**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.

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**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’s 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 Women 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?

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