
Women Participation in Agricultural Activities and Associated Problems in District Faisalabad

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Abstract:

Women in Pakistan play an important role in society, with the majority living in rural areas. The status, employment, and work performed by them are instrumental in the economic growth of the nation. Agriculture is the predominant source of livelihood for almost 60 percent of the population and a major source of poverty reduction in rural areas. Women are as important a component of the labour force in the agriculture sector as are men but still, their contribution is not visible, though they actively undertake all the agricultural-related activities from household to farm level. The current study is designed to examine their participation level in different agricultural activities and the problems faced by them in performing these activities. The study was conducted in district Faisalabad. A sample size of 120 respondents was taken through purposive sampling. Data was collected through personal interviews using a pretested interview schedule. The study finds that women play a very important role in all the agriculture related activities. Household activities like picking cotton, crop and vegetable production were major activities performed by rural women.

Key Words: Rural women; agricultural activities; growth, economy, crops, production

INTRODUCTION

The contribution that women make to the agricultural and rural economies is vital to countries all over the world but it is more important in the case of developing countries, where on average, women make up 43 percent of the agricultural labour force (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2011). In developing countries, women are like the backbones of their rural economies. Over the last 40-50 years, women have extended their role in agriculture around the world. Recent studies show that women now comprise almost half of the farmers on the planet. In rural areas, the number of households headed by women also increased manifolds because men have migrated to the cities. Since women are the chief caregivers of many families and communities nowadays, they provide for their food and nutritional needs too, hence becoming the human link between the farm and the table. Since the global community is striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and one of these goals (called SGD2) targets to eliminate starvation and undernourishment by the year 2030, the role of women has acquired huge importance in the achievement of that goal to bring about positive change in agriculture, nutrition, and rural development (World Bank, 2017). Despite playing a big role in the production of food, lending a major hand in the earning of household income, and also being the custodians of knowledge to make the world go round, the efforts and rewards of women are restricted by their lack of access to the related local markets,

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services avenues, technologies, and productive resources. All the above mistreatment and injustice happens although women account for up to 43 percent of the agricultural labour force. There is enough evidence available to prove that women could increase the yields on agricultural farms from 20 to 30 percent and an overall increase in the agricultural output of their countries by up to 4 percent if these women farmers and agricultural workers had similar access to productive resources as their counterpart men working in the same capacities. This scenario would help bring a decrease in the number of hungry humans in the world by a whopping 12 to 17 percent. If women farmers are empowered up to the same level as their male counterparts then these women can achieve a sustainable rural income, increase their own household income substantially, and make a major contribution to attaining food security. Nevertheless, the empowerment of women should be taken to the bigger canvas of wealth creation and leadership in the field of agriculture rather than just household income and livelihood ("Women's key role," 2014).

In developing countries, institutions like agricultural cooperatives have in them the huge potential of strengthening the financial position of economically weak farmers. These institutions can help farmers to increase their bargaining power which would lead to increased incomes. This is done by creating market openings and also by providing input services to their members. Unluckily, in most of the developing countries, female farmers are not given reasonable opportunities to participate and benefit from such groups (Woldu, Tadesse, & Waller, 2015).

Like other developing countries, Pakistan's economy is agriculture-based because the livelihood of the large population of rural areas depends upon or is associated with this fundamental activity (Mirza, Najam, Mehdi, & Ahmad, 2015). This was also stated by Khan (2008) when he stated that around 60 percent of Pakistan's population entirely depends on agriculture directly or indirectly. Agha (2017) in this context gives a very comprehensive picture of the role of agriculture and the condition of women in this field by saying that in Pakistan the agriculture sector is widely considered as the backbone of the country's economy simply because of the size of the contribution it makes to the GDP. Women farmers are said to be the nucleus of this essentially agriculture-dependent economy. Women are key partakers in food production in the rice and wheat growing areas and also in the cotton production processes.

Despite all this, the social indicators in Pakistan show a very depressing picture of rural women trapped in a vicious circle of poverty because of very limited access to credit and productive resources which restrict investment in technology other advanced trends and hence hamper farming productivity. The bulk of work done by women farmers is manual labour which uses up more time and energy than usual. The work done by most women is not registered which leaves them prone to a high level of exploitation. Apart from this, the method and value of payments are agreed upon verbally which leads to even more exploitation of women farmers and most women farmers are not even paid the national minimum wage due to this. In Pakistan, almost 72 percent of working women are employed in the agriculture sector but a vast majority of them are not given access to post-harvest activities like grading and processing of vegetables and fruits.

Women empowerment is generally associated with the availability of social capital and cohesive social community networks and the nonexistence of these in Pakistan restricts their capacity to bring positive change to their lives. Working and an effective presence of these groups enhances

women's access to loans. They also empower women to bargain and sell their services at better prices. It is a common belief that women who are associated with social groups and networks avail better chances of securing loans for agricultural production. The formation of such groups also enhances women farmers' chances of sharing their produce from livestock and buying and selling among their peers. A few NGOs in Sindh have begun efforts to make easier the availability of credit to rural women along with a smooth return of credit but the number of such networks is depressingly low.

The objectives of this study include: to identify the demographical characteristics of respondents; to access the participation level of women in different agricultural activities; to identify the needs and priorities of women in the agriculture sector; to diagnose the problems faced by the women farmers during performing agricultural activities, and; to determine the relative effectiveness of various communication methods with agricultural women.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in district Faisalabad which comprises six tehsils, namely (Faisalabad Saddar, Faisalabad City, Jaranwala, Chak Jhumra, Samundari, and Tandianwala). Out of the above, tehsil Faisalabad Saddar was selected randomly as the study area. The selected tehsil Faisalabad Saddar consists of 59 union councils (UCs), out of which 2 rural UCs were selected through purposive sampling. From the selected UCs, four villages were selected purposively and from each selected village 30 women were chosen purposively thus making a sample size of 120 respondents. Well-structured interview schedules were used for data collection. The collected data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to draw conclusions and to suggest measures for improvements. Descriptive statistics found i.e. weighted score, mean value, and standard deviation. The following scale is used to determine the intensity of associated problems of women to agriculture.

1. Very low
2. Low
3. Medium
4. High
5. Very High

The rank order was calculated by the sum of responses of respondents regarding agricultural problems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis and interpretation of data are fundamental steps in scientific research. Without these steps, simplification and calculation cannot be achieved. Socio-economic characteristics have an impact on the general state of mind and behaviour. Therefore, these are discussed below:

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their age

Age	<i>F</i>	Percent
25-30	68	56.7
31-35	19	15.8
36-40	10	8.3
Above 41	23	19.2
Total	120	100.0

Table 1 depicts that 56.7 percent of the total population belonged to an age group of 25-30 years while slightly less than one-fifth belonged to the above age group of 41 years old. It is found that aging is associated with a majority. The age factor is essential to impact individual personality.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to their education

Education	F	Percentage
Primary	37	30.8
Middle	17	14.2
Matric	17	14.2
Intermediate	16	13.3
Graduate	15	12.5
Master	18	15.0
Total	120	100.0

Data presented in **Table 2** depicts that mostly (30.8) of the respondents got primary education followed by 15.0% of Master education level.

Women play a very important role in agricultural and household activities (Iftikhar, Ali, Ahmad, Maan, Haq, 2009). Kausar and Ahmad (2005) also emphasized this fact by saying that women are involved in various plant production, plant protection, post-harvest, poultry, and livestock management activities. They are the landless labourers who work in agricultural fields along-with their male counterparts. The data in this regard are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Ranking of agricultural and household activities based on women's participation

Activities	Weighted Score	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank Order
Household activities	468	3.90	1.27	1
Vegetables growing	391	3.25	1.32	2
Water collection	356	2.96	1.18	3
Sowing of crops	354	2.95	1.23	4
Fertilizing	352	2.93	1.35	5
Threshing	349	2.90	1.13	6
Grain storage	340	2.83	1.06	7
Clearing fields	337	2.80	1.45	8
Irrigation	329	2.74	1.08	9
Livestock management	295	2.52	1.43	10
Hoeing/ weeding	281	2.34	1.14	11
Orchards management	281	2.34	1.26	12
Land preparation	278	2.31	1.13	13
Poultry husbandry	257	2.14	1.22	14

Scale: 1= Very low, 2= Low, 3= Medium, 4= High, 5= Very high

The ranking of agricultural and household activities based on the women's participation is presented in **Table 3** which shows that household activities were ranked 1st with a weighted score of 468 and mean value 3.90 and fell between medium and high categories but tended toward the high category. Moreover, vegetable growing activity was ranked 2nd with a mean value of 3.25 and fell between medium and high categories but tended toward the medium category. Furthermore, water collection, sowing of crops, fertilizing, threshing, grain storage, clearing fields, irrigation, and livestock management fell in between low and medium categories were ranked 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th with weighted scores of 356, 354, 352, 349, 340, 337, 329 and 295 and mean value 2.96, 2.95, 2.93, 2.90, 2.83, 2.80, 2.74 and 2.52 respectively. Hoping/weeding, orchards management, and land preparation was ranked 11th, 12th, and 13th with a mean value of 2.34, 2.34, and 2.31 respectively. Poultry husbandry was ranked at the bottom and fell between low and medium categories but tended towards the low category.

Table 4: Ranking of problems faced by the women during performing agricultural activities

Problems	Weighted Score	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank Order
Lack of education	383	3.19	1.10	1
Lack of Information about new technologies	354	2.95	1.09	2
Gender discrimination	353	2.94	1.10	3
Lack of access to credit	353	2.94	1.10	4
Low wages	352	2.93	1.05	5
Lack of Employment opportunity	351	2.92	1.12	6
Social restrictions	348	2.90	1.19	7
Religious restrictions	347	2.89	1.15	8
Lack of market opportunities	337	2.80	1.12	9
Mobility constraints	324	2.70	1.19	10
Lack of knowledge about livestock management	314	2.61	1.00	11
Lack of knowledge about land preparation	281	2.34	0.98	12
Lack of knowledge about poultry management	262	2.18	1.07	13

1. Very low 2. Low 3. Medium 4. High 5. Very High

The ranking of problems faced by women during performing agricultural activities is presented in **Table 4** lack of education was ranked 1st with a weighted score of 383 and mean value 3.19 and fell in between medium and high categories but tended toward the medium category. However, lack of information about new technologies, gender discrimination, and access to credit was ranked 2nd, 3rd, and 4th with a weighted score of 354, 353, and 353 and mean value 2.95, 2.95, and 2.94 respectively. Furthermore, mobility constraints were ranked 10th and fell in between low and medium categories but tended towards the medium category. The lack of knowledge about livestock management and land preparation was ranked 11th and 12th with weighted scores 314 and 281 and mean values 2.61 and 2.34 respectively. The lack of knowledge about poultry management was ranked at the bottom

and fell in the medium category. A large proportion of rural women around the world continue to face limited access to education, control over natural resources, insecure employment, low income, poor health conditions, and poor work conditions in general. Above all high level of illiteracy among rural women is a fundamental cause of poverty in Pakistan. Other obstacles particularly related to agriculture faced by rural women in Pakistan include inadequate technical skills, lack of acquaintance with the latest technology, limited access to the means of production, lack of financial and credit facilities, and marketing (Masood, & Jamil, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that most of the respondents had a lower level of education and they have to share more work at the farm in place of going to school. In this study, most of rural women were involved in the different agriculture activities and their participation level was high, and less than half of the respondents have major roles in household activities. The majority of women have a role in the picking of cotton. More than one-third of respondents performed their role in sowing of crops. One-third of respondents have role water collection for house utilization. Mostly of women in rural communities are highly affected by their many roles, for example, collecting fuelwood, fetching water and cooking, etc. There are many different factors to influence the participation of rural women in agricultural productivity. Women said that the main problem which has a major effect on the activities of women is lack of education, access of funding, religious restrictions, social restrictions, and employment opportunities were the problem which highly effects on activities of agriculture.

In the light of present research findings and discussion with farmers, the following suggestions are made:

- Women should ensure basic knowledge, information about new technologies, awareness about agri helplines, and right decision making power for their better participation in agricultural activities.
- More facilities should be provided to poor rural women for land, agricultural, and livestock extension services.
- Minimum wages should be fixed by the government for women agricultural labourers and the rates should be reviewed periodically.
- The government should provide some alternatives employment programmes and opportunities to agricultural women labour in rural areas.
- The government should ensure women's access to education and training in agriculture as well as their access to alternative sources of capital such as agricultural credit.

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