



Empowering Women in Agriculture

For Prelims: [Periodic Labour Force Survey \(PLFS\)](#), [Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana](#), [Kisan Credit Cards](#), [Tea](#), [Coffee](#), [Gram Panchayats](#), [Cooperatives](#), [Farmer Producer Organizations](#), [BHASHINI](#), [Digital Sakhi](#), [e-NAM](#).

For Mains: Status of Feminisation of Indian Agriculture, Challenges in Women's Agricultural Empowerment, Systemic Barriers to Women's Progress, Government Initiatives for Women Farmers, Strategies for Future Empowerment.

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

As per the [Periodic Labour Force Survey \(PLFS\) 2023-24](#), women's participation in agriculture has **increased significantly**, however, **nearly half** of them continue to remain **unpaid**, reflecting **deep-rooted gender disparities** in farm employment.

What is the Status of Women in Agriculture Across India?

- **Feminisation of Agriculture:** Women now make up over **42%** of India's agricultural workforce, a **135% increase** in the past decade. **Two out of three rural women** work in agriculture.
- **Prevalence of Unpaid Work:** Nearly **half of women in agriculture** are **unpaid family workers**, rising from **23.6 million to 59.1 million** over eight years (2017-18 to 2024-25).
- **Regional Concentration:** In states like **Bihar** and **Uttar Pradesh**, more than **80% of women workers** are in agriculture, however, over **half remain unpaid**.
- **Government Support:** [Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana](#), [Kisan Credit Cards](#), and **Self-Help Groups** collectively empower **women farmers** through **skill development**, **access to formal credit**, **sustainable agriculture**, and strengthened **collective bargaining**.

What Factors are Leading to Feminisation of Agriculture in India?

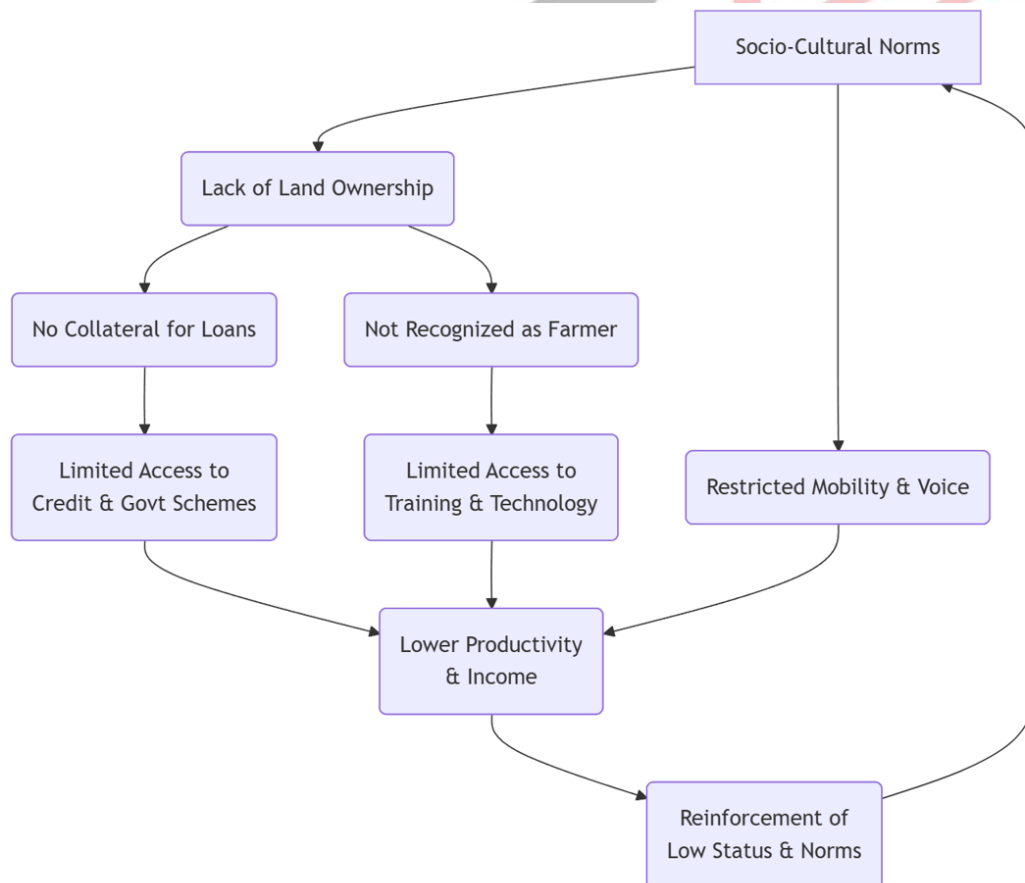
- **Male Out-Migration:** Men are **migrating to cities** or shifting to more **lucrative rural jobs** (construction, services, transport, government), leaving **women to manage and work on family farms**.
- **Growth of the Contract Farming:** Sectors like **floriculture**, [horticulture](#), and [tea/coffee](#) plantations prefer **women for labor-intensive tasks**, viewing them as **reliable, skilled**, and willing to accept **lower wages**.
- **Patriarchal Norms:** Society expects **women to handle home and light farm work**, treating their **farm labor** as part of **household duties** or **assisting men**.
- **Limited Alternative Opportunities:** **Lower literacy**, **restricted mobility**, and **social norms** limit **women's non-farm employment**, making **agriculture** one of the

few **acceptable** and **accessible livelihoods** in **rural areas**.

What are the Systemic Barriers Limiting Women's Progress in Agriculture?

Mnemonic: WOMEN

- **W - Wage Discrimination:** Women in India earn **20-30% less** than men, highlighting **gender wage gaps** and **economic inequality**, which limit **economic empowerment**.
- **O - Omission from Decision-Making:** Agricultural extension officers are predominantly **male**, excluding **women** from knowledge on **seeds, pesticides, and sustainable practices**, while their opinions are often overlooked in [Gram Panchayats](#) and **farmer cooperatives**.
- **M - Machinery and Tool Mismatch:** Farm machinery such as **tractors, harvesters, and threshers** is designed for **male physiques**, while **women** often lack the **strength, training, or financial means** to operate or access it.
- **E - Entrenched Domestic Double Burden:** **Restricted mobility** and **time poverty** from **domestic chores**, and **childcare** limit **women's access** to **markets, skill development**, and **community participation**.
- **N - Negation of Land and Identity Rights:** Women own only **13-14% of land holdings**, and without **land titles**, they are seen as **cultivators** rather than **farmers**, limiting access to **credit, government schemes, and independent decision-making**.



What Measures can Effectively Ensure the Empowerment of Women Farmers in India?

Mnemonic: GROW

- **G - Guarantee Market Access:** [Free Trade Agreement \(FTAs\)](#) like the one with the **UK**,

expected to raise **agricultural exports** by 20%, should focus on **women-intensive sectors** such as **tea, spices, and dairy**, and support **women** in exporting **premium products** like **organic foods** and **GI-tagged goods**, using their **traditional knowledge**.

- **R - Resource Rights and Reforms:** Promote **joint or individual land ownership** for **women** to enhance access to **credit, insurance, and government support**, and systematically scale proven **women-led Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)** and **SHGs** to achieve **economies of scale**.
- **O - Open Digital Gateways:** Scale up **digital platforms** like **e-NAM**, promote **voice-first AI** like **BHASHINI**, **Jugalbandi**, and **Digital Sakhi** for **digital and financial literacy**.
- **W - Well-being and Social Support:** Provide **creche facilities near farms, water supply, and clean energy** to reduce **women's time poverty**, while using **media campaigns** and **awards** to brand **women farmers** as role models.

Conclusion

To harness the potential of **feminising agriculture**, India must transition from recognizing **women's labor** to empowering them as **economic agents**. This requires dismantling **systemic barriers** like **land rights denial** and **wage gaps**, while actively promoting their access to **technology, markets, and decision-making roles** for **inclusive growth**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. "The feminisation of agriculture in India has reinforced existing inequities rather than empowering women." Critically examine this statement and suggest measures for a gender-inclusive agricultural growth model.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is Feminisation of Agriculture?

Ans: The **feminisation of agriculture** refers to the increasing **participation of women** in **agricultural labor** due to the **migration of men** to **non-farm jobs**.

2. What is the current share of women in India's agricultural workforce?

Ans: Women now constitute over **42%** of India's agricultural workforce, marking a **135% increase** in the past decade.

3. Which factors are driving the feminisation of agriculture in India?

Ans: **Male out-migration, growth of contract farming, patriarchal norms, and limited non-farm opportunities** for women are key drivers.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q. With reference to the circumstances in Indian agriculture, the concept of "Conservation Agriculture" assumes significance. Which of the following fall under the Conservation Agriculture? (2018)

1. Avoiding the monoculture practices
2. Adopting minimum tillage.
3. Avoiding the cultivation of plantation crops
4. Using crop residues to cover soil surface
5. Adopting spatial and temporal crop sequencing/crop rotations

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1, 3 and 4
- (b) 2, 3, 4 and 5
- (c) 2, 4 and 5
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 5

Ans: (c)

Mains:

Q. Discuss the various economic and socio-cultural forces that are driving increasing feminization of agriculture in India. (2014)

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/empowering-women-in-agriculture>

