



CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION IN PAKISTAN

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INTRODUCTION

The predominance of agriculture in the economy indicates that agricultural growth is a critical driver of economic growth, employment, and poverty reduction, given its linkages with the other sectors. Pakistan, an agrarian economy, heavily relies on agriculture for its sustenance and economic growth. Agriculture Sector contributes 24 percent in GDP and 37.4 percent in employment providing employment opportunities, and ensures food security for the nation.

Historically, women have been indispensable to this sector, toiling tirelessly alongside men in cultivating the land, tending to livestock, and ensuring the transformation of raw produce into consumable goods.

Despite their crucial role in agriculture, women's contributions have often been overlooked and sidelined in development discussions and policymaking. This research endeavors to highlight the critical role of women in agricultural production in Pakistan. By delving into the complexities of women's involvement, challenges, and potential, this study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the sector and to advocate for policies that empower women as agents of agricultural transformation.

Historically, women have been the backbone of agricultural societies. They were integral to food production, processing, and preservation. Their roles extended beyond mere labor and often included deep knowledge of plant cycles, soil conditions, and animal husbandry.

- **Gatherers and cultivators:** In early human societies, women were primarily responsible for gathering wild plants and later, cultivating crops.
- **Food processors:** They transformed raw produce into consumable products, developing skills in preservation techniques like drying, pickling, and fermentation.
- **Caretakers of livestock:** Women often managed the care of domestic animals, ensuring their health and productivity.
- **Knowledge keepers:** They were custodians of traditional agricultural knowledge, passing it down through generations.
- **Primary producers:** In many developing countries, women are the primary producers of food for their families and communities. They are involved in various aspects of agriculture, from cultivation to post-harvest activities.

EXISTING ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR OF PAKISTAN

- 1) **Rice Cultivation:** Punjab, the breadbasket of Pakistan, is renowned for its extensive rice cultivation. Women in Punjab are deeply entrenched in the rice cultivation process,

participating in various stages from seedbed preparation to harvesting. Their involvement is particularly pronounced during the labor-intensive tasks of rice transplanting, where their dexterity and patience are invaluable. Despite the arduous nature of this work, women's contributions are often undervalued and undercompensated. Beyond transplanting, women are engaged in a wide range of activities, including:

- Seedbed preparation: Assisting in land leveling and preparing the fields for sowing.
- Weeding: Removing unwanted plants from the rice fields.
- Fertilizer application: Contributing to crop nutrition management.
- Harvesting: Participating in cutting, bundling, and threshing rice.
- Post-harvest activities: Engaging in drying, cleaning, and milling of rice.

2) Livestock Rearing: Women in Balochistan are deeply involved in various aspects of livestock rearing, contributing significantly to household food security and income generation. Their responsibilities encompass:

- Animal husbandry: Caring for young animals, providing feed and administering traditional remedies.
- Milk production and processing: Milking animals, producing dairy products like yogurt, butter, and cheese.
- Animal health: Recognizing common diseases and providing initial care.
- Poultry management: Raising chickens for eggs and meat.
- Livestock products: Selling milk, eggs, and other livestock products in local markets.

While livestock rearing and rice cultivation are prominent areas of women's involvement in agriculture, their contributions extend far beyond these sectors. Women play crucial roles in various agricultural domains, often undertaking tasks that are critical for the overall productivity and sustainability of the farm.

3) Crop Production:

- Wheat Cultivation: As the staple food crop, wheat cultivation is a major agricultural activity in Pakistan. Women's involvement is substantial, particularly in tasks like sowing, weeding, harvesting, and post-harvest activities.
- Fruit and Vegetable Production: Pakistan boasts a diverse range of fruits and vegetables. Women are crucial in their cultivation, harvesting, and processing. For instance, in regions like Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women are involved in the production of mangoes, citrus fruits, tomatoes, and chilies.

- **Cash Crop Production:** Cotton, sugarcane, and tobacco are significant cash crops in Pakistan. Women contribute to their cultivation, harvesting, and post-harvest processes. However, their involvement often involves more labor-intensive tasks and lower wages compared to men.

4) Post-Harvest Activities:

- **Food Processing:** Women excel in traditional food preservation techniques, turning agricultural produce into value-added products. This includes pickling, drying, making jams, and preserving dairy products.
- **Value Addition:** Transforming raw agricultural products into higher-value items is a key area where women contribute. This involves activities like producing ghee, honey, and various handicrafts using agricultural byproducts.

5) Agricultural Labor:

- **Seasonal Labor:** The demand for agricultural labor fluctuates seasonally. Women form a significant portion of this workforce, especially during peak periods like planting and harvesting. Cotton is a crucial cash crop for Pakistan, significantly contributing to the country's economy through textile production and exports. The labor-intensive nature of cotton picking makes it highly dependent on manual labor, with a strikingly high reliance on female workers. Multiple studies and reports have documented the predominant role that women play in this sector, highlighting both their contributions and the challenges they face. A study by the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC) underscores that women constitute approximately 99% of the workforce in cotton picking. This reliance is rooted in traditional gender roles, where women are often seen as more efficient in handling tasks like picking cotton bolls. The task requires patience, dexterity, and the ability to work in harsh conditions, qualities often associated with female labor in rural areas of Pakistan (PCCC, 2015). According to a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the involvement of female labor in cotton picking is not only crucial for the agricultural sector but also for the economic empowerment of women in rural communities. Their participation provides a significant source of income for their households. However, the report also highlights that these women are often underpaid and overworked, with limited access to basic rights and protections (FAO, 2017). Research conducted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) points out the numerous health risks associated with cotton picking, including exposure to pesticides, long hours under extreme weather conditions, and the physical strain of repetitive movements. Women, who predominantly perform these tasks, often do so without adequate safety measures or health care, leading to chronic health issues (ILO, 2018).

- **Wage Labor:** In many regions, women work as agricultural laborers on other people's farms, contributing to their livelihoods.

6) Horticulture and Gardening

- **Home Gardening:** Women play a pivotal role in home gardening, providing supplementary nutrition and income for their families. Rural women in Pakistan are heavily involved in kitchen gardening activities. According to a study by the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC), kitchen gardening is a common practice among rural households, where women manage small plots of land to grow vegetables and herbs for household consumption. This activity not only contributes to food security but also provides a supplementary income source when excess produce is sold in local markets (PARC, 2018).
- **Nursery Management:** In some areas, women are involved in raising seedlings for various crops, contributing to the overall agricultural value chain.

CASE STUDIES: WOMEN'S IMPACT ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY

Case Study 1: Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a prime example of how increased women's participation has led to significant improvements in agricultural productivity. The country has witnessed a remarkable transformation in its agricultural sector, with women playing a pivotal role.

Microcredit and women's empowerment: Programs like the Grameen Bank have empowered rural women by providing them with microcredit. This has enabled them to invest in agriculture, purchase inputs, and adopt improved technologies.

Key Ways Grameen Bank Empowered Women:

- **Access to Credit:** The bank provided small, collateral-free loans to women, traditionally excluded from the formal banking system. This financial access enabled them to start small businesses, often in agriculture or related sectors.
- **Group Lending:** Grameen Bank's group lending model fostered solidarity among women borrowers. This peer pressure ensured repayment and encouraged entrepreneurship.
- **Economic Independence:** By providing financial resources and support, the bank helped women become economically independent, enhancing their decision-making power within households.

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- **Social Empowerment:** Grameen Bank's focus on women's empowerment went beyond finance. It emphasized social and personal development, building women's confidence and leadership skills.
 - **Impact on Agriculture:** While not exclusively focused on agriculture, the loans provided by Grameen Bank often fueled investments in agricultural activities. Women used the funds to purchase livestock, farm equipment, or seeds, leading to increased agricultural productivity and income.

Case Study 2: Kenya

In Kenya, women are key players in the agricultural sector, particularly in small-scale farming. Their contributions have had a positive impact on food security and livelihoods.

- **Horticulture:** Women have excelled in horticulture, cultivating fruits and vegetables for both subsistence and commercial purposes. Their knowledge of local markets and consumer preferences has led to successful farming enterprises.
- **Conservation agriculture:** Women have been at the forefront of adopting conservation agriculture practices, which have improved soil health, water retention, and crop yields.
- **Extension services:** Women-led extension programs have been effective in disseminating agricultural knowledge and promoting best practices among other women farmers.
- **Farmer Field Schools (FFS)** have proven to be an effective model for increasing agricultural productivity and sustainability in Kenya. Studies show that women who participate in FFS programs gain crucial knowledge about crop management, pest control, and soil conservation techniques. This has led to increased crop yields, improved food security, and enhanced household incomes (Davis et al., 2012).

Case Study 3: India

India's agricultural sector is heavily reliant on women's labor. Their contributions have been instrumental in ensuring food security and rural livelihoods.

- **Dairy farming:** Women's involvement in dairy farming has led to increased milk production and improved incomes for dairy farming households.
- **Agricultural extension:** Women extension workers have been successful in reaching out to other women farmers and promoting technology adoption.
- **Self-help groups:** Women's self-help groups have played a crucial role in accessing credit, markets, and agricultural inputs. SHGs are informal associations of people who come together to find ways to improve their living conditions. SHGs have played a crucial role

in empowering rural women and contributing to poverty alleviation in India. They have been instrumental in:

- *Financial inclusion: Providing access to credit for women who are traditionally excluded from formal banking systems.*
- *Income generation: Enabling women to start small businesses and generate income for their families.*
- *Savings mobilization: Encouraging a savings culture among women, leading to financial security.*
- *Social empowerment: Building women's confidence and leadership skills.*
- *Community development: Addressing issues like health, education, and sanitation at the community level.*

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES TO EMPOWER WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE IN PAKISTAN

Recognizing the importance of women's role in agriculture, the Pakistani government and various organizations have initiated several programs to empower women and enhance their contributions:

- **Women-specific agricultural extension services:** Providing targeted training and support to women farmers.
- **Microfinance initiatives:** Offering credit facilities to women to invest in agriculture.
- **Land reforms:** Promoting women's land ownership rights.
- **Capacity building:** Empowering women with leadership and management skills.
- **Awareness campaigns:** Promoting gender equality and women's rights in agriculture.
- **Support for women-led cooperatives:** Fostering collective action and economic empowerment.



Some of the notable programs include:

Government Initiatives

- **Benazir Income Support Program (BISP):** While primarily a social safety net, BISP has indirectly empowered women by providing financial resources, which can be invested in agricultural activities.
- **Women Development Department (WDD):** This department focuses on women's empowerment and has undertaken various initiatives to improve the lives of rural women, including those involved in agriculture.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

- In 2013 and 2014, CABI initiated farmer training activities specifically targeting women in two areas of the country: Gilgit-Baltistan in the high north, and southern Punjab in the flatter central part of Pakistan. In the north, CABI worked with a local development project to set up farmer field schools for both men and women; these focused on production of tomatoes and dairy livestock. In southern Punjab, CABI's Skills for Farms project ran a series of three-month, village-based training courses in kitchen gardening and grain storage, targeting women between 16 and 35 years old. In each case, the training courses were designed to focus on household farming activities that are typically the responsibility of women.
- **Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP):** AKRSP has been actively involved in empowering women through agricultural development projects, focusing on areas like livestock, horticulture, and value addition.
- **The Humdard Foundation:** This organization has implemented several programs to improve the livelihoods of rural women, including those engaged in agriculture.
- **Save the Children:** This international NGO has been working in Pakistan to empower women through education, health, and economic opportunities, including agriculture.
- **National Rural Support Program (NRSP):** Through its community-based organizations, NRSP has been instrumental in promoting women's participation in agriculture and providing them with access to credit, training, and markets.

Specific Programs

- **Women Farmer Field Schools:** These programs provide women with practical agricultural training and skills development.
- **Microfinance for Women:** Several microfinance institutions offer credit facilities to women farmers, enabling them to invest in their agricultural enterprises.

- **Technology Transfer:** Programs focused on transferring modern agricultural technologies to women farmers to enhance productivity.
- **Market Access Initiatives:** Helping women farmers connect to markets for their agricultural products.

To further empower women in agriculture, Pakistan needs to:

- Increase investment in gender-responsive agriculture programs.
- Strengthen women's access to land and other productive resources.
- Enhance financial inclusion for women farmers.
- Promote gender-sensitive agricultural policies.
- Strengthen women's cooperatives and farmer organizations.

ACHIEVING AGRICULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY DEPENDS ON GENDER EQUALITY

Addressing gender inequality is essential to achieving sustainability in agriculture. High levels of inequality make it harder to increase productivity and reduce poverty and hunger. Countries where incomes are highly unequal have, on average, lower levels of land productivity and are more prone to food insecurity. These inequities are slowing many countries' progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2) to "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture" by 2030. Gender inequality undermines progress toward sustainable agricultural development across multiple dimensions.

Women and girls make almost half of the agricultural workforce in developing countries, and that workforce is typically large. For example, over 60% of all employed women in Africa south of the Sahara work in agriculture. Women in agriculture often encounter unique challenges that are not as prevalent among their male counterparts, including limited access to training, machinery, and emerging technologies. In highly unequal countries, the majority of the farming population, particularly women, lacks the economic resources and capacity to invest in appropriate agricultural technologies, as well as the knowledge to implement improved agricultural practices. Because of the disparity in access, women farmers face an increasing knowledge gap.

Women also have difficulty in access to land ownership, agriculture extension services, and finance. Agricultural credit, for instance, is critical for farmers to manage the seasonality of agricultural income and expenditures, and to invest in technologies and long-term farm improvements.

What are the possible solutions? Various tools are available to help reduce inequalities between income groups and between genders. One is strengthening land tenure rights among poor rural farmers. This element is critical to addressing the first layer of inequality.

Another approach is to develop innovative strategies to improve access to credit and agricultural services for marginalized farm populations. This requires strategic investment in public goods and programs that benefit marginalized populations. These include rural infrastructure, education and health services and programs such as credit, subsidized inputs, information and extension.

Monitoring progress and empowerment through tools such as IFPRI's project-level Women's Empowerment in Agricultural Index (pro-WEAI) allows countries to document and adjust policy on the various facets of livelihood activities, the sale or use of outputs, the use of income, and borrowing from financial services.

Ensuring the benefits of such investments reach the groups that need them will require tailored services and targeted delivery, including gender sensitive and pro-marginalized targeting. This will in turn support better, more sustainable agriculture—and in the end, a better landscape for all.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN AGRICULTURE

Promoting gender equality and women's leadership in agriculture is crucial for achieving sustainable development and food security. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, several best practices have emerged.

1) Policy and Legislative Framework

- **Gender-responsive policies:** Countries like Rwanda have implemented gender-responsive agricultural policies, allocating specific budgets for women farmers. This approach has led to increased access to resources and services for women.
- **Land reform:** Countries such as South Africa have undertaken land reform initiatives to address historical gender inequalities in land ownership. This has empowered women farmers and increased their agricultural productivity.

2) Access to Resources

- **Financial inclusion:** Programs like Grameen Bank in Bangladesh have successfully provided microcredit to women farmers, enabling them to invest in their farms and increase production.

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- Technology transfer: Kenya has invested in Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) to disseminate agricultural information to women farmers, improving their access to knowledge and best practices.

3) Education and Skill Development

- Agricultural training: India's National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) has focused on skill development for rural women, including agricultural training, leading to increased farm incomes.
- Leadership development: Programs like the African Women in Agricultural Leadership (AWAL) initiative have empowered women to take on leadership roles in the agricultural sector.

4) Institutional Strengthening

- Women's cooperatives: Countries like Tanzania have supported the formation of women's cooperatives, enabling collective action and access to markets.
- Gender audits: Conducting gender audits of agricultural institutions can identify gender gaps and inform targeted interventions.

5) Challenging Gender Norms

- Awareness raising: Campaigns like those in Nepal to challenge gender stereotypes related to agriculture have been effective in changing social norms.
- Men as allies: Involving men as partners in promoting gender equality has been successful in some countries, such as Uganda.

ROLE OF FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN EMPOWERING WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Financial institutions play a crucial role in empowering women in the agriculture sector. By providing access to credit, financial services, and knowledge, they can significantly contribute to women's economic independence and agricultural productivity.

Key Roles of Financial Institutions

1. Credit Access:

- Offering tailored financial products like microloans, group loans, and agricultural credit to meet the specific needs of women farmers.

- Reducing barriers to credit access by simplifying loan application processes and offering flexible repayment options.

2. Financial Literacy:

- Providing financial literacy training to women to help them manage their finances effectively and make informed decisions.
- Building awareness about savings, investment, and risk management.

3. Insurance Products:

- Developing insurance products that address the specific risks faced by women farmers, such as crop failure, livestock loss, and natural disasters.

4. Digital Financial Services:

- Promoting digital financial services to enhance financial inclusion and provide convenient access to banking services.

5. Partnerships:

- Collaborating with government agencies, NGOs, and cooperatives to reach a wider range of women farmers.
- Supporting women's self-help groups and farmer producer organizations.

ZTBL's INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

- **Khawateen Rozgar Scheme & Financing Scheme for Women Empowerment in Garments Sector** are specially designed for women. In addition to these, to reduce the gender gap in financial inclusion, **ZTBL Bakht Account** has been launched exclusively for women, which offers option of both current & saving account. However, all operative schemes of the Bank are equally available for the women customers as well.
- ZTBL is providing digitized loan facility to the women. The customers only have to visit the branch and their land record will be retrieved digitally under this solution and already provided revenue documents can be verified along with the loan application available on Bank's website. To reduce the branch visits of customers, loan acceptance and rejection steps will be conveyed to them through SMS. In addition to this, a mobile tablet application has also been launched for MCOs which will enable the customer base to have easy and at door step access to credit facility which is very feasible for women customers.

Other steps are being taken from time to time for making the loan procedures easy for customers including women.

- More than 240 female employees have been designated as " **Women's Champions**". Personalized Desk Name Plates engraved with " WOMAN CHAMPION" along with ZTBL logo have been provided to designated Women Champions as "Identifier of woman champion" at the branches by customers.

Women attending ZTBL Zarai Baithak in Sindh:



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- Nepal's campaigns on gender equality in agriculture & Uganda's.
