

Gender Mainstreaming in the Agricultural Sector: Empowering Women for Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

Gender mainstreaming in agriculture ensures equal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making for both men and women. Women form over 64% of India's agricultural workforce and 93% in dairy, yet face challenges like limited land ownership, inadequate extension services, and technological exclusion. Tools like gender budgeting ₹2.23 lakh crore allocated in 2024–25 and schemes such as Saksham Anganwadi, Drone Didi, and Mahila Shakti Kendra aim to enhance women's participation. Success stories from Gujarat, Karnataka, and Kerala demonstrate the impact of targeted interventions. However, challenges like environmental stress and poor infrastructure remain. Promoting agri-tech, climate resilience, and inclusive extension systems is key to empowering women and achieving sustainable rural development.

INTRODUCTION

Gender mainstreaming is an inclusive strategy aimed at ensuring that both women and men have equal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making

processes across all sectors, including agriculture. Introduced globally at the 1985 Nairobi World Conference on Women and later solidified through the 1995 Beijing

Platform for Action, gender mainstreaming has become a powerful tool for fostering gender equality and sustainable development.

The distinction between "sex" and "gender" is crucial. While sex refers to the biological differences between males and females, gender encompasses the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and attributes that a society considers appropriate. Gender mainstreaming recognizes these differences and aims to transform the structures that perpetuate inequality.

Role of Women in Agriculture

Women are the backbone of agriculture in India. In India, women make up 48.00 per cent of self-employed farmers and 33.00 per cent of the labor force in agriculture. From sowing and transplanting to harvesting and marketing, their involvement is evident across all stages of the agricultural cycle. According to the PLFS Report (2022–23), 64.3% of female workers are engaged in agriculture, with a staggering 76.2% in rural areas. According to FAO survey female farmers receives only 5.00 percent of extension services and that only 15.00 per cent of the world's extension professionals are women. In fact, animal husbandry is becoming feminized women do a bulk of livestock related activities like fodder collection, feeding, health care of animals, watering, milking and household level processing (Planning Commission, 2012). Women accounted for 93% of total employment in dairy production (Qureshi *et al.* 2016). However, only 12.8% of operational landholdings are owned by women highlighting significant gender disparities in ownership and control over resources.

Despite their contribution, women in agriculture face several challenges:

- **Gender stereotypes** that undervalue their capabilities

- **Male migration**, leading to increased burdens on women
- **Technological exclusion**, as most innovations cater to men
- **Gender bias** in access to extension services and decision-making

These issues are exacerbated by a lack of tailored extension programs and the dominance of male extension agents.



Gender Budgeting and Auditing: A Step Toward Equality

Gender budgeting is an analytical and practical approach to evaluate how public expenditure and revenue policies affect men and women differently. It ensures equitable resource allocation to bridge gender gaps. Originating in Australia in 1984, gender budgeting has been adopted by several countries, including India, where it was institutionalized in 2005-06.

India's Gender Budget for 2024–25 stands at ₹2.23 lakh crore—30% higher than the previous year. It includes:

- Part A: Women-specific schemes (100% allocation to women)
- Part B: Pro-women schemes (minimum 30% allocation for women)

Gender auditing, on the other hand, evaluates the effectiveness of policies and programs in delivering on gender equality commitments. It helps determine whether resources are utilized equitably and provides a feedback loop for policy improvement. Government of India has given due importance to gender sensitization and women empowerment in the country (Borkar *et al.* 2017).

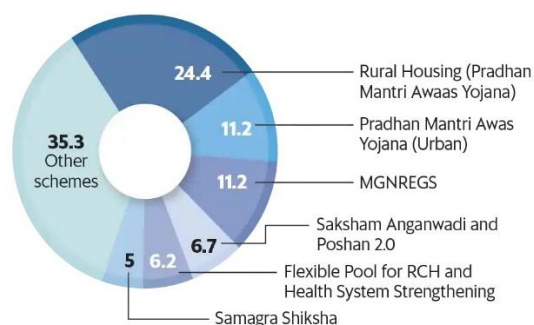


Fig. Share (%) of top scheme in gender budget, 2024-25 (Source: Mint, Center for Policy Research, IMF, NITI Aayog)

Government Schemes for Women Empowerment in Agriculture

Numerous initiatives have been launched to empower rural women and integrate gender perspectives into agricultural development:

- **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS):** Focuses on nutrition, education, and health of children and mothers now it has merged in Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 in 2021.
- **Swadhar Greh Scheme:** Provides shelter and rehabilitation for women in distress.
- **Drone Scheme for Women SHGs (Drone Didi) -2023–2026:** Aims to empower 15,000 SHGs by providing drones for rental services to farmers.

- **PM-JANMAN:** Target's development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
- **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao:** Promotes survival, protection, and education of girl children.
- **PM Mahila Shakti Kendra & Matru Vandana Yojana:** Focuses on community participation, skill development, and maternity benefits.
- **Mahila Coir Yojana:** Encourages women's entrepreneurship in coir processing.

These schemes play a vital role in boosting the participation, income, and independence of rural women.

Scope and Challenges in Gender Mainstreaming

India, as one of the world's largest agricultural economies, provides a fertile ground for gender-inclusive growth. With a diverse agro-ecological environment, high rural female labor participation, and growing policy support, gender mainstreaming has vast potential.

However, challenges persist:

- **Environmental stress:** Soil degradation, erratic rainfall, and water scarcity
- **Logistical issues:** Poor rural infrastructure and storage facilities
- **Natural calamities:** Floods, droughts, and pest outbreaks
- **Fragmented landholding:** Resulting from breakdown of joint families
- **Lack of women-friendly technologies**

These hurdles necessitate gender-sensitive approaches in research, extension, and innovation.

Review of Literature and Success Stories

Empirical studies have shown that SHGs and women-centric programs significantly enhance economic security and social empowerment. For instance:

- Studies in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh highlight women's increasing role in farm decision-making.
- Use of ICT tools has shown promise in improving women's access to extension services.

Success stories further demonstrate the impact of gender mainstreaming:

- **Gaytriben Shah (Gujarat):** Achieved economic stability through organic farming and livestock management. (Source: ATMA office, Anand district).
- **Satya Kumari (Karnataka):** Built a successful silk enterprise with training support. (Source: Krishivistar & Kisan of India).
- **Shije Varghese (Kerala):** Created a ₹12 lakh annual mushroom enterprise using hi-tech innovations. (Source: e-Bulletin 'Agripreneur').

These examples underscore the transformative potential of empowering women in agriculture.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE THRUST

Gender mainstreaming in agriculture is not merely a gender issue it is a development imperative. By ensuring equal access to resources, education, and decision-making power, it enhances productivity, innovation, and sustainability in the agricultural sector.

Future directions include:

- **Technology adoption:** Promoting agri-tech and digital solutions for women farmers
- **Climate resilience:** Including women in climate-smart farming strategies
- **Value chain integration:** Encouraging women's participation in agri-business and marketing
- **Capacity building:** Training and supporting women through inclusive extension systems

Empowering women in agriculture will not only bridge gender gaps but also foster a more resilient, productive, and equitable rural economy.

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