ACS Publisher

Journal of Extension System

Year 2020, Volume-36, Issue-1 (June)

ISSN 0970-2989 **(Print)**
ISSN 2582-273X **(Online)**

A Study on Market Linkage of Women Farmers through Group Approaches

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Group approach, Market linkage, Women empowerment, Women farmers

ABSTRACT

Women account for 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries and slightly more than 30 per cent in South Asia and India. The Millennium Development Goals specified by the United Nations have "promote gender equality and empower women" as the third most important goal. Group marketing activities have a greater chance of success when attention is not only paid to capacity building in marketing, but also to overall organizational and management skills that could help the groups operate independently. Sankalp Streewadi Aoudhyogik Utpadak Sahakari Sanstha Limited, Uruli Kanchan under BAIF (Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation) is one of the successful women farmers group which conduct combined training for all the members for costing, pricing, quality control, and product development. It also helped in participating in domestic exhibitions/ trade fairs. The paper attempts to analyse the group approach among women farmers and to identify the market linkage among women group farmers through available literature.

Introduction

India's agricultural extension system is the largest in the world and it helps to fulfill the technology and information needs of about 100 million farm families **(Nandi, 2019)**. The focus of extension agencies on production technologies yielded outstanding results, and India became self-reliant in food production. Significantly, the extension system had played its role untiringly in the transfer of production technologies from lab to land, besides the agricultural scientists, farmers, and marketing network. But the farmers who follow individual farming are not realizing remunerative prices for their produce. Therefore, extension functionaries need to play a major role to build the capacity of the farmers to meet the emerging challenges and make the farmers realize better prices for their farm produce **(Rivera and Qamar, 2013).** On one hand the structural changes in markets through integration on national, regional and international markets provides an opportunity for participation and profit for smallholder farmers who can supply new product lines and meet the market's needs **(IFAD 2010)**. But, market-led extension is a central issue in the extension scenario. Hence, the extension focus should extend from mere production to market-led extension on an end-to-end basis. According to **Swaminathan** "Woman first domesticated crop plants and initiated the art and science of farming." while men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fiber, and fuel. The contribution of women in agriculture is significantly high in developing countries, for example, women comprise at least half of the rural agricultural labour force **(World Bank 2006, FAO 2011)**. Women have played and continue to play a key role

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Received 13-01-2020; Accepted 14-04-2020

in the conservation of basic life support systems such as land, water, flora, and fauna **(Prasad, 1992)**. Agriculture is the invention of women and farming in India is mainly a family occupation **(Chauhan, 2011)**. extent of women involvement was maximum in operations like transplanting, weeding, harvesting and storing. The farm women face constraints like non-availability of inputs on time, low price of produce less involvement in decision making. Farm women also reported heavy drudgery level in operations like field preparation, threshing and marketing (Nain and Kumar, 2010).

Despite this contribution, women's visibility, access to productive resources, and contribution remain largely unacknowledged in statistics and policy making **(Doss 1999; FAO, 2010).** Women were involved in almost every farming activity like harvesting millet grain, cutting millet straw, and manually digging fields in preparation for planting wheat, whereas men would mostly cut millet straw and plow fields for wheat etc., (**Brown, 2002).** There is evidence that income under the control of women is more likely to be used to improve family welfare including family food consumption, education, child nutrition, etc. **(Jaim, 2012)**. Women farm entrepreneurs are technically involved in only one or two enterprise activities. To expand the enterprises and help them to take advantage of developed technologies, existing nodes of activities need to be enhanced into a stronger integrated marketing network **(Tondon, 2013)**. Women farmers should provide various benefits like access to the market through retail agriculture which has been the traditional source of income, and linking it with some entrepreneurial activities has smoothened the process of empowerment among the women outlet (Singh *et al*, **2014).** Women's empowerment cannot be achieved without organizing **(Carr** *et al***. 1999)**. Apart from it, they also had to be got linked with suppliers of raw materials at urban places and provided regular skill up-gradation training for producers in their respective spheres. Linking women farmers to the markets and bringing them into the mainstream of marketing is a real challenge for the government and NGOs. The present paper is an effort to study the importance of group approach among women farmers and to identify the market linkage among women group farmers through available literature.

Methodology

The study is based on secondary data which were collected from books, journals, government reports, websites, and NSSO reports. The content analysis approach and review of studies was followed. The concept of the Group approach has been conceived to organize small farmers especially women farmers to collaborate to increase productivity as well as bargaining power. Achieving productivity jointly rather than individually can help spread lowering the risk of farming among a larger number and increase production and marketing opportunities. Marketing linkages was conceived any type of group marketing for farm and non farm products associated with women.

Result and Discussion

A women's self-help group platform could be an effective way of improving access to information, women's empowerment in agriculture, agricultural practices, and production diversity **(Raghunathan** *et al***, 2018)**. In India, several organizations are promoting market-led extension among women farmers through the formation of self-help groups (SHGs). The self-help group movement strives to empower rural farmers through their efforts to better utilize resources, access information, enhance savings, and also avail credit **(Mandal, 2005)**. The SHGs are characterized by focused attention on providing employment opportunities by imparting training to generate both incomes as well as employment **(Husain and Nair, 2006).** Self-help groups bring economic upliftment, leadership skills in managing the group, and inculcate great confidence in the members of selected groups to succeed in their day-to-day life **(Kaur, 2017)**.

Marketing being an important area of functioning of SHGs helped farmers to realize reasonable returns from the produce, minimize the transportation cost and improve the product value and marketability. In rural India, Self-help groups worked very well and showed a good effect on the economy and society. The extent of participation in production, grading, and standardization, packaging, and distribution activities were more among the women members of SHG rather than non-member **(Tehra, 2014)**. The studies shows that economic benefits gained from enrolling in the groups were received the higher price of their products instead of selling individually (91%), understood banking operations to avail credit facility (81.50%). A large number of women in Punjab developed the courage to think independently (99.50%), understood group activities (96%), and managed group activities (95.50%) after joining the group **(Kaur, 2017)**. Self-help groups played a significant role in many core aspects of farming, such as increasing production at a reduced cost; providing expert technical guidance; purchasing inputs, and marketing products **(Pertev and King, 2000)**.To market its products, the group has built linkages with other organizations like the Department of Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry, and Farm Science Centres5/Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) of PAU. **Kilpatrick et al. (2003)** found that growers who are active in external networks are more likely to make changes to practice. The group was allotted an area within PAU to sell their products until they became more established. Now that it is well established, the group manages its marketing, with savings usually invested back into the group's business or used for inter-loaning among group members at 12% interest with 1% interest returned to the pool. Micro-credit not only helped rural people attain improved economic status but also led to social cohesion and women's empowerment **(Singh et al. 2007; Pandher 2009)**.

Ministry of Rural Development launched 'Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana' (MKSP) in 2011 as a sub-component of the scheme, DAY–NRLM aiming at bringing at least one woman member from each identified rural poor household under the self-help group (SHG) network in a time-bound

manner. The primary objective was to empower women by making systematic investments to enhance their participation and productivity in agriculture and allied activities for creating sustainable livelihood opportunities. MKSP in 2018–19 focused on promoting sustainable agricultural practices through organic certification and marketing to enable farmers to get better market access. The MKSP has been instrumental in increasing the visibility of women in allied activities as an interest group where women SHG members were trained to become *Pashu Sakhi* for improved rearing and management of goats. The activity resulted in the creation of weekly *haat* for the sale and purchase of animals, which especially benefited landless and single women (GoJ, 2017).

The continuity and success of collective marketing depend on decisive factors like learning the rules of the market like the price information for different products, different marketing outlets, and timeliness of delivering the product to the market, on spot computation of sale value, price negotiation with the purchaser (Landesa, 2013). The group of women vegetable farmers in Muzaffarpur, India, benefitted from collective marketing, cutting out the middlemen and putting more money back into their businesses and families. Techno Serve, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), is implementing the Women Economic Empowerment project in collaboration with the Government of Bihar's JEEVIKA program. The team has worked to strengthen the all-women " Samarpan Jeevika Mahila Kisan Producer Company Limited" (SJMKPCL), a farmer producer organization (FPO) comprised of smaller producer groups, transparently leveraging their aggregation advantage. Timely payment and cashless transactions were key benefit of the intervention. The project is helping smallholder producers to achieve higher prices and direct market access by removing intermediaries and adopting best practices, including collective marketing, quality control, and transparency in weighing and pricing. (https://www.technoserve.org/blog/collective-marketing-individual-gains/).

A significant part of the success of Operation Flood could be attributed to women's participation in dairy development that was made possible through two important programs; Women Dairy Cooperative Leadership Program (WDCLP) to promote women leaders and Enhancing Women Involvement in Dairy Cooperatives (EWIC) that aimed to support milk unions efforts to increase women membership and enhance the role of women in dairy cooperatives (Chaudhary, 2012). Linking women farmers to markets built the capacity of women farmers to understand markets-financial literacy, negotiation skills, access to inputs, information, and supportive policies (Njuki, 2012).

Smallholder farmers face challenges in participating in agricultural markets, smallholder rural women farmers have extra challenges associated with their lack of ownership of livestock, land, low education levels and low use of technology as well as demands on their time by other household duties (Dolan 2001, Grace 2005, IFAD 2010). Limited access to hired labour, equipment, technology, training, finance, and markets, Restrictions on land ownership and tenure that limit expansion opportunities and lead investors to deal primarily with men (Giovarelli *et.al,* 2013). Land ownership with male members were 80.56 per cent while only 19.74 per cent female had land ownership. Ownership of livestock was with both men and women 48.82 per cent as against with women in 33.33 per cent of households (Subrahmanyeshwari and Chander, 2012). Sexual harassment and violence; household, community, care responsibilities, are essential to rural wellbeing but have an important effect on women's time use. (Doss *et.al* 2011).

Women traditionally participate in value chain nodes with lower economic returns than men. Women's participation in the production of a specific crop is oftentimes related to the crop's assumed value and is thereby usually limited to local consumption and the local market. Men are more likely to participate in export commodities, or in markets where there is a greater economic return. (Coles, 2011). The Food and Agriculture Organization found that women received only 5 per cent of extension services. Though this figure can vary, it inevitably reflects gender gaps: for instance, in Ethiopia and India, 20 per cent and 18 per cent of extension services reach women respectively, yet in Ghana, only 2 per cent of such services do so. Women in agribusiness are likely to be excluded from transportation of goods to market or from marketing or sales roles of goods, even when women are the main producers of those goods. Where women are involved, their sales opportunities are more likely to be confined to local markets rather than regional or international ones. This results in poor access to networks and is reinforced by infrastructure and trade systems that tend to inadvertently disadvantage women.

Strategies to link women farmers to markets

Creating direct linkages with women in the supply chain is the best way to ensure that women benefit from their work, maintain control over their assets, and can expand their businesses. women's engagement in agricultural markets has limited impact on women's incomes and does not strengthen their assets and decision-making capacity by increasing the visibility of poor women and promoting them into new roles and leadership positions in viable agricultural markets, women's income and well being can be improved and facilitate their wider economic and social empowerment facilitated (Baden, 2012). Francis (2012) revealed that there were some known solutions to improve market access. These were minimizing uncertainty in production and markets, encouraging innovation and uptake of inputs such as technological, facilitating access to credit various forms, improving knowledge and skills in production, processing and marketing, improving access to market information, investing in infrastructure (e.g. markets), research and increasing involvement of women in policy and programme formulation and implementation, While technology adds value to every stage of the value chain, ICT applications have particular utility in access to transportation, marketing, and sales, because they can help overcome the restrictions on movement and home-based care responsibilities that are oftentimes barriers for women in India (Pathak and

Figure 1 Logical Framework Approach Matrix

	Intervention Logic	Objectively measurable and verifiable indicators	Sources of verification	Important Assumptions
Development objectives/Goal	• To empower Women farmers through group approaches	• Role of SHGs in empowerment of women. • Implications of Group approach in market led extension	• Review of related literature, Reports from secondary data (Books, websites)	• Market led extension through group approaches help Women farmers to empower
Project objective/ Purpose	• Documenting and verifying how Self Help Group Approach empowering Women farmers.	• Self-help group approach • Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana • Collective Marketing	• Market Intelligence, Market Orientation, Market Integration	• Formation of SHGs, FIGs, CIGs help farmers to empower
Results/Output	• Appropriate reception of Market Intelligence, Market needs, empowerment among the women farmers at all the four main levels *i.e.*, personal, social, technological and economic.	• Market awareness, Information source utilization, Income generation, Credit utilization, Social participation, Social recognition	• Utilization of experienced gain, improvement in output, change in attitude, change in skills	• Market led extension leads to better performance
Activities	• Collection of data from secondary sources of information	• Proper collection and analysis of Collected information.	• Collected Information from Research papers, manuals, Books etc.	• Adequate information
Inputs/ Resources	• Research papers, manuals, Books etc.	• Proper selection of variables and statistical tools	• Implications on empowerment	• Adequate Review of Literature

Maulik, 2014). Logical framework has been designed (Figure 1) to understand interventional logic, indicators, source of verification and assumptions .

Women represent significant potential to upgrade value chain performance and build input markets, benefiting women and input supply companies at the sometimese, however, enabling small-scale farmers with the potential to succeed in commercial farming can support the performance and development of the sector as a whole. Sector-wide women's labor force participation differs across and within countries and regions, from 20 percent in Latin America to 50 percent in parts of Africa and Asia(FAO, 2010). Open multiple types of markets, formal or informal, even away from farm gate to allow greater choice and new opportunities. Engage men and women to achieve broader changes in gender relations and bbuild on collectives that ensure benefits to women (Jaim, 2012).

Conclusion

Women play important role in agricultural development and allied fields including crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post-harvest operations, agro/ social forestry, fisheries, etc. The group approach among women farmers is the key to increase the participation of women in marketing agricultural produce. The market linkage can help them to get more exposure and can become their source of income. Women's economic empowerment starts with earning and saving from that income. To improve the quality of their yields, women farmers need access to inputs and knowledge of best practice for input application, which ultimately benefits agribusiness companies as it leads to secured quality and sustainable supply of outputs. The process of awareness creation, capacity building and facilitation ensures greater control over the decision-making process in the livelihood of women farmers and leads to trans-formative decisions based on sound science.

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