

The background of the cover is a photograph of a woman in a vibrant, multi-colored sari (red, yellow, and green) working in a lush green rice field. She is bent over, tending to the plants. In the background, another person is visible, also working in the field. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with tall rice stalks in the foreground.

Gender & Agriculture

An Indian Perspective

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Gender and Agriculture: An Indian Perspective

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About the Editors



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Preface

Indian women often assume this burden while labouring with key disadvantages due to long-standing gender roles that can limit their access to economic resources—both within their households and communities. To be effective, any intervention to avert a food crisis caused by the pandemic will need to navigate a fraught terrain of gender inequality—and not just in the interest of social justice. Women are critical to feeding the country. The more they suffer, the more the country will suffer. Most of the food consumed in India is produced on small-scale family farms where, in many states, 40 to 60 per cent of farmers are women. Yet these women often lack equal access to quality seeds, fertilizers, good land, credit, technical advice and new technologies. Compared to men, women are less likely to own a cellphone or have the finances to purchase it. Technology literacy may also be lower for women.

As infections with Covid-19 pandemic appear to be intensifying across the globe, subsequent economic fall out and severe food shortage is pointing to a warning that the world may be “on the brink of a hunger pandemic.” But averting what some experts believe could be a food crisis of immense proportions requires paying close attention to an often overlooked feature of food security across the globe: Globally women play a large and growing role in all aspects of the global food systems—whether it’s growing crops and raising livestock, selling and purchasing food in local markets, or dealing with the nutritional needs of their households.

Moreover, the social network many women use to overcome these barriers could be closed-off by the COVID-19 clampdowns.

One of today’s biggest challenges is that millions of women remain mostly excluded from agricultural development through no fault of their own. They are unable to participate in the urgently needed transformation of food systems, essential to sustainably defeat hunger and produce enough, and good enough food under the ongoing climate crisis. It is only when both women and men are able to contribute the food systems equally they can successfully nourish families, communities and entire nations, today and in the future. Breaking down the structural barriers that hold women back is essential to support farmers in developing countries and finally giving women an equal voice in making decisions about their farm and non-farm activities can lead to better nutrition.

May, 2021

Editors