Natural Farming:** Since women mostly cook for their families, **they understand the importance of natural products to nurture and nourish their children**. As a result, women are likely to adopt natural farming sooner than men.
 - Women have played a key role in **[biodiversity management](#)** and sustainable agriculture through ecological practices, such as **conserving traditional seeds, preparing [natural fertilizer](#)**, and using diverse natural resources to meet daily household needs.
 - Their participation in natural farming will ensure the practice's sustaining and scaling to the extent of natural farming and **support the nation's [sustainable development agenda](#)**.
- **Example - Andhra Pradesh Community-Managed Natural Farming (APCNF):**
 - APCNF has **engaged women in social mobilization, collective action, community learning** and community marketing by utilizing the existing institutional platform of **women's [Self-Help Groups \(SHGs\)](#)**, which are instrumental in scaling, sustaining and deepening the natural farming programme.
 - This movement has also helped women improve their household nutrition and incomes and **empowered them to create their agency in their village**.

What Should be Our Approach Moving Forward?

- **Social Security:** A **[social security](#) blanket** is essential to ensure that women have a **robust support system** to juggle **household responsibilities, child-rearing**, and **financial burdens** while also managing work.
- **Farm Ownership to Women:** There continues to be a growing need to **identify women as farmers, with farm ownership** that would in turn make them **eligible for schemes and benefits, and not mere cultivators** who work on farms.
 - **According to the agricultural census (2015-16)**, of the **73.2%** of rural women **engaged in farming, only 12.8% own land**.
- **Recognize Women's Contribution: Inclusive approaches in [agricultural policy](#)** implementation are required to recognize the presence and contribution of women in the sector.
 - In addition, better extension services and **training programmes** aimed at women can address gender disparity.

- **Gender Budgeting:** [Gender sensitive formulation of legislation](#), programmes and schemes, allocation of resources can be a powerful tool for achieving **gender mainstreaming** so as to **ensure that benefits of development reach women as much as men.**
- **Inclusion of Local Womens at Planning Stage: Mainstreaming women's role in India's agriculture sector,** upcoming developmental projects and action plans should include women in its planning stages.
 - Women working in farms are more **aware of their village's geography and [land topography](#)** and it **can also introduce an equity and inclusivity lens to planning.**

What are the Recent Government Initiatives Related to Women Empowerment and Agriculture?

- **Rashtriya Mahila Kisan Diwas**
- **National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)**
- [Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana](#)
- [Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana \(MKSP\)](#)

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the impacts of feminization of agriculture on women. How Women's Participation in Natural Farming can be a Win-Win Situation?