

The Role of Rural Women In Agriculture Sector Of Sagar Island, West Bengal, India

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Abstract

Agriculture can be an important engine for growth and poverty reduction. But the sector is underperforming in many countries in part because women, who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constrain that reduce their productivity. This study analyzed women participation in agricultural production of Sagar Island, West Bengal, India. In this paper I have tried to discuss the actual role of rural women in agricultural sector. Here I have shown how number of rural agricultural labor changed from 1971 to 2011. Therefore I have discussed the major role of rural women in another fields, their real problems, barriers and actual position of the society. From the contribution of women to agricultural and food production is significant, but it is impossible to verify empirically the share produced by women. It investigated the women access to economic resources and examined the influence of selected socio-economic characteristics of women and access to economic resources on their participation in agricultural production. In this study area maximum no of women laborers are illiterate with no formal educational status which directly informed their participation in agricultural production. Women participation in rural labor markets varies considerably across regions, but invariably women are over represented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work, and the available evidence suggests that women are often paid less than men for the same work. This paper re-affirms that women make essential contributions to agriculture and rural enterprises across the study area as well as developing world.

Date of Submission: 1February, 2013



Date of Publication: 15, February 2013

I. Introduction

The international development community has recognized that agriculture is an engine for growth of poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor. But the agricultural sector in many developing countries is underperforming, in part because women who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as farmers, laborers' and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources. Efforts by national governments and the international community to achieve their goals for agricultural development, economic growth and food security will be strengthened and accelerated if they build on the contributions that women make and take steps to alleviate these constraints. Women make essential contribution to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing foods, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as "economically active employment" "in national accounts but they are essential to the well-being of rural households. Despite their importance to agricultural production women face severe handicaps. They are in fact , the largest group of landless laborers with little real security in case of break-up of the family owing to death or divorce , inheritance laws and customs discriminate against them land reform and settlement programs usually give sole title and hence the security needed for obtaining production credits to the husbands. Agricultural development programs are usually planned by men and aimed at men. Mechanization for example alleviates the burden of tasks that are traditionally men's responsibility, leaving women's burdens unrelieved or even increased.

Objectives: The main objectives of this study are mentioned below.

1. To find out the role of women in agriculture and its allied fields.
2. To find out main obstacles in women growth in agricultural sector.
3. To analyze the gender differences in roles and activities in agricultural sector.

II. Study Area

Sagar Island (also known as Ganga Sagar) lies on the continental shelf of Bay of Bengal about 150 km (80 nautical miles) south of Kolkata, in West Bengal. The area of the island is about 251.59 sq km with 43 villages and a population of over 180408 with population density of 717 / sq km. The latitude of the study area is 21° 37' N to 21°52' N and the longitude of the study area is 88°02' E to 88°11'E. The Island has scatter Mangrove swamp, waterways and small rivers. The island is a famous Hindu pilgrimage. Every year on the day of Maker sankranti (middle of January thousand of Hindus gather to take a holy dip at the confluence of Ganga and offer puja in Kapil Muni Temple. The Sundarban along the Bay of Bengal has through quaternary (began about 2 million Years ago and extends to the present) sediments deposited mainly by the mighty river Ganges, Brahmaputra, Meghna and their numerous distributaries. The building up of this estuarine area is not complete. The mangrove dominated delta is a complex ecosystem comprising one of the three largest single tracts of mangrove forests of the world. The Sundarban floor varies from 0.9m to 2.11 m above sea level. Sagar Island such an area, which despite its tremendous economic potentiality is lagging behind in comparison with many other areas which are in geo-economic, geo-environmental and geo-hydrological in same region. This study will emphasize on finding out the role of rural women in agricultural sector of this remote Island.

III. Data Base & Research Methodology

Methodology for data collection is divided into two segments. Secondary and primary sources. Secondary sources mainly consist of literature survey, peer reviewed articles and research papers and government published documents. Primary data sources consist of 10 % household survey of total households following random sampling method. The inputs from the conducted interviews and feedback received from Questionnaire survey were analyzed against the actual data collected and the literature review.

IV. The Role Of Women In Agriculture And Its Allied Fields

Rural women perform numerous labour intensive jobs in agricultural field. They are directly attached with summer, rainy and winter season agriculture system. Topographically maximum area of this study area has been considered as mono crop. Rain fed agriculture system is the dominant agricultural practices in this area. There is no irrigation facility for summer and winter cultivation. Women are also expected to collect wood from fields. This wood is being used as a major fuel source for cooking. Clean drinking water is another major problem in rural areas. Like collection of wood, collecting water from remote areas is also the duty of women. Because a rural women is responsible for farm activities. Keeping of livestock and its other associated activities like milking, milk processing and preparation of ghee are also carried out by the women. Livestock is the primary subsistent activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm incomes. The majority of farms own some livestock. The pattern of livestock strength is mainly influenced by various factors such as farm size, cropping pattern, availability of range –lands including fodder and pasture. Therefore rural women earn extra income from the sale of milk and animals. Mostly women are engaged in cleaning of animals, sheds, watering and milking the animals. Rural women are also responsible for collection, preparing dung cakes and activity that also brings additional income for poor families. In most of the cases rural women are involved in almost all livestock related activities. Majority of women are involved in shed cleaning and collection of farm yard manure. It is evident that the women are playing a dominant role in the livestock production and management activities. Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. The rate of women in poultry farming at household level is the central in poultry industry. Even though rural women are not using modern management techniques, such as vaccination and improved feed, but their poultry enterprise is impressive. Every year income from poultry farming has been rising. In order to generate more and more income, rural women often sell all eggs and poultry meat and left nothing for personal use. Due to poverty and lack of required level of proteins most of women have got a very poor health. As a result most of the women suffer from malnutrition and severe diseases. The study also noted that majority of the rural women are uneducated, unskilled and tradition bounded, therefore their productive capacity are also low and counted as unskilled labour. Rural women have very hectic life. Her work starts from dawn and ends at night. The daily routine works begins from house cleaning, collection of drinking water, dish washing, laundry, preparing food for farming, care of children. She manages these activities very smartly.

Main obstacles in Women growth in Agricultural Sector: In this study area certain number of women holding of agricultural productive resources such as lands, animals and machinery. Women have no power for

decision making process, either inside or outside the home. However women perform all un-mechanized agricultural tasks and perform multiple tasks which add more burdens to them. Women workers in agriculture suffer from high illiteracy rate among them and drop out of schools. They have no proper knowledge about modern agriculture system. Women earn fewer wages, especially in joint informal and private sector. Therefore women do not know their legal rights.

Gender differences in roles and various activities: Gender differences are the prime issue of women's and men's work in natural environment in particular to recognize the importance of their different roles. On the basis of the gender division of labour has revealed that typically women take on three types of roles in terms of the paid and unpaid labour they undertake. Their major roles are discussed below.

1. **The productive role:** It refers to the market production and home /subsistence production are undertaken by women which generates a fixed income.
2. **The reproductive role:** This refers to the child bearing and child rearing responsibilities are mentioned by women.
3. **The community management role:** This refers to activities undertaken by women to ensure the provision of resources at the community level, as an extension of their reproductive role. An understanding of these three roles can inform gender –aware planning that takes into account the differential impact of programmes and projects on women and man because of women's triple role when under estimations and under valuations of rural women's work are found , as they so often are in the sphere of development planning, the consequences are serious. Failure to acknowledge the importance of women's multiple contributions to rural survival means that practical policy interventions are frequently detrimental both to women themselves and to their communities.

Another factor that needs to be taken into account is that certain tasks, activities or enterprises may be regarded as male or female.

More work less pay: Generally man can easily shift from one place to another place for better job opportunities and better income facilities. They can move as a migrant from their birth of place to anywhere. But women cannot shift from their living place. It is therefore becoming essential for men to migrate in search of better – paid work. Women are filling this vacuum. Women are forced to accept work in agriculture in their own village under very bad conditions, because they cannot migrate as easily as men. The dependence of women's labour of family farms, especially during the peak periods of sowing and harvesting has become very common. Farmers on the other hands also seek to prefer women as agricultural workers. The farmer is forced with the increasing costs of production required for modern agriculture. He finds that he can squeeze his labour costs by using lower – paid women workers. Similarly the work of women within family based agriculture is preferred because it is cheaper than hiring labour. Women agricultural workers although they present a big proportion of all women workers continue to receive lower wages than men. The ministry of labour puts the differences at 60 % of men wages, while the Indian labour journal showed that women received 75 % of men earnings.

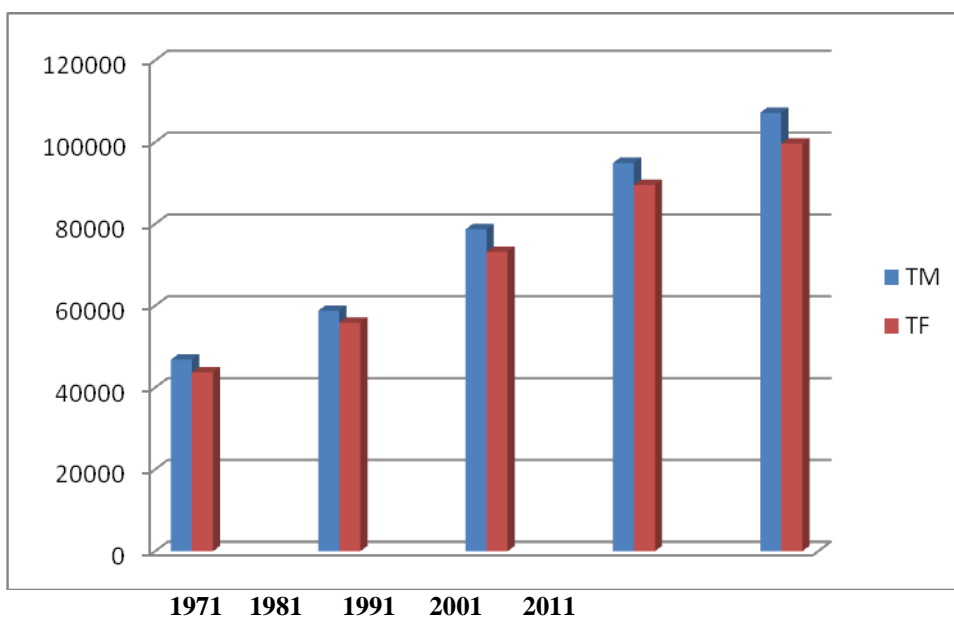
Findings & Analysis: In this paper I have tried to discuss the role of rural women in agricultural sector. For the convenience of analysis I have taken 50 years census population data (1971-2011). However I have also collected 10 % household survey data on May 2012. With the help of pre mentioned data source I have explained it. In 1971 total population was 88540, which increased into 206801 in 2011. In 1971 total male and female agricultural labors were 8014 and 79. In 1971 total female agricultural labors were very negligible. From the given table it is apparent that before the year 2001, the increase of male agricultural labor was satisfactory, but the increase of female agricultural labor was not sufficient. After the year 2001 the increasing rate of female agricultural labor was very rapid. In 1971 total female agricultural labor was only 79, which converted into 1237 in 2011.

Table showing total population, total male, male agricultural laborers, total female and female agricultural laborers' from 1971 to 2011.

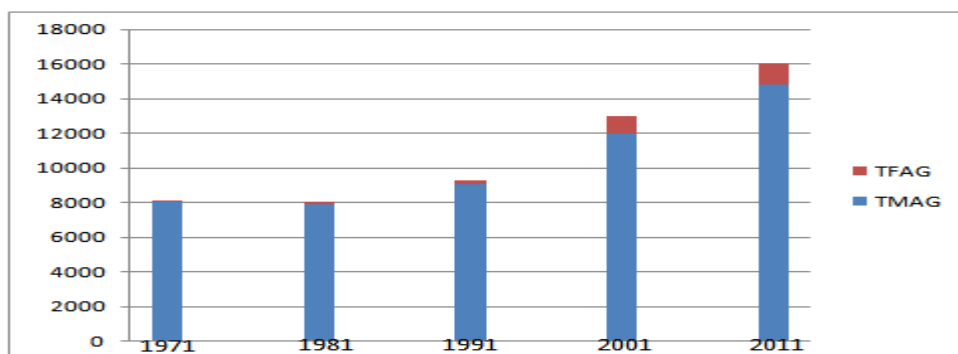
year	Total population	Total male	Male agricultural laborers	Total female	Female agricultural laborers
1971	88540	46820	8014	43691	79
1981	112653	58779	7842	55882	173
1991	151213	78682	9064	73150	214
2001	182409	94909	11919	89501	1054
2011	206801	107179	14813	99620	1237

(Source - Census of India 1971- 2011)

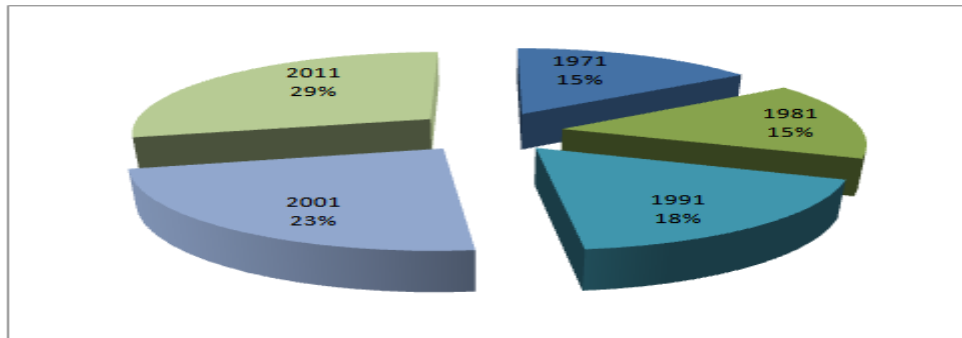
Bar graph showing increasing of total male and female population from 1971-2011. (Fig -1). (TM= Total male, TF= Total female).



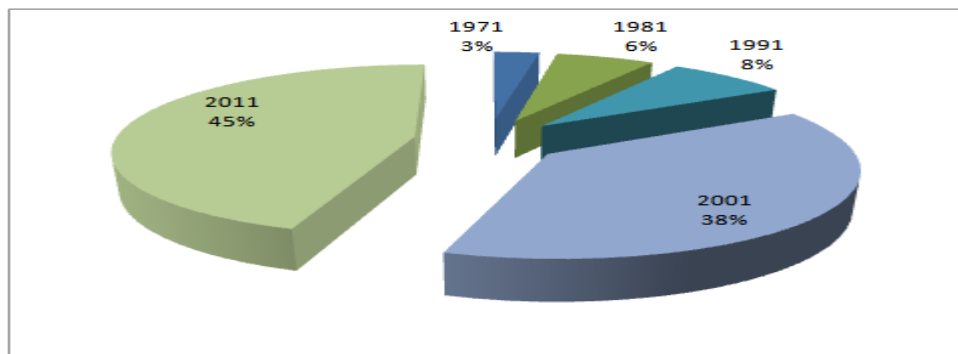
(Years)Bar graph showing increase of male and female agricultural laborer's from 1971-2011. (Fig -2), (TMAG& TFAG= Total male& female agricultural labors)



**Proportional Pie graph showing percentage of male agricultural laborer's during 1971-2011.
(Fig -3)**



**Proportional Pie graph showing percentage of female agricultural laborers during 1971-2011.
(Fig -4)**



For the necessity of income of the poor family, a certain number of females are coming into agricultural works. Poverty and insecure income are the prime reason behind it. Most of the rural women lack higher living dream. They only want to maintain a minimum standard of living. Malnutrition and fatal diseases are the major problems faced by them. To look after their family they are bound to hard work in agricultural fields. Bar graph and proportional pie graph have been drawn to show the graphical representation of the related data. (Fig 1, 2, 3, 4). In 1971 total male and female agricultural labors was 15% and 3% of total male and female. In 1981 it was 15% and 6%. Within 10 years there was no increase rate of male agricultural labors, but female agricultural labors increased 3 %. From 1971 to 2011 total male agricultural labors increased 15% to 29 %. The increasing rate was 14%. On the other hand from 1971 to 2011 female agricultural labors increased 3% to 45 %. Here increasing rate was 42 %. Within 50 years increasing rate of female agricultural labors was very high than male agricultural labors. Maximum involvement of female agricultural labors in agricultural fields indicates greater income and secure rural economy of this rural area. Hope participation rate of female agricultural labors will increase in near future to ensure healthy family income.

V . Recommendations:

- [1] Recognition of labour work of working women in the rural economy may be accounted in monetary terms.
- [2] More facilities should be provided to poor rural women for land, agricultural and livestock extension services.
- [3] Measures should be taken to enhance women's literacy rates. A separate education policy for women may serve the purpose.
- [4] Priority must be given to women in accessing credit on soft terms from banks and others financial institutions for setting up their business, for buying properties, and for house buildings.
- [5] Women must be aware regarding their existing rights , access to judicial relief and redress , removing discrimination through legal reforms , and providing legal aid, assistance and counseling.
- [6] Women must be involved in decision making bodies that have the potential to introduce structural changes. This action will bring some changes in the gender relations in the society.

Vi Conclusions

Rural women are the major contributions in agriculture and allied fields. Her work ranges from crop production, livestock production to cottage industry. From household and family maintenance activities, to transporting water, fuel and fodder. Despite such a huge involvement her role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic and political indicators. Women's wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and women's engagement in multiple home based economic activities leads to under remuneration for their work. Women spend long hours fetching water, doing laundry, preparing food and carrying out agricultural duties. The nature and sphere of women's productivity in the labour market is largely determined by socio-cultural and economic factors. Women do not enter the labour market on equal terms when compared to men. Their occupational choices are also limited due to social and cultural constraints, gender bias in the labour market, and lack of supportive facilities such as child care, transport and accommodation in the formal sector of the labour market. Women's labour power is considered inferior because of employers predetermined notion of women's primary role as homemakers. As a result of discrimination against female labour, women are concentrated in the secondary sector of labour market. Their work is low paid, low status, casual and lacks potential upward mobility. For the recognition of women contribution in agriculture and its allied fields are reducing the gender issues. From the above discussion I can easily conclude that the rural women are exploited by landlords for their personal good and enrichment. Women are treated as sub –servant or personal property. In this regard Government must formulate policies to enhance their skills and their works should be counted in economic indicators.

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