NATIONAL POLICY INTERFACE OF SDGS AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Promoting sustainability in agriculture necessitates addressing gender disparities. Women farmers in numerous developing nations face significant challenges due to their limited rights to inherit, access, and utilize land and other productive resources, resulting in 20–30% lower production compared to men (FAO, 2020). In developing countries, only 16% of landholders are women, compared to 21% in developed economies (UNCC, 2019). Countries characterized by high-income inequality tend to exhibit lower levels of land productivity and are more susceptible to unsustainable agriculture and food insecurity.

In India, approximately 62.9% of women are engaged in agriculture (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2023), but land ownership is heavily imbalanced in favour of men, with women representing just 14% of all landowners (Vasavada, 2022). While recurrent climate-related disruptions impact everyone, there are distinct gendered experiences, with women facing a disproportionate burden because of disparities in societal norms and power dynamics. The situation is exacerbated when funds for crop-related climate risk mitigation are directly deposited into bank accounts. Given the gender-biased distribution of land ownership, it is predominantly men who possess the land and consequently receive the funds in their bank accounts. This, in turn, restricts women from accessing the compensation or participating in decisions regarding its utilization. In several instances, women may not even be aware that the compensation has been transferred. Thus, land ownership by women serves as a protective barrier for them, enabling them access to government climate initiatives and relief programmes designed for the farming sector.

A significant part of women's agricultural labour involves working long hours doing tedious tasks. A study conducted by Singh et al. (2022) compared the drudgery levels of farmers during paddy harvesting in Odisha, India, when using serrated sickles versus a power tiller reaper. The study revealed a 26.61% reduction in drudgery levels when employing the power tiller reaper, as indicated by measured ergonomic parameters, compared to using serrated sickles.

Women working in India's agricultural sector often encounter a lack of recognition, resulting in limited entitlements. Even when women have legal ownership of land, they typically lack control over it as it is usually managed by a male figure, such as a husband or father. Acknowledging and supporting the contributions of women in farming and natural resource management can lead to more environmentally sustainable, socially equitable, and economically viable agricultural practices.

National Policy and Stakeholder Mapping

Policies/Schemes	Stakeholders	Pre-production	Production	Post-production
Mission for Protection and Empowerment of Women	Ministry of Women and Child Development	X	X	X
Support to Training and Employment Programme	Ministry of Women and Child Development	X	X	X
Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)	Ministry of Panchayati Raj	X	X	X

National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)	Ministry of Rural Development	X	X	X
Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)	Ministry of Finance	X	X	X
Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)	Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship	X	X	X
Gender Budgeting	Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment	X	X	X
National Policy for Farmers 2007	Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare	X	X	X
Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) under NRLM	Ministry of Rural Development	X	X	X
Mission Shakti	Ministry of Women and Child Development		X	X

Synergies and Trade-offs

The agricultural sector, as well as society, may avail many of the tangible and intangible benefits by addressing the gender gap. If women had equal access to productive resources as males, they could boost farm production by 20–30%, leading to a potential 2.5–4% increase in global agricultural output in developing nations (FAO, 2016).

Targets	Synergy	Trade-off
Target 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere		
Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation		
Target 5.3: Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation		
Target 5.4: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate		
Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life		
Target 5.6: Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on		

Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences		
Target 5.a: Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws		
Target 5.b: Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women		
Target 5.c: Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels		

Women who work in agriculture often face drudgery and are at risk of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, assault, and exploitation. Tackling gender-based violence in agricultural settings is crucial for safeguarding women's human rights, ensuring their safety and well-being, and enabling them to participate in agricultural development (Corona, 2023). In situations where land ownership rights are predominantly exercised by men, women are excluded from decision-making spaces, lacking a voice or vote in decisions related to agricultural practices, potentially leading to the adoption of unsustainable farming methods (OECD, 2021). Closing the gender gap in access to productive resources, services, rural institutions, and decision-making processes can enhance the well-being of women and their households. This includes involving women and indigenous communities in making decisions about farming policies and practices, given their roles as custodians of natural resources and their representation in the agricultural sector. Their traditional knowledge can help identify local challenges and provide alternative solutions. In emerging regions, agroforestry has been shown to effectively empower women. Women are typically heavily involved in the food production process, working in the fields, and selling the crops harvested. Including them in such practices will not only promote sustainable agriculture but also empower them.

Recognizing and supporting the role of women in farming and natural resource management can lead to more environmentally sustainable, socially equitable, and economically viable agricultural practices. When women enter agricultural markets, they become integral to building a more sustainable agricultural system. Market engagement encourages women to adopt environmentally friendly practices such as organic farming, agroecology, and reduced chemical usage. These practices prioritize soil health, biodiversity, and resource efficiency, contributing to resilient ecosystems and preserving natural resources for future generations.

Gender-sensitive policies that promote healthy diets can have a positive impact on the transition towards more sustainable agricultural practices. A healthy diet not only helps prevent many non-communicable diseases but also creates synergies for reducing environmental pressure on agricultural systems. This is achieved by decreasing the demand for and consumption of organic products (FAO, 2020). This synergy benefits not only women individually but also contributes to the overall well-being of communities, reinforcing the vital link between sustainability and women's economic empowerment.

Gaps and Barriers

Even though there has been extensive research over the years on violence against women, effective monitoring is hindered due to the absence of data for the same. Many farmers, especially women, lack the financial resources, capacity, and expertise necessary to invest in relevant agricultural technologies and better agricultural practices. Gender-based violence and limited access to education, training, land ownership, finance, technology, and markets are some of the obstacles to achieving equitable access to resources for women. Because of the disparity in access, female farmers face an increasing knowledge gap (Chitoor and Mishra, 2012; ActionAid, 2017; Ignaciuk and Chit Tun, 2019).

There are some agricultural education institutions that have gender-sensitive admittance policies in place but due to traditional barriers, female students continue to have problems when it comes to finding employment in agriculture (Chitoor and Mishra, 2012). Women's contribution to agriculture is often unpaid and undervalued, and they frequently face the dilemma of leaving school to take on household responsibilities and assist with other family tasks. This situation makes it challenging to recognize the unremunerated contributions of women, leaving them disproportionately burdened. This perpetuates a harmful cycle of discrimination and gender inequality that affects future generations (ActionAid, 2017). The scarcity of women in roles such as extension workers, researchers, and other agricultural professionals can be attributed, in part, to the limited number of female graduates emerging from intermediate and higher-level agricultural education institutions (Chitoor and Mishra, 2012).

Emerging Policy Solutions

Enabling Institutional Structures and Governance for Uplifting Women in Agriculture

- **Legal and cultural barriers:** Women often face barriers in accessing and inheriting land, which can restrict their participation in agriculture. Deep-rooted social norms and legal obstacles, such as those related to inheritance, can hinder women's land rights. Registering women as farmers can empower them by recognizing their role and contributions to agriculture.
- **Institutional support through Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP):** Considering complexities in land transfers due to recent changes like Aadhar requirements, the institutional support and access of resources to women should be strengthened through MKSP. To achieve this, MKSP can be leveraged to equip women with proper sustainable infrastructure and training on various stages of the agricultural value chain.
- **Access and ownership of land:** Mere ownership does not guarantee that women will have access to it and vice versa. For instance, when large landholdings are prevalent, women's participation in agriculture tends to decrease since they primarily manage the land without owning it. Likewise, post-marriage, women typically move to their husband's homes, making it difficult for them to access their own land.
- **Gender-disaggregated data:** The absence of gender-disaggregated data hinders policymakers from recognizing gender-related barriers in agriculture. Gender-disaggregated data is crucial for understanding and addressing challenges faced by women in agriculture effectively.
- **Resource management:** Implementation of schemes such as 'Pokra' in Maharashtra can be challenging when large landholders transfer land to females for various benefits. Limited data connectivity and lack of access to mobile phones can hinder women's access to information and resources. To overcome this challenge, initiatives like *Krishi Tai* need to ensure that women join with interest and receive proper remuneration.

- **Acknowledging women's contributions**: Before data collection to determine focus areas, it is important to recognize and acknowledge the work done by women in agriculture. In regions like Punjab, women are often categorized as labourers rather than farmers due to landholding patterns.
- **Policies and concessions:** Promoting policies that provide concessions to women, such as Kisan Credit Cards, incentivizing land transfers and empowering them. Practices like 'Padyali' in Uttarakhand show that a substantial percentage of women are actively engaged in sustainable agriculture.

Support and Opportunities for Women Can Empower Them to Pursue Sustainable Agriculture

- **Asset transfer to women:** Transferring assets to women is an important step towards gender equality. Men often dominate marketing activities, making it difficult for women to sell their produce directly. Initiatives by Krishi Vigyan Kendras to enable farmers to sell their produce in markets should be promoted. Direct payments to women for selling produce, as seen in Gujarat, can empower them economically.
- **Leveraging technology:** Biometric verification is a useful tool to enhance security in property registration and reduce the chances of fraudulent land transfers. Women's digital literacy and access to information can be improved by setting up internet access centres. Leveraging technology for financial inclusion and knowledge dissemination can uplift women in agriculture.
- **Education and awareness:** Education in local dialects and promoting experiential learning can bridge educational barriers. Promotion of gender-neutral intervention in vernacular languages is needed.

Strengthen Reporting on Metrics for Policy Design and Implementation

Some proposed metrics that could be monitored include the following:

- Percentage of women engaged in sustainable agriculture practices.
- Percentage of women in rural areas who have access to agricultural information and resources through ICT platforms.
- Government budget allocated to programmes and initiatives focused on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture.