

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH HORTICULTURAL VALUE-ADDED VENTURES

Abstract

Women's economic empowerment through horticultural value-added ventures is a dynamic strategy with far-reaching implications for both individuals and communities. By engaging in the processing and marketing of horticultural products, women not only contribute to their households' financial well-being but also acquire valuable skills in entrepreneurship and agribusiness. Through activities such as making jams, pickles, and dried fruits, women add value to raw produce, enabling them to fetch higher prices in the market. This not only enhances their income but also mitigates the impact of seasonal fluctuations in agricultural earnings. Additionally, these ventures foster self-reliance and independence among women, challenging traditional gender norms. The ripple effects of women's economic empowerment extend beyond individual households, positively influencing community development and overall resilience. To maximize the impact of such initiatives, there is a need for continued support, training programs, and market linkages that enable women to scale up their ventures and contribute to sustainable and inclusive economic growth in rural areas.

Author

Dr. Piyali Dutta

Assistant Professor
Department of Horticulture
School of Agriculture
Sister Nivedita University
Kolkata, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indeed, family farming is a predominant form of agriculture worldwide, including in both developing and developed countries. In India, there are distinct gender roles within the rural economy, with women and girls actively involved in various agro-horti-oriented activities. Women's involvement in horticulture in India encompasses a wide range of tasks, starting from seedbed preparation, weeding, nursery, and fruit cultivation. They also engage in post-harvest crop processing activities such as cleaning and drying vegetables, fruits, and nuts for domestic consumption and marketing. It is noteworthy that a significant number of individuals dependent on land are women. In fact, 58% of male workers and 78% of female workers are engaged in agriculture, and 86% of all rural female workers are involved in this sector. Additionally, female-headed households account for 20% to 35% of rural households, which includes widows, deserted women, and those who manage farming while their male counterparts migrate. While the time dedicated to agricultural activities may be nearly equal for both women and men in certain communities and agricultural contexts, women tend to be predominantly responsible for domestic tasks. The level and nature of women's involvement in agricultural activities can vary depending on the specific agro-production systems, geographical location, cropping patterns, ethnic affiliation, as well as economic and educational background of the family unit. Apart from their role in agricultural production, rural Indian women are also engaged in various horti-based allied activities. These include dairying, animal husbandry, poultry farming, goat rearing, rabbit farming, beekeeping, floriculture, horticulture, fruit preservation, post-harvest technology, and value-added food product processing. These allied activities provide additional income sources for women and contribute to the overall rural economy. It is essential to recognize the diverse roles and contributions of women in agriculture and allied activities in India. Empowering women farmers and ensuring their equal access to resources, education, technology, and markets can significantly enhance agricultural productivity, rural livelihoods, and overall food security in the country.

II. HISTORY

Indeed, the concept of women's empowerment is multifaceted and can be understood and defined in various ways, as evidenced by the multitude of definitions documented in the literature. One common thread among many of these definitions is the emphasis on agency, which refers to the ability of individuals or groups to make purposeful choices and take actions to improve their circumstances. (Alkira *et al*, 2005)

The multidimensional nature of women's empowerment is crucial to recognize. Women may face disempowerment in different aspects of life, such as social, economic, and political dimensions, among others. (Alsop *et al*, 2006) For example, a woman might have economic empowerment but still lack social or political empowerment, which may limit her overall agency and potential to effect change in her life.

Considering empowerment in a multidimensional way, as advocated by Mason and the World Bank, is important for crafting effective interventions and policies aimed at promoting women's empowerment. Addressing empowerment in one dimension should not overshadow or neglect the need to empower women in other aspects. (Narayan *et al*, 2005) A comprehensive approach is necessary to ensure that women have the resources, capabilities,

and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, access services, and have control over their lives.

By adopting this holistic perspective, policymakers and practitioners can better understand the complexities of women's empowerment and design interventions that address the various dimensions of disempowerment, ultimately contributing to more meaningful and sustainable progress in gender equality and women's rights.

III. EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH HORTICULTURAL VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS

Women empowerment through horticultural value-added products is an excellent approach to promote gender equality, economic empowerment, and sustainable development. By engaging women in horticulture and enabling them to create value-added products, we can enhance their skills, income opportunities, and overall socio-economic status. Here's how women can be empowered through horticultural value-added products:

- 1. Skill Development:** Providing training and capacity-building programs to women in horticulture can equip them with the necessary skills to produce value-added products. This can include training on product development, packaging, marketing, quality control, and entrepreneurship.
- 2. Entrepreneurship Opportunities:** Encouraging women to become entrepreneurs in the horticulture sector allows them to establish their businesses and be self-reliant. They can start small-scale enterprises such as processing fruits and vegetables, making jams, jellies, pickles, sauces, dried fruits, herbal teas, and other value-added products.
- 3. Access to Resources:** Facilitating women's access to land, credit, technology, and markets is crucial for their success in horticulture. Providing them with easy access to resources and financial support enables them to invest in infrastructure, equipment, raw materials, and marketing efforts.
- 4. Market Linkages:** Assisting women in establishing market linkages is essential to ensure the sustainability of their horticultural ventures. Collaborations with local markets, restaurants, hotels, supermarkets, and online platforms can help women reach a wider customer base and increase their product visibility.
- 5. Networking and Collaboration:** Encouraging women to form self-help groups, cooperatives, or associations allows them to share knowledge, experiences, and resources. Collaborative efforts can lead to collective marketing, bulk procurement of raw materials, and better bargaining power.
- 6. Access to Information and Technology:** Providing women with information on the latest horticultural practices, market trends, and technological advancements empowers them to make informed decisions. Access to agricultural extension services, mobile applications, and online platforms can bridge the information gap and enhance their productivity.

7. **Sustainable Practices:** Promoting sustainable horticulture practices among women helps protect the environment and ensures long-term viability. Training them in organic farming, natural pest control, efficient irrigation techniques, and waste management contributes to sustainable production and market demand for eco-friendly products.
8. **Policy Support:** Advocating for policies that support women's participation in horticulture and value addition is crucial. Governments and relevant stakeholders should ensure gender-responsive policies, easy access to credit, land rights, and supportive legal frameworks to promote women's empowerment in the sector.
9. **Recognition and Appreciation:** Recognizing and appreciating the contributions of women in horticulture and value addition is essential for boosting their morale and confidence. Celebrating their successes, organizing exhibitions, fairs, and award ceremonies can showcase their products, raise awareness, and attract more customers.

Value Added Product

Sl. No	Crop	By Product
1	Mango	Juices, leather, nectars, drinks, jams, fruit cheese, and many other beverages, puddings, bakery fillings, fruit meals.
2	Banana	Banana chips, banana juice, banana wine, banana jam, banana flour ,banana powder, banana drink, and banana sauce
3	Jackfruit	Jelly, chips from seed, jackfruit leather
4	Citrus	Juice, Squash,
5	Grape	Juice, Squash, Wine
6	Guava	Jelly, juice, concentrate, cheese, toffee, Guava wine, guava powder, ice cream toppings.
7	Litchi	Juice, Squash, ice cream topping
8	Papaya	Papaya jam, papaya squash, papaya Sauce, papaya toffee and papaya nectar
9	Apple	Apple juice, apple cider, Apple jam
10	Pear	juice, jam
11	Peach	juice, jam
12	Pineapple	Canned pineapple, dried pineapple, nectar, juice, sauce, jam, vinegar, toffees.
13	Passion fruit	Passion fruit juice ,chocolate ,passion fruit tea, desserts like ice cream cordial ,jam ,cake
14	Pomegranate	squash, syrup, nectar, jelly, anardana

Overall, empowering women through horticultural value-added products not only benefits them individually but also contributes to the economic growth of communities, the preservation of traditional knowledge, and the sustainable development of the horticulture sector. It is a powerful means to create inclusive and gender-equal societies.

IV. CONCLUSION

Indeed, the role and participation of women in society are crucial for a nation's overall progress. Women have made significant contributions in various fields, and their status, employment, and work are important indicators of a country's development. Without the active involvement of women in national activities, a country's social, economic, and political progress can be hindered.

Rural women, in particular, have the potential to play a significant role through their effective participation in entrepreneurial activities. They often possess basic indigenous knowledge, skills, and resources that can be utilized to establish and manage enterprises. Income-generating activities can be powerful tools for social and economic development, providing employment opportunities for many rural women within their own communities and contributing to the family income.

Empowering women requires a multi-faceted approach, and one crucial element is the provision of new skills through training. As women take on new roles and responsibilities, it is essential to support them by providing the necessary training to perform these roles effectively. Such training programs should also address societal norms and how they shape women's perceptions. Encouraging critical analysis and independent thinking is vital for women to challenge unequal gender relations and exploitation.

By empowering women through education, skill development, and challenging social norms, societies can harness their potential to drive progress and create more inclusive and equitable communities. Women's participation in all aspects of life is not only a matter of justice and equality but also a key factor in achieving sustainable development and the advancement of nations as a whole.

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