

Role Performance and Knowledge Level of Tribal Women Farmers in Meghalaya

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ABSTRACT

Role and contribution of women human resource in agriculture has been a very crucial input not only in enhancing the crop production but also in overall agricultural diversification. To recognize women's role and their innate potential, their capacities and skills are required to be build up and refined accordingly. Keeping in view the overall involvement of tribal women farmers in agriculture, study was planned to assess the knowledge level of the women farmers about modern farming so that a mechanism could be developed for upgrading of their know-how and the do-how which in indispensable not only for enhancing the production but also the sustainability on nutritional and environmental fronts. Results of the study reveal that knowledge and adoption level were considerably low among almost all the tribes. Reasons might be attributed to the low knowledge level, poor socio-economic status and land tenure system.

Key words: Women human resource; Agricultural diversification;

According to 1991 Census about 87 percent of the rural women in India are employed in agricultural sector. Their participation differs from region to region and strata to strata. The role of participation of women has been found to be 58.3 percent in marginal farms, 52.71 percent in small farms and 53.90 percent in medium farms (Saikia, 1985). But, despite of their major contributions, they do not get due recognition. According to Mitra (1980) women labour force in India is perceived as a reserve pool of helpless labourers.

In Meghalaya, social system is such that most of the farm operations and household activities are performed by the women only. They are also envolved in decision making process but their low knowledge level about the improved practices and developments in the area of agriculture restricts them to go far modern farming practices and efficient marketing of the farm produces. To establish a feedback to this effect a study was conducted among the major tribes of Meghalaya viz; Khasi, Garo and Jaintia with following objectives :

1. To study about socio-economic features of tribal women.

2. To study about their role performance in different farm operations and their knowledge level about modern farming.

METHODOLOGY

Total 150 (50 each from Khasi, Garo and Jaintia) farm women were selected randomly and were interviewed personally against structured schedule with major components viz; socio-economic profile, participation in different agricultural operations and the knowledge level. Finally correlation coefficient was calculated with socio-economic variable and participation level in different agricultural operations.

For measuring knowledge level, a knowledge scale consisting of 17 statements (9 positive & 8 negative) was included in the interview schedule. The scores assigned were 1 and 0 for right and wrong responses respectively. Reverse scoring was done for the negative statements. On the basis of total scores, respondents were grouped into three categories:

Low level	-	< mean-SD
Medium level	-	from mean- SD to mean + SD
High level	-	>mean + SD

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Majority of women farmers were found to have small (38.67%) and medium (49.33%) size of family with farming (83.33%) as the major source of livelihood. As regard to education 62.0% were found to be illiterate. Only 12.0% had education above 8th class. About 58.0% had small size (<1 acre) of land holding followed by medium (1-2.5 acre) 31.33% and large (>2.5 acre) only 10.67% while in case of material possession max. 54.67% had medium level of possession. Because of their hectic engagements in household & farm activities and unavailability of media sources (News Papers, Television, Radio etc.), less mobility and remoteness of the places where even govt. or non-govt. functionaries are also not able to reach regularly and sufficiently, 72.67% women were found to have low media exposure and about 46.67% had low social contacts (Table 1). Overall, above details depict poor socio-economics of the tribal women in the state of Meghalaya.

Table 1. Socio-economic profile of tribal women (n=150)

S.No.	Variable	Category	No.	%
1.	Age	Young < 26	34	22.67
		Middle 26-40	95	63.33
		Old > 40	21	14.00
2.	Family size	Small	58	38.67
		Medium	74	49.33
		Large	18	12.00
3.	Occupation	Landless	10	6.67
		Agricultural labourers	15	10.00
4.	Education	Farming	125	83.33
		Illiterate	93	62.00
		Primary	39	26.00
5.	Land holding	Middle and above	18	12.00
		Small <1 acre	87	58.00
		Medium 1 - 2.5	47	31.33
6.	Material possession	Large > 2.5	16	10.67
		Low	47	31.33
		Medium	82	54.67
7.	Mass Media Contact	High	21	14.00
		Low	109	72.67
		Medium	34	22.67
8.	Social contact	High	7	4.66
		Low	70	46.67
		Medium	56	37.33
		High	24	2.67

Except use of agricultural chemicals (fertilizers and plant protection chemicals), tribal women irrespective

of Khasi, Garo or Jaintia maximum were found to be engaged predominantly in all type of farm operations (Table 2).

Table 2. Participation of tribal women in different agricultural operations

S. No.	Activity	Khasi (n = 50)		Garo (n = 50)		Jaintia (n = 50)	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Application of FYM	32	64	40	80	38	76
2	Land preparation	23	46	31	62	35	70
3	Preparation of nursery	28	56	38	96	36	72
4	Sowing of paddy/maize	41	82	42	84	45	90
5	Transplanting of rice	44	88	45	90	40	80
6	Fertilizer application in crop	18	36	12	24	8	16
7	Weeding	46	92	42	84	43	86
8	Plant prot.	9	18	5	10	2	4
9	Harvesting	48	96	47	94	48	96
10	Threshing	25	50	33	66	35	70
11	Storage	37	74	32	64	38	76
12	Sale of produces	43	86	38	76	32	64
13	Animals care	48	96	46	92	48	96
14	Household chores	50	100	50	100	50	100
15	Decision making in crop management activities	21	42	15	30	12	24
16	Adoption of modern technology	14	28	10	20	9	18

It was interesting to note that despite their involvement in almost all type of farm operations their role in decision making (Khasi-42.0%, Garo-30.0% & Jaintia-24.0%) and adoption of modern technologies (Khasi-28.0%, Garo-20.0% & Jaintia-18.0%) was found to be very low. Reasons for the plight could be attributed to the poor socio-economics, low media & social contacts and low knowledge level (Table 3) among all the tribes.

Table 3. Knowledge level of tribal women in modern farming

S. No.	Knowledge level	Khasi (n = 50)		Garo (n = 50)		Jaintia (n = 50)	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Low	33	66	39	78	46	92
2	Medium	15	30	10	20	3	6
3	High	2	6	1	2	1	2

Table 4. Correlation between independent and dependent variable in crop production activities

S. No.	Independent variables	'r' value
1	Age	0.098
2	Family size	0.342**
3	Education	0.297**
4	Land holding	0.299**
5	Material possession	0.077
6	Mass Media	0.042
7	Social participation	-0.427**

** Significant at 0.01 level of probability

* Significant at 0.05 level of probability

It is evident from the table 4 that the family size, education and land holding was positively and significantly correlated with participation. Women who had their own land (exclusive of land allotted by village community or Darbar hall) and large size of family were found to participate more in farm operations. Large family size helps in distribution of house hold and farm activities among the members of the family which facilitates them to devote maximum time for farm operations. Participation of women with high education

level was also found to be more because of comparatively high knowledge level and their role in decision making.

CONCLUSION

Since women are engaged in most of the house hold and farm activities, they must be targeted through the development programmes in agriculture and allied sectors. For betterment of their know how and do how in modern farming they should be involved maximum in exposure, training and awareness programmes & to ensure their maximum participation, programmes should be organized in their conditions and as per their convenience. Further, though keeping in view the existing social systems, it is tough, but State govt. should initiate the process of improvement in land tenure system so that max. farmers could think of settled cultivation for the betterment of themselves in particular and for the improvement of agricultural development in the State in general.

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