

Organic Farming and Women

Raksha

Assistant Professor,

Siddharth University Siddharth Nagar, Kapilvastu

Email-ID: raksha.sukpv@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

It is much known fact that women are the part and parcel of the agriculture occupation and we have already seen the feminization of agriculture. With the introduction of newer technologies in agriculture, its reach to women is also no matter of question. Although the extent of reach of technologies and its adoption and utilization with special reference to women is a major concern. Involvement of women in organic farming is also not a new concept as it is a proven fact that women are conserver and preserver of the traditional knowledge including agriculture. With the promotion of organic/natural farming, role of women also increased in development of the family, home and economy. The present paper is review based and major focus is on how women are involved in organic or natural farming and where they are lacking. Women can earn a lot with the organic farming and its various products development. Here, it is also important to note that how organic/natural farming is affecting the women, their overall development and most important the sustainability.

Key words: Women, organic farming, natural farming, development and empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Gender relationships are fundamental worldwide to the way farm work is organised, the way assets such as land, labour, seeds and machinery are managed, and to farm decision-making. Given this, the lack of adequate attention to gender issues within the organic and sustainable farming movements is worrying. The revolutionary potential of sustainable approaches to farming to reshape our food systems, and the way humans interact with those systems, will not be realized unless there is a concerted effort by committed sustainable farmers and consumers to work towards gender equality. Although women working in organic sustainable production generally call themselves farmers, unlike women in conventional farming who tend to consider themselves 'farmwives', it is interesting to note that the gender division of labour per se is not being challenged. Women's work on both sustainable and conventional farms is similar. It is labour intensive, largely unmechanised, and rarely involves the application of inorganic chemicals. Organic and sustainable farming has the potential to create new structures that actively work towards achieving women's empowerment and protecting the use of indigenous knowledge. This is a challenge for the organic movement, particularly certified organic, which is predominately driven and supported by political, cultural, economic and social structures that are located within western ideologies and practices. Part of the challenge is to identify behaviour that is impeding women's empowerment in organic agriculture. This may include a dominance of western-

based thinking with regard to women's empowerment and possible interventions. Culturally appropriate solutions need to be created by communities at the local level to address issues of structure.

WHAT IS ORGANIC AGRICULTURE?

- Organic Agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects.
- Organic Agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved. Wettasinha (in Frost 2003) remarks that 'Organic Agriculture is not simply agriculture without chemicals. (It is) an ecologically sound, socially just, economically viable, and therefore sustainable form of agriculture. [It] strives to maintain the ecological balance in the farming system and to utilise the resource base in a sustainable manner, whilst paying keen attention to socio-economic aspects of production. Nutrient recycling, optimal use of available resources, diversification, site specificity are important ecological aspects of organic agriculture. Socio-economic aspects such as food security, fair trade, capacity building etc are no less important.'
- Thus, organic and other forms of sustainable agriculture are the site of multiple values; the realisation of these values is certain to be problematic and conflictual given the fact that trade-offs will have to be made between values, and given the great variety of actors in the process.

WOMEN'S PLAY IN ORGANIC CULTIVATION

The women play a major and important role in organic farming development and allied fields including in the main agricultural production like horticulture, livestock, agro/ social forestry, postharvest operations, fisheries, etc. The environment and extent of women's involvement in organic agriculture, no doubt, differ obviously from region to region. Even within a region, their involvement varies widely among different farming systems, ecological sub-zones, castes, classes and stages in the family cycle. But regardless of these variations, there is hardly any activity in agricultural production, except plowing in which women are not actively involved. Several studies on women in organic farming conducted in India and other developing and underdeveloped countries all point to the conclusion that women contribute far more to agricultural production than has generally been approved

REVIEWS ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIC CULTIVATION

Khana (2007) expressed his views that the principle of organic cultivation is attracting world over farmers due to its various benefits over modern agricultural practices. Sodjinouet *al.*, (2015) argued that there are immense challenges like sustaining crop production, productivity without damaging the resources and environment which a farming situation faces but this problem can be overcome by several ways and the first and foremost way is organic farming. We know that organic farming system in India is not new and is being followed from ancient time. It is a way of farming system which principally aimed at cultivating the land and raising crops in such a way, as to keep the soil alive and in good health by use of organic wastes (crop, animal and farm wastes, aquatic wastes) and other biological materials along with beneficial microbes (biofertilizers) to release nutrients to crops for increased sustainable production in an eco-friendly pollution free environment (Sharma and Kaur, 2013). Nagnuret *al.*, (2012) said that women are the role player in

Indian agriculture which is a well-known fact. In India, agriculture is a joint contribution both of male and female with family members. Women are said to contribute 40 percent of their efforts towards farming and 60 per cent for food preparation. Reddy (2010), wrote that rural farm women are extensively involved in agricultural activities and the extent of their involvement differs with the variations in agro-production systems. In all farm production, women’s average contribution is estimated at 55 percent to 66 percent of the total labour. Women are the major stakeholders in organic agriculture, precisely because they are the worst victims of chemical farming.

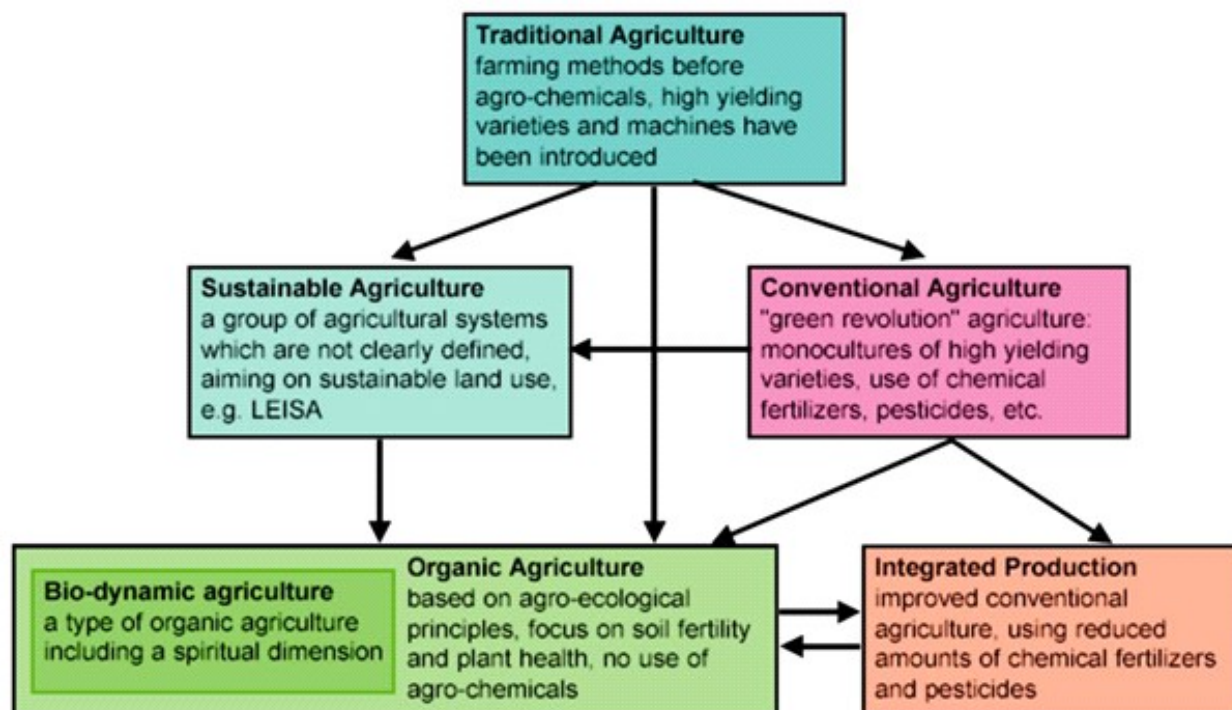


Figure-1 : Definition Of Some Farming Systems :

This Shows An Attempt To Distinguish Between Some Commonly Used Terms Of Agricultural Systems (Arrow Show How They Can Transform From One Type Into Another)

Below is the figure showing the different types of agriculture with its main feature. No doubt, with the advancement and needs, these system arised or modified to support the farming family.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND ALLIED SECTORS

Women play an important role in allied activities as well; they undertake a wide range of activities related to livestock production, vegetable cultivation, fish processing, and dairy production and maintenance. Beyond the farm, women play a significant role in land and water management⁶ and are most often the collectors of water, firewood, and fodder. Given the extensive participation of women in all aspects of agricultural and allied activities, the mainstreaming of the gender into the agriculture sector is a key strategy not only for the promotion of equality between men and women but also for sustainable agriculture and rural development.

Providing livelihood and employment to 44 per cent of the workforce in 2018 (World Bank 2019a) and contributing about 17.2 per cent of gross value added in 2017/18 (MoAFW 2018), the agriculture sector remains fundamental for economic growth, poverty alleviation, and environmental sustainability, wherein

rural women contribute significantly in three different ways depending on the socio-economic status of their family. They contribute as paid labourers, unpaid labourers— doing labour on their own/family-owned land, and managers/supervisors in agricultural production and post-harvest operations. Besides they also play an important role in the maintenance of natural processes and ecosystem services and adopt an integrated perspective to farming system that emphasizes on sustainable agricultural practices and resource-use efficiency. This further gets bolstered by their ability to respond to the barriers to farming with innovative strategies that emphasize smaller farm scales, diversified high value and value added products and enterprises, unique marketing strategies, and sustainable practices (Sachs, Barbercheck, Brasier, *et al.* 2016).

The role of women in agriculture and in rural labour markets varies between regions and different agro-climatic zones. The analysis of gender-wise changes in labour-force participation and workforce distribution across sectors shows a disproportionate number of women who are dependent on land: 73 per cent of all rural female workers and 55 per cent of all rural male workers are in agriculture (Table 1). However, in terms of earnings from employment, it is observed that women workers, in both rural and urban areas, continue to receive lower wages than men. Earnings of a male regular wage/salaried employee vis-à-vis a female regular wage/salaried employee are higher by 1.4–1.7 times in rural areas and 1.2–1.3 times in urban areas (MoSPI 2019). Further, in the agriculture sector, the Census of India data reveal that the proportion of women in agriculture declined from 39 per cent in 2001 to 37 per cent in 2011 and the percentage of women cultivators within female agricultural workers has reduced from 46 per cent in 2001 to 37 per cent in 2011 (Table 2).

The pattern of agricultural holdings reflects a predominance of small and marginal farmers in the agriculture sector. Although women play a significant role in agriculture, they own only about 13.9 per cent of the operational holdings, with a large proportion of these (over 27 per cent) in the marginal and small category (Agriculture Census 2015–16). Since small and marginal farmers, in particular women farmers, are more vulnerable to shocks and poverty, it is imperative to focus on resource efficiency in smallholder farming to meet the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets and also to attain sustainability in agriculture (Table 3).

The social and cultural aspects around agriculture have been witnessing changing trends. Women's role has been growing with the 'feminization of agriculture' as the men are migrating to urban areas in search of productive employment, leaving women to manage the farmlands. Other factors include rise of women-headed households and growth in the production of cash crops which are labour intensive and primarily managed by women. While the women are now de-facto playing multiple roles in managing farm and non-farm activities, particularly in the dryland areas, their typical work continues to be limited to less skilled jobs, such as sowing, transplanting, weeding, and harvesting and rearing livestock among other things that fall within the broad framework of domestic life. Participation of women as unpaid subsistence labour in agricultural work is also quite common. Though the number of women's tasks, both in farm and in nonfarm activities, is increasing, it is often treated as an extension of their household work which in turn becomes a dual burden of domestic responsibilities.

SOME FACTS ON AGRICULTURE AND WOMEN

Following are the tables which show some very interesting information on women in agriculture. The data is taken from

Table : 1 Gender wise percentage distribution of workers across sectors in rural areas

Sectors	1999-200*		2004-05*		2011-12*		2017-18**	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Agriculture	71.4	85.4	66.5	83.3	59.4	74.9	55	73.2
Mining and quarrying	0.6	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.2
Manufacturing	7.3	7.6	7.9	8.4	8.1	9.8	7.7	8.1
Construction	4.5	1.1	6.8	1.5	13	6.6	14.5	5.3
Trade, hotel & restaurant	6.8	2	8.3	2.5	8	3	9.2	4
Other services	9.4	3.6	9.9	4	11	5.4	13.1	9.2

Source: NSS rounds*, MoSPI, 2019**

Table: 2 Percentage between 2001 and 2011 of cultivators and agriculture labourers (men and women)

Category of workers	2001		2011	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Cultivators	67.1	32.9	69.7	30.3
Agriculture labourers	53.7	46.3	57.3	42.6
Cultivator's percentage within M/F	6	46	50	37

Source: Census data 2001 and 2011

Table: 3 Operational land holdings operated by women

Different size groups	2005-06 (%)	2010-11(%)	2015-16*(%)
Marginal(below 1.00 ha)	12.6	13.6	14.6
Small (1-2 ha)	11.1	12.2	13.3
Semi-medium (2-4 ha)	9.6	10.5	11.5
Medium (4-10 ha)	7.8	8.5	9.6
Large (10 ha and above)	6	6.8	7.7
All size groups	11.7	12.8	13.9

Table: 4 The numbers and areas of operational land holdings operated by women in major dryland/rainfed agricultural regions in India (in percentage)

States	Marginal (<1 ha)		Small (1-2 ha)		Semi-medium (2-4 ha)		Medium (4-10 ha)		Large (>10 ha)		All size groups	
	No	Area	No	Area	No	Area	No	No	No	Area	No	Area
Gujarat	39.6	11.6	30.6	24.3	20.4	31	8.8	27.4	0.8	5.7	16.5	15.9
MP	56.2	20.9	26.2	28.9	12.9	27	4.5	19.8	0.3	3.3	11.9	9.6
Rajasthan	49.5	10.7	20.8	13.7	15	19.6	11.7	33.2	3	22.8	10.1	7.9
Chhattisgarh	69.1	27.8	18.4	26	9.2	24.4	2.9	16.5	0.4	5.4	13.8	11.1
UP	86.8	53.6	9.3	23	3.2	15.5	0.7	7	0.1	0.8	7.7	5.8
Tamilnadu	81.3	42.1	12.7	26.4	4.7	18.7	1.2	9.7	0.1	3.1	19.7	17.4
AP	72.3	34.6	18.5	30.6	7.6	22.9	1.5	9.7	0.1	2.2	30.1	27.2
Telangana	65.1	31.3	24.4	34.9	8.7	22.8	1.7	9.3	0.1	1.6	23	22.4
Maharashtra	53.9	20.2	28.8	31.8	13.5	28.4	3.5	15.8	0.3	3.9	15.5	14.1

Source: MoAFW, 2019

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES AFFECTS WOMEN TO ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES IN ORGANIC FARMING

1. Women farmers Literacy rate
2. Gender Division of Labor in India
3. Property Ownership Rights of Indian Women
4. Women perform all un-mechanized agricultural tasks and perform multiple tasks
5. Lack of market intelligence
6. Women have little control over decision making process
7. Women have limited access to use of productive resources.
8. Rural Credit for agriculture
9. Time allocation for farming

OPPORTUNITIES IN ORGANIC FARMING FOR WOMEN

1. Perceived positive impacts of organic farming
2. Improved health conditions of female farmers and their families
3. Improved food security
4. Facilitated access to seeds
5. Diversified income sources empower female farmers

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIC FARMING

1. More amenities should be given to poor rural women for land, organic agricultural and livestock extension services.
2. By providing financial powers to women farmers in accessing credit on soft terms from banks and other financial institutions for landholdings, setting up their occupation, for buying properties, and for house building etc.
3. The separate education policy for women may serve the purpose to improve women’s literacy rates.
4. The women farmers Skill empowerment training in the area of numerous operations- Organic farming, Vocational training, Field operations, Conservation of biodiversity and Nutritional biosecurity etc.
5. The women farmers must be aware of their existing rights, access to judicial relief and compensation, eliminating discrimination through legal improvements, and providing legal assistance, and counseling
6. The women must be involved in administrative bodies that have the possibility to introduce structural changes.
7. The women farmers’ development in technology by designing tools for various field operations, animal husbandry, artificial insemination, veterinary knowledge, and other income activities
8. projection of successful women farmers in organic farming, and representation of their contribution
9. The Creation of self-help groups for women farmers to their financial support, and generation of employment.
10. Minimum and equal wages should be fixed by state government for women agricultural -labors and the rates should be reviewed periodically

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