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Empowerment Status of Sub-Marginal Women Farmers and Perceived Constraints in Livelihood Security

Pooja Roy[1], D. Shekhar[2] and A. K. Singh[3]

ABSTRACT

The study was taken up in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar with an objective to examine the empowerment status of sub-marginal women farmer and their perceived constraints. The result revealed that majority of the respondents of experimental group had more power of decision making, positive thinking, and access of information with respect to control group. Water scarcity, timely unavailability of critical input in-time on reasonable price, appropriate infrastructure, and lack of technical expert are the key constraints and played a crucial role in their livelihood security. Meeting these constraints will certainly excel their agricultural productivity and bring improvement in their livelihood.

Key words: Sub-marginal women farmers, empowerment, food consumption pattern, constraints

INTRODUCTION

Indian agriculture, presently faces manifold challenges like sustainable agriculture, food and nutritional security, climatic change and mitigation of its effects on crop and animals health ,technology generation and its transfer, enhancement in resource use efficiency and water productivity, provision of incentives for agriculture, promotion of investments in agriculture, strengthening of institutional infrastructure, better risk management, corporate agriculture, peri-urban agriculture, human resource development, tapping the potential and introduction of management reforms and enhancing the profitability, *etc.* As a result, a large number of rural people started to quit from the agriculture.

Women constitute half of the world's population, perform nearly two thirds of its work hours but still receive only one-tenth of income and own one-hundredth of world's property. Women are the vital part of the Indian economy constituting, one-third of the national labour force and forming a major contributor to the survival of family. Eighty nine percent of total female labour is involved in agriculture and allied industrial sector. Thus to empower women in the real sense is to enable them to blossom their talents, facilities, abilities and capacities, and to realise their full potentialities, and real identity as also freedom of thought, expression and action, and strength to handle every sphere of their lives.

Sub-marginal women farmers possess and cultivate very small land holdings. These farm women have very small pieces of land usually less than 1 acre (or 0.4 hectare or 20 khattas). Many of these farm women have about 10-15 khattas (or 0.5 to 0.75 acres or 0.2 to 0.3 hectare). Hence these women farmers can be categorized still lower than marginal farmers.

Hence they are termed sub-marginal farmers. Since these women are independent women farmers (and not farm women working with their farmer husbands) they are termed women farmers. They cultivate their own land or share crop with others, lease-in land from others and cultivate crops for their own food for home consumption and sustenance. These women head and manage their families in the absence of their migrated husbands. They are usually assisted by their own family members and children.

[1.] Ph.D Scholar, [2.] Asstt. Professor and [3.] University Professor Department of Extension Education, RAU (Bihar), Pusa, Samastipur

Visualizing these facts for empowering the sub-marginal farm women, emphasis is required to be laid down for the development an extension model based on private-public partnership to address gender sensitive, cost effectiveness, leadership development among farm women in the view of location specific technological and subject matter support system extended by the specialists of local NGO – Creative Welfare Society(CWS) of Rajapur, Sakra block, Muzaffarpur district through collaboration of several development agencies.

For empowering farm women there is a need to address the perceived constraints and livelihood security. The research study is planned with specific objectives to study the empowerment status of sub-marginal women farmers and constraints as perceived by in livelihood security.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was carried out in Sakra block of Muzaffarpur district which has been purposively selected as the study attempts to explore socio-economic empowerment of sub- marginal women farmers (those cultivating less than 01 acre / 20 Kattha) through the interventions made by local NGO, Creative Welfare Society (CWS) of Muzaffarpur district through collaboration with several developmental agencies.

In Sakra block, three panchayats (Dubaha, Dihuli, Misraulia) and six villages (Dubaha, Rajapur, Dihuli, Naropatti, Misraulia, Maniyari) were selected. A total of 80 respondents was selected as the sample for the study which constituted of two groups of sub- marginal women farmers: 40 farm women, termed as 'experimental' group (those women beneficiaries, who were members of the NGO 'Creative Welfare Society', who actively participated in livelihood security programme of the society) and 40 non-beneficiary farm women, termed as 'Control' group (None of this group belongs to 'Creative Welfare Society') They are those sub-marginal women farmers who are residing in the same village in which the sample of beneficiaries were also living. Eight most relevant independent variables *i.e.,* Age; Caste, Education, Land holding, Annual income, Social participation and interventions methods were identified for the study. Dependent variables were socio-economic empowerment and livelihood security. All the variables were measured under the set rules and procedures, with scale and schedules developed for the study. An interview schedule was prepared, pilot study were conducted and used in personal interviews with respondents and data were analysed and presented with appropriate statistical tools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women's empowerment in India is dependent on many factors that include geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status (caste and class), and age. Policies on women's empowerment exist at the national, state, and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. Given the link between farm intervention and livelihood security, it has been accepted that economic empowerment provides a stronger scaffold to build the overall empowerment of women extending to social and political spheres. The SHG model of economic empowerment with all its limitations has proved to improve women's physical mobility and autonomy to a considerable extent besides providing income security to the household during contingencies.

Empowerment status:

Most of the poor people often put up a struggle for survival which has been a lifelong mission and natural process, agriculture and allied activities have been the main source of their livelihood. Empowerment has been conceptualised is a process of awareness and conscientization, of capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision-making power and control leading to transformative action. This involves ability to get what one wants and to influence others on our concerns. The results illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their empowerment

Area of Empowerment	Experimental	Control
Decision making power of one's own	36 (90.0)	23 (57.5)
Access to information and resource to take decision	27 (67.5)	14 (35.0)
Positive thinking ability to make change	29 (72.5)	19 (47.5)
Ability to learn technical skills	22 (55.0)	13 (32.5)
Ability to organize women's SHGs	15 (37.5)	06(15)
Ability & Willingness to run group activities	13 (32.5)	07(17.5)

Decision-making is the process of identifying and choosing alternatives based on the values and preferences of the decision-maker. The table showed that the women farmers who are associated with CWS (experimental group) had found to increase their power of decision making in order to the 90 per cent as they had more exposure to the society as compare to the control group which ranges to 57.5 per cent. Respondents of experimental group is very active and participated in many ongoing developmental programmes. They have the ability to access the information and resource to take their decision itself. Thus, results revealed that 67.5 per cent of experimental group had that information and

resources to take decision but it ranges very low to control group which is was found only 35 per cent. A positive thinking ability helps you to cope more easily with the daily affairs of life. It brings optimism into the life of respondents, and makes it easier to avoid worries and negative thinking. It often found that if you adopt it as a way of life, it would bring constructive changes into your life, and makes them happier, brighter and more successful. The table reveals that 72.5 per cent of women farmers of experimental group and 47.5 per cent of respondents of control group were found to think positively in order to make change.

CWS provides technical skill to the women farmers such as seed bed preparation, use of machinery. Therefore results revealed that experimental group of women farmers constituted 55 per cent while control group women farmers only 32.5 per cent because experimental group member are associated with CWS which encourage them to learn more technical skill so that they can get maximum profit from any enterprises or farming.

A self-help group (SHG) is a village-based financial intermediary committee usually composed of 10–20 local women or men. Women farmers were very enthusiastic to organize their own SHG and this tendency was more (37.5%) in sub- marginal women farmers belonged to experimental group as compared to the women farmers of control group (15.0 %). Women farmers have the ability as well as willingness to run group activities. The results showed that 32.5 per cent of respondents of experimental group and 17.5 per cent of respondents of control group were participated in group activities.

Thus, it is concluded that experimental group poses high level of decision making ability, access of information, positive thinking, ability to learn technical skill, ability to organize SHG and willingness to run the group activities in compare to control group. It also revealed the relevance of ongoing initiatives of CWS in empowerment whereas requires more attention towards organize SHGs and willingness of group activities.

Consumption pattern per month of family:

Economic growth is typically accompanied by improvement in dietary habits, resulting in improvement in both quantitative and qualitative terms, and a gradual reduction in nutritional deficiencies. Diets evolve over time and get influenced by many factors such as income, prices, individual preferences and beliefs, cultural traditions, as well as geographical, environmental, social and economical factors. The consumption pattern of the respondents is illustrated in table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to their family Consumption pattern per month

Consumption pattern (in ₹)	EXPERIMETAL					CONTROL				
	Up to 500	501-1000	1001 -1500	1501-2000	Above 2000	Up to 500	501-1000	1001 -1500	1501-2000	Above 2000
Rice	–	20 (50)	08 (20)	09 (22.5)	03 (7.5)	–	17 (42.5)	10 (25)	10 (25)	03 (7.5)
Wheat	11 (27.5)	18 (45)	10 (25)		01 (2.5)	11 (27.5)	17 (42.5)	12 (30)	–	–
Pulses	24 (60)	08 (20)	04 (10)	01 (2.5)	03 (7.5)	27 (67.5)	07 (17.5)	05 (6.25)	01 (2.5)	–
Oil and spices	27 (67.5)	10 (25)	03 (7.5)	–	–	24 (60)	14 (35)	02 (5.0)	–	–
Vegetables	26 (65)	08 (20)	–	06 (15)	–	30 (7.5)	10 (25)	–	–	–
Milk	24 (60)	09 (22.5)	–	–	–	28 (40)	12 (30)	–	–	–
Meat	04 (10)	16 (40)	14 (35)	03 (7.5)	02 (5)	03 (7.5)	23 (57.5)	13 (32.5)	01 (2.5)	
Eggs	40 (100)	–	–	–	–	40 (100)	–	–	–	–
Fish	09 (22.5)	24 (60)	06 (15)	–	–	04 (10)	33 (82.5)	03 (7.5)	–	–
Fruits	40 (100)	–	–	–	–	40 (100)	–	–	–	-

The results revealed that in both the group respondents spent ₹ 500-1000 in purchasing of rice, wheat and pulses. However 67.5 per cent of respondents of experimental group spent up to ₹ 500 in purchasing of oil and spices while they spent less money in purchasing of vegetable and milk because they grow vegetable in their own land and majority of respondents have milching cow and buffalo.

But they have to spent money in purchasing of fruits up to ₹ 500. 82.5 per cent respondent of experimental group expend ₹ 500/- to 1000/- on milk and 85.0 per cent on vegetable as compared to control group 70 per cent and 32 per cent on milk and vegetable respectively, where as it is important to mention that majority of experimental group grow less or more vegetable at their own farm and owned livestock still they expand on vegetable and milk which is good sign of awareness or respondents towards nutritional security.

Perceived constraints:

The respondents were asked with a set of open-ended questions to elicit the constraints perceived by them in livelihood security. Their responses were analysed, summarised and tabulated. The frequencies, percentages and ranks were computed for the constraints. The results related to the constraints perceived by the respondents are presented in the table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to Constraints perceived

Constraints	Experimental		Control		RANK
	F	%	f	%	
Water scarcity	40	100.0	40	100	I
Timely availability of seeds	30	75.0	25	62.5	VII
High rates of seeds, fertilizer and pesticide	38	95.0	35	87.5	III
Lack of transportation	25	62.5	10	25.0	XI
Inefficient market and storage facility	30	75.0	15	37.5	IX
Lack of nearby primary health centre	38	95.0	40	100.0	II
Lack of credit for having own entrepreneurship	20	50.0	38	95.0	V
Lack of technical expert	10	25.0	29	72.5	X
Lack of machinery	25	62.5	31	77.5	VI
Shortage of land holdings	35	87.5	10	25.0	IX
Limited education	15	37.5	37	92.5	VIII
Limited control over factors of production	32	80.0	38	95.0	IV
Lack of collective voice	12	30.0	20	50.0	XII
Lack of alternative job	24	60.0	32	80.0	VI

The results in the table revealed that the constraints as perceived by the women respondents water scarcity is the major constraint as perceived by the sub-marginal women farmers and ranked I.As rainfall was very minimal in the past few years, the level of ground water has gone down. Due to this, drought had prevailed in these areas. Even they did not have drinking water. The scarcity of water is a major issue now a day which leads to the loss of crop yields as reported by 100 per cent of women respondents.

CONCLUSION

The table revealed that 75 per cent in experimental group and 62.5 per cent in control group members perceived that timely availability of seed was an important constraint (ranked VII) and resulted into low adoption of hybrid seeds as well as low seed replacement rate. Ninety five per cent experimental group and 87.5 per cent of control group members perceived that high rate of seeds, fertilizer and pesticides was the major constraint (ranked III), which are critical inputs for agriculture production leading to low productivity and low adoption of technology while 62.5 per cent of experimental group and 25.0 per cent of control group members perceived that lack of transportation is a constraint (ranked XI). Seventy five per cent of experimental group and 37.5 per cent of control group members perceived that inefficient market and storage facility is an important constraint (ranked IX), ninety five per cent of experimental group and 100 per cent of control group members perceived that lack of nearby primary health centre is a major constraint (ranked II). 50 per cent of experimental group and 95 per cent of control group members perceived that lack of credit for having own entrepreneurship was an important constraint (ranked V). It is important to mention here that all the respondents of experimental group were also the members of SHG, so they face comparatively less challenge in credit as compared to their counterparts. Twenty five per cent of experimental group and 72.5 per cent of control group members perceived that lack of technical expert was important constraints (ranked X) because all the respondents of experimental group were the members of CWS and they were providing technical expertise while 62.5 per cent of experimental group. 72.5 per cent of control group members perceived that lack of machinery was one of the important constraint (ranked VI) Similarly 87.5 per cent of experimental group and 25.0 per cent of control group members perceived that shortage of land was an important constraint indicating less empowerment level of control group (ranked IX). Above 37 per cent of experimental group and 92.5 per cent of control group members perceived that limited education was also an important constraint (ranked VIII).

The result as obtained in the table revealed that 80 per cent experimental group and 95 per cent control group members perceived that limited control over factors of production was a major constraint (ranked IV). Thirty per cent of experimental group and 50 per cent of control group members perceived that lack of collective voice is a constraint and it has received XII rank. Sixty per cent of experimental group and 80 per cent of control group members perceived that they lack alternative job during off farming season as agriculture provide only seasonal employments and it was an important constraints, which got VI rank.

On the basis of their systematic research it was concluded that majority of the respondents of experimental group having more power of decision making, positive thinking, and access of information. Water scarcity, timely unavailability of seeds, high rates of seeds, fertilizer and pesticide, lack of transportation, inefficient market and storage facility, lack of nearby primary health centre, lack of credit for having own entrepreneurship, lack of technical expert, lack of machinery, shortage of land holdings, limited education, limited control over factors of production, lack of collective voice and lack of alternative job are the key constraints plays a crucial role in their livelihood security and highlighted the relevance of welfare programmes in the same tune of Sulo *et al.* (2012), Mikalista (2010), Edeoghon *et al.* (2009), Adamu *et al.* (2008) and Olujide (2007). The present study also reveals timely unavailability of critical input at cheaper price is crucial and meeting these constraints will certainly excel their agricultural productivity and bring improvement in their livelihood.

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