

## **WOMEN AND THE PROBLEMS RELATED TO FOOD SECURITY IN RURAL AREA**

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### **Abstract**

Food security is a fundamental human right and critical aspect of sustainable development. In the rural areas, women play a crucial role in ensuring food security for their households and communities. However, they often face unique challenges that hinder their ability to access and provide adequate nutrition to their families. Present study sheds light on the problems women encounter condemning food security in rural areas. One of the primary issues faced by women in rural areas is limited access to resources. Traditional gender roles and societal norms restrict women's access to education, employment opportunities, and decision-making processes.

Moreover, women frequently face discrimination and marginalization within the food value chain. They are often unrepresented in agricultural cooperatives, marketplaces, and decision-making bodies, further limiting their access to fair wages, markets, and information. These challenges exacerbate the food security crisis, leaving women and their families vulnerable to malnutrition and poverty. Women are responsible for half of the world's food production, and in most developing countries they produce between sixty to eighty percent of the food, but the rural women have no food security and there was no recognition for their contribution.

This article analyzes the position of women in rural India, regarding hunger and poverty, discrimination and underdevelopment, women and Food security issues, and food security measures of rural women.

**Keywords:** women, food security, rural area,

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

*“As long as women do not have the same rights in law as men, as long as the birth of a girl does not receive the same welcome as that of a boy, so long we should know that India is suffering from partial paralysis. Suppression of women is inconsistent with principles of ahimsa (non-violence)”.*

*-Mahatma Gandhi, Harijan, August 18, 1940*

In developing countries, among the poor, rural women are the poorest and more vulnerable. Empirical evidences suggest that women in rural areas are more adversely affected by poverty than men. The incidence of poverty among rural women is on the rise in most of the developing countries. The issues of gender bias and equity point to the double burden women have to bear - that on being poor and being a woman. Further strategies and programmes for development had largely overlooked the question of gender equity. Projects aiming to reduce poverty view the poor rural women as the recipient of benefits of development, instead of active participant and still poor rural women have the least access to basic needs such as food, health and education.

### **2. METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1 Objectives of Study**

The present article has been prepared on the basis of the following objectives:

1. To study of effects of hunger and poverty, discrimination and underdevelopment on rural women
2. To study the Food security issues of rural women, and
3. To study the various measures for the food security of rural women.

On the basis of these objectives present article has been prepared.

## **2.2 Hypothesis**

Women in rural areas face significant challenges related to food security and addressing these challenges can lead to improved household and community level food security outcomes.

## **2.3 Method of data collection**

Both primary and secondary sources have been collected to publish the present article. The Researcher has consulted different books Journals, magazines, newspapers presented in seminars, conferences, symposia, the resolutions of conclaves and covering women and the problems related to food security in rural area. The Researcher has consulted the debates on women and food security by UNO, other international agencies and NGO's. The Researcher has also consulted the authoritative books pertaining to history relating to women problems and challenges, apart from various Law books. Many books, articles published in journals regarding women and food security of rural women. A doctrinaire approach has been made to complete the Article.

## **3. HUNGER AND POVERTY**

Hunger, which usually follows food shortages, is caused by a complex set of events and circumstances [social, economic and political factors] that differ depending on the place and time. Although hunger has been a part of human experience for centuries and a dominant feature of life in many low-income countries, the causes of hunger and starvation are not very well understood. Our understanding of the main causes of hunger and starvation has been hampered by myths and misconceptions about the interplay between hunger and population growth, land use, farm size, technology, trade, environment and other factors.

Poverty cannot be defined simply in terms of lacking access to sufficient food. It is also closely associated with a person's lack of access to productive assets, services and markets. Without access to these, it is unlikely that production and income earning capacities can be improved on a sustainable basis. Rural poverty is related to food insecurity, access to assets, services and markets: income-earning opportunities; and the organisational and institutional means for achieving those ends.

Throughout the history and in many societies, inequalities of women and men were part and parcel of an accepted male-dominated culture. It is a complex historical process, which requires detailed study before one can conceive of a viable strategy to improve and sustain the status of women in society. One of the basic factors causing unequal share of women in development relates to the division of labour between the sexes. This division of labour has been justified on the basis of the childbearing function of women and this is biologically important for survival.

Consequently, distribution of tasks and responsibilities between men and women in a given society has mainly restricted women to the domestic sphere. Mass poverty and general backwardness has further aggravated the inequalities.

While the women's childbearing and child-rearing functions are respected in many countries, there has been very little recognition of women's actual or potential contribution to the economic, social and cultural states. The role of women within the family combined with high level of unemployment and under-employment of the population in general, has led to the unequal state of priority to men in matters of employment. It is understandable that women cannot be expected to join the army, for instance, as foot soldiers but Israel's well-known and rightfully feared *sabrahs* or women commandos have shattered the myth of man's physical superiority and thus priority for most jobs.

### **3.1 Discrimination and Underdevelopment**

It is relevant to consider some aspects of the marginalisation of the status of women in the world by having a look at the figures which are based on the documents of the United Nations. Some of the findings are:

- **Unemployment Rate:** Male unemployment rate decreased by 11% from 1984 to 1988 while that of women, unemployment rate increased by 0.5% during the same period;

- *Women in the Informal Sector:* Without legal protection or security, women depend on informal trade for their survival. In Third World countries, a high percentage of food vendors were women: in Nigeria 94%, Thailand 80%, 63% in the Philippines;
- ***Inequality in Pay:*** All over the world women earn only two-thirds of men's pay and earn less than three-quarters of the wages of men doing similar jobs. Women form a third of the world's official labour force, but are concentrated in the lowest-paid jobs and are more vulnerable to unemployment than men;
- ***Domestic Work:*** Women do almost all the world's domestic work and coupled with their additional work in the productive spheres - this means most women work a double day. Unpaid domestic work is regarded as women's work. Though it is vital work, it is invisible work, unpaid, undervalued and unrecognised. Yet, the women's contribution to society in this regard is enormous;
- ***Agriculture:*** Women grow about half of the world's food, but own hardly any land, have difficulty in obtaining credit and are overlooked by agricultural advisors and projects. In Africa, three-quarters of the agricultural work is done by women while in Asia, Latin America and the Middle-East, women comprise half of the agricultural labour force;
- ***Health:*** Women provide more health care than all health services combined and have been major beneficiaries of a new global shift in priorities towards prevention of disease and promotion of good health;
- ***Education:*** Women continue to outnumber men among the world's illiterates by about 3:2 ratio, but school enrollment boom is closing the education gap between boys and girls;
- ***Political Affairs:*** Due to poorer education, lack of confidence and greater workload, women are still under-represented in the decision-making bodies of their countries.

### **3.3 Women and Food Security Issues**

Not only do women produce and process agricultural products but they are also responsible for much of the trade in these and other goods in many parts of the third world. In many parts of the world, women continue to play an important role as rural information sources and providers of food to urban areas. This may involve food from the sea as well as from the land. Although women rarely work as fisher people they are often involved in net-making and the preparation and sale of the catch.

Women's roles and status all over the world are generally determined by social institutions and norms, religious ideologies, eco-systems and by class positions. The Indian social systems exhibit such grave disparities. Indian women are not a homogeneous group. Their traditional roles are not identical in all strata of society.

Norms and taboos governing their roles and behaviours within and outside the family, the structure of family organisations and social practices and the positions accorded to women in a community differ considerably across regions, cultures and levels of socio-economic development.

It is needless to emphasise on the significant contribution of women to agricultural production and household food security. In the process of production, handling and preparation of food, women play a multiple role throughout the sequence. They are said to be "feeding the world". Do women really feed the world? Let us consider the evidence. On a global scale, women produce more than half of all the food that is grown. In sub-Sahara Africa and the Caribbean, they produce up to 80% of basic foodstuffs. In Asia, they provide from 50 to 90% of the labour for rice cultivation.

And in Southeast Asia and the Pacific as well as Latin America, women's home gardens represent some of the most complex agricultural systems known. In countries in transition, the percentage of rural women working in agriculture ranges from about a third in Bosnia and Herzegovina to more than half in Poland. Across much of the developing world, rural women provide most of the labour for farming, from soil preparation to harvest. After the harvest, they are almost entirely responsible for operations such as storage, handling, stocking, marketing and processing.

Women in rural areas generally bear primary responsibility for the nutrition of their children, from gestation through weaning and throughout the critical period of growth. In addition, they are the

principal food producers and preparers for the rest of the family. Despite their contributions to food security, women tend to be invisible actors in development. All too often, their work is not recorded in statistics or mentioned in reports. As a result, their contribution is poorly understood and often underestimated. There are many reasons for this. Work in the household is often considered to be part of a woman's duties as wife and mother, rather than an occupation to be accounted for in both the household and the national economy.

Outside the household, a great deal of rural women labour - whether regular or seasonal - goes unpaid and is, therefore, rarely taken into account in official statistics. In most countries, women do not own the land they cultivate. Discriminatory laws and practices for inheritance of and access and ownership to land are still widespread. Land that women do own tends to consist of smaller, less valuable plots that are also frequently overlooked in statistics. Furthermore, women are usually responsible for the food crops destined for immediate consumption by the household, that is, for subsistence crops rather than cash crops. Also, when data is collected for national statistics, gender is often ignored or the data is biased in the sense that it is collected only from males, who are assumed to be the heads of households.

#### **4. FOOD SECURITY MEASURES AND THE RURAL WOMEN**

These handicaps have contributed to an increasing "faminisation" of poverty. Since the 1970s, the number of women living below the poverty line has increased by 50%, in comparison with 30% for their male counterparts. Women may feed the world today, but, given this formidable lists of obstacles placed in their path, will they be able to produce the additional food needed for a world population expected to grow by three billion in 2030.

These international agreements specified that the role of women in agriculture and food security must be emphasised, in order to create the enabling political, social and economic environment required for the eradication of hunger and poverty.

Under Commitment-I of the World Food Summit Plan of Action agenda, governments committed themselves to:

- Support and implement commitments made at the 4th World Conference on Women that a gender perspective is mainstreamed in all policies;
- Promote women's full and equal participation in the economy...including secure and equal access to and control over credit, land and water;
- Ensure that institutions provide equal access for women;
- Provide equal gender opportunities for education and training in food production, processing and marketing;
- Tailor extension and technical services to women producers and increase the number of women advisors and agents;
- Improve the collection, dissemination and use of gender-disaggregated data [which distinguishes between males and females];
- Focus research efforts on the division of labour and on income access and control within the household; and
- Gather information on women's traditional knowledge and skills in agriculture, fisheries, forestry and natural resources management.

##### **4.1 The Role of Women in Food Security**

This demonstrates that the role of women is key in agricultural production and in food security. Women are the primary farmers and producers in a large part of the world; however, their work continues to go largely unrecognized. In fact, in developing countries women comprise approximately 43% of the agricultural work force.

There are many voices defending the promotion of the rights of women and their participation in the rural world, arguing that these should be understood within the context of sustainable development.

In spite of this, women's position has barely advanced; they continue to be in charge of field work and housework in rural areas. Furthermore, due to women's limited access to training and the rapid technological changes in the sector, coupled with the devastating effects of climate change, natural disasters, or violent conflicts pose an even greater challenge with respect to leveling the playing field for women in agriculture.

Women can play an important role in food security for two principal reasons, they are efficiency and equity.

**Efficiency:** Gender is crucial from the point of view of economic efficiency. In the agricultural sector, inequalities in areas of control of and access to resources between men and women generate massive inefficiencies in production, which, if resolved, could improve food production on a worldwide level.

**Equity:** Women in rural areas have less access to financial services, production activities, technologies, and education compared to men. A focus on gender can help us reduce inequity in resource distribution, which has historically been negatively influenced by differing social roles of men and women.

Nevertheless, food security isn't just a question of availability of food, nor of the financial resources to access it. People must also have consistent access to quality, nutritious foods in order to ensure food security. Evidence shows that gender inequalities both in and outside the home endanger not only the ability to obtain food, but also the nutritional security of that food, which is so central to the health of women and children.

Unfortunately, in the agriculture sector, there is gender inequality with respect to control and access to productive resources, which limits the sector's development enormously. Furthermore, the social roles of men and women also generate disparities in the distribution of goods within the home have a powerful impact on food security and the well-being of families.

#### **4.2 The Measures for improving the Food Security for Women**

- **Empowering women** via participatory spaces that allow them to identify specific actions to promote and recognize their roles in agriculture.
- **Improving access to productive activities for women**, mainly via land access. This can be achieved through projects that incentivize extending land titles to women and implementing awareness campaigns directed at women to inform them about their rights and responsibilities with respect to land ownership.
- **Developing best practices with respect to gender** in agriculture and farming, and identifying schedules and specific actions so that women can actively participate in trainings and other spaces.
- **Incentivizing the adoption of advanced technologies** >among female producers.
- **Identifying lines of action with respect to agricultural innovation** that benefit women and reduce the burden of labor.
- **Enabling the participation of women in government settings**, agricultural production associations, and commissions.
- **Collecting data regarding access to productive resources and use of time** that are filtered by gender in order to better understand the role of women in agriculture and to quantify their work.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

Rural women have a central role to play in achieving food security. Stronger legislation and effective programs are greatly needed at the national and regional level to invest in their potential. Good governance, ecologically efficient agriculture, land access, food security and social protection, and linking smallholders with efficient markets. It is essential that strategies for rural women's empowerment are understood in relation to the mix of factors that impact their lives.

This paper has provided a snapshot of what is and could be done to strengthen commitments for rural women. Much more can be presented, including a better overview of best practices and lessons

learned in the field. The case studies submitted for the Forum highlight the potential of development cooperation to support women's entrepreneurial spirit and leadership and to even scale-up those initiatives that are working. They also capture some of women's coping and savings strategies as well as alternative farming methods. Practitioners can be learning about women's decisions through engagement and dialogue.

There is a long way to go to ensure that the voice of women is being heard and that the needs of women farmers are seriously taking into account... Let us work together to create an enabling environment in which women can participate fully in decision and policy-making processes in the areas of agriculture and rural development.

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