



**The Role of Rural Women in Agricultural Operations:
A Study of Sargodha District**

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Abstract

A large number of Less Developed countries depend upon agriculture for economic gain and monetary purposes. In these countries, Agriculture is the main catalyst that drives forth the engine of national economy. Growth comes from the latter and as of such; a large majority of these countries populations is directly or indirectly involved with the field of agriculture. Pakistan is one such country and has immense interests within the realm of Agriculture and pertinent operations. More than half of the country's denizens are involved in agriculture and this in turn speaks volumes about the significance that the latter evinces within the context of Pakistan. However, in this region, the actual unsung heroes, or rather heroines, of the trade are Women. Their accomplishments and contributions in Agriculture far outshine their male counterparts and these dedicational contributions are in large part responsible for supporting the whole aspect of Pakistani Agriculture. This study is an endeavor towards this particular direction wherein the irrefutable and highly significant role that Women play in the field of Agriculture within the context of Pakistan will be illuminated. In order to attain said goal, this study was carried out in congruence with Quantitative nature of Research. The respondents were the female agricultural workers within District Sargodha. A multi stage sampling method was employed for the selection of respondents for the study. First one tehsil of Sargodha was purposively selected. Secondly, from one tehsil one rural union council named 74 was purposively selected. All villages of this rural union council were selected purposively. Therefore, 300 hundred female respondents who were participating in agriculture sector were purposively selected for information from these three villages. An Interview Schedule was utilized for obtaining data from the respondents. The data yielded as a ramification of this study was well within the range of expected outcomes and as of such; requisite recommendations and suggestions for bringing about improvement were also postulated.

Keywords: Agriculture, Pakistan, Economic gain, Rural, Women, Sargodha.

Introduction

When we talk about work force or labor force, then we are in fact alluding to a human resource channel that can be accessed on monthly or daily basis for the completion of certain tasks and services. In remuneration for these services, the work force members receive daily wages or monthly salaries. Therefore, when we say Labor force participation, we are ascribing to the availability of skilled labors to be engaged in meaningful and paid activities. A population's participation rate in the labor force is indicated by LFPR or Labor Force Participation Rate if you prefer. It is also known as Economic Activity Rate. LFPR is formulated by dividing the number of the individuals that are economically active in any provided age group by the total number of individuals and subsequently multiplying the result by hundred.

The degree to which females indulge in matters pertaining to the economy of a country is denoted by the Female Labor Force Participation, or FLFP. Due to its significance in pinpointing the discrepancies that exist between genders across matters of economy in a country, FLFP has attained an emphasized level of prominence amongst researchers. FLFP is actually the percentage of females that are working in the labor force of a given population at that particular time and are available to be inducted into any profit garnering activity.

The role of females in the work force and their endeavors within it have led to increased stability in the economy and as a ramification, poverty has been notably declined in certain populations. Countries like Malaysia, who have been dubbed as Asian Tigers due to their recent boom in prosperity, attribute much of their economic emergence to the sterling number of female participants in her labor force. On the flip side, areas like Rural Punjab, where women participation in the work force is notably lower, economic matters have taken quite a blow in terms of efficiency. Women have recently also begun to show their mettle in labor force pertaining to agriculture as well. For instance, in Nigeria, improved engagement and indulgence of women in the agricultural sector has led to enhanced growth in agricultural production, processing and utilization. Programs like Women in Agriculture aims at refining the number of female farmers within a country by providing knowledge on improved and rectified farming techniques and research methods to those overlooked and ignored female farmers whose roles remain obscured.

Pakistan is a country located within the area of South Asia and evinces a total area of 796100 sq. Km. It boasts a total population of about 162 million people 51% of which are women, and is at present, a developing state. The country has been designated as an agricultural one, seeing as 67% of its denizens are directly or indirectly associated with the occupation of agriculture. Ever since its conception, the tenets of agricultural development and production have played a vital role in the economic development of the country. The total number of labor force engaged in Pakistan amounts to about 23.12 million and accounts to about 44.65% of the total work force. 69.9% of the work force is comprised of males while the remaining 38.4% if constituted of females. Despite Pakistan's gradual and consistent growth over the last few decades, the country still lags far behind in comparison to its contemporaries when it comes to FLFP. Despite the level of significance that the latter entails in regards to economic development, Female Labor Force Participation still doesn't exhibit adequately appropriate levels of prominence or focus.

Researches have shown that in South Asian countries, labor force participation rate is 42 % in Bangladesh, 41% in Nepal, 32 % in India and Bhutan, 37% in Sri Lanka. All of these countries boast a much better proportion of Labor Force participation, in accordance with their population, when stacked against Pakistan. The rationale for Pakistan's comparatively lower Labor Force Participation lies in the startlingly lower number of females in the labor force. This is largely in part due to the obstructions and hindrances that females face when endeavoring to break into the

labor markets as well as the lack of liberty and autonomy in choosing vocations that match their proclivities.

Integral and paramount procedures relevant to agriculture that include livestock farming, crop production, fisheries, operations performed after harvest and many more are initiated and conducted by rural women. It is therefore somewhat mortifying not to mention depressing that despite this prominent and irrefutable role played by rural women in the development of agricultural sector, and by link society, these diligent ladies yet remain mired in the depths of obscurity. Women, despite their pivotal presence in maintaining the integrity of agricultural operations within the country, are still oppressed and governed by the decisiveness of the ruling male class. This is in large part due to the fact that these women are oblivious and totally nebulous when it comes to knowing their basic rights. They have to accept and acquiesce to all decisions that are taken by men. In addition to this, these women also intercept various maladies during the course of their work in the fields. For instance, rural women who work in the cotton fields often suffer from swelling in their hands, which in turn can be credited to the usage of chemicals in agricultural pursuits that are detrimental to the epidermis. These women are also ignorant of the cost, expenditures and marketing methods pertinent to their vocation. That is why there is an immense need for them to be educated in the latest research methods and techniques for augmenting their prowess in agricultural production, processing and so forth. This positive reinforcement is justified as rural females are solely accountable for about 50% of the food production that is attained in the world. They also contribute to about 60 to 80% of the production that occurs in various developing countries. Women make up about 70% of the world's total agricultural workers, 80% of the workforce responsible for food making and 60 to 80% when it comes to selling off these products.

Another factor that can be attributed to as being a major cause for the lower level of female participation in the work force is Education. The level of education that women exhibit at any point in time is largely responsible for the degree of presence that they evince in the work force. The greater the education that females evince, the greater will be their participation in the labor force of a population. Perhaps this is one reason because of which Pakistan is currently lagging behind other countries when it comes to ensuring elevated inclusion levels of females in the work force. The participation and position of women in intercepting the difficulties and challenges in production of agricultural goods can't be denied or overlooked. Why just in Nigeria only, women make up about 60 to 80% of the total work force in the Agricultural sector.

Role of Women in Agricultural Development

Rural as well as National economies are dependent upon women for their development. Women constitute about 43% of the total agricultural labor force of the world and this figure ascends to about 70% in certain countries. 80% of the agricultural production comes from women in Africa. Despite possessing the largest percentage in the agricultural sector, women are still deprived of their rights as well as access/control over their productive resources and land. (Mucavele, 2013) The majorities of LDCs, or Less Developed Countries, are dependent upon agriculture and consider it to be a crucial and irreplaceable component of their economy. Agriculture acts as a vigorous driver of economy as well as growth. Pakistan is not exempted from this case as it is a country that evinces an economy highly dependent upon agriculture. The latter is responsible for generation of employment and national income within the country. The largest portion of the country's population is either directly or indirectly involved with Agriculture as an occupation. In this sector, the diligence and commitment of women far eclipse those of men. However, the irony here lies in the truth that their contributions and endeavors go unnoticed and unrecognized

on the national level. There are many factors that can be attributed as being the cause for this absence of recognition. Still, amongst these factors, gender comes out on top, where women are not surpassed by superior talent in the field by rather through the archaic and normative notions of gender superiority. Further exacerbation is enforced through the negligence of the policy makers in this regard. The policy makers initiate no such endeavors for alleviating the injustice heaped upon women through constraints of male superiority which therefore leads to failure in properly and explicitly utilizing the full extent of the talents that Pakistani female agri workers embody in the concerned field. (Yasmeen, 2014)

When it comes to economics development of a country, women have largely remained an invisible and undecipherable aspect of the whole equation. The social development of a country rests greatly on its women as well. In rural settings, many men migrate to the urban regions for finding work. As a result, their absence compels women to come forth and step into the field of agriculture. The rural way of life within South East Asia is kept alive by the women as they participate in all chores pertaining to sowing, transplanting, harvesting and weeding. In addition to this, they also play prominent roles in post-harvest operations like grinding, drying, storing etc. Households that are headed by women are affected most severely by urban way of living. This represents a monumental and increasing portion of the most destitute urban households. The informal sector provides for many women in regards to their income. This is therefore affected by the aforementioned onset of urban conditions which causes the earnings of these women to vacillate. This is in large part due to their responsibilities, such as child care and so forth. Women play an eminent role in the marketing of products in many countries. This is because in most of these countries, transportation costs for these products is very high and in some cases, the territorial hindrances render conventional means of transportation ineffectual. This requires carrying of the products on head. In these countries, the role of females is not only limited to the agricultural fields. Also, in areas where piped water supply is absent or not available, the responsibility for provision of said commodity falls upon women. The womenfolk are assisted in this task by their children as well and the quality of this water is largely dependent upon the distance to the source, time taken to get there and the capacity of the women for carrying it. In hot areas, the availability of drinking water is scarce. The obligation for fetching water therefore falls upon women who have to do so from wells and other far away water spots. Water is a basic and integral element in agricultural pursuits as well so in these areas, the importance of water is enhanced by many folds as well. That is why women and their role are undeniable in these areas when it comes to agricultural advancement.

According to an estimate, the average woman from working class spends about 12 to 16 hours daily engaged in chores in South Asia. For instance, an average woman from Nepal works for about 12.07 hours daily. This is significantly higher than her male counterpart, who spends about 8.21 hours a day in work (47% higher to be precise). A large number of operations across the field of agriculture are dependent upon the participation of women for their successful completion. There are a number of factors that govern the inclusion and participation of women in the field of agriculture. These factors include ones relating to socio economic status, geographical area, type of activity and the crops concerned. Men and women work alongside in farms where agricultural operations take place. While women are involved in all aspects of the agricultural ministrations, there are certain ones that require special and concentrated participation from their part. There are specific crops in South Asia that require eminent participation from the female workers of the agricultural sector. For instance, in Pakistan, women play a profound and irrefutable role in the production, plantation and cultivation of cotton crop. Almost all of the operations, including the planting and picking of the crop in question are done

by women. The level of participation varies from area to area in Pakistan, like for instance, in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women and their inclusion in the field of agricultural operations is very much lower and restricted. This can be owed to the binding and constricting social and cultural norms of the regions which prevent these women from taking part in the agricultural sector.

It is also noteworthy to mention here that Women in Pakistan play an integral role in dairy production within the country. Small domestic production units that are entirely managed and run by women are the ones that provide fresh milk to all areas of the country, except several specific cities. According to an estimate, about 90 percent of these women who earn income as a result of dairy production are also the ones that manage and control the expenditures of this income. Also, when it comes to textile industry, women still play a prominent role. While they are not involved directly with the more intricate machinations of these operations, the basic ones like spinning the yarn, dyeing and the arranging of the loom is performed solely by them. It is because of this therefore, that despite the apparent and lucidly critical role played by women in agricultural sector, their plight and constrained limitations predicated on tradition/norms in pertinence to agricultural participation is so distressing. In Pakistan, women face a lack of access in regards to supplies, right for extension, credit and even advice for managing and owning agricultural lands. The average woman in Pakistani Agricultural sector works around 14 hours a day. These women are responsible for about 25 to 40% of the total agricultural production within the country and that is why their problems and predicaments need to be assessed, recognized and alleviated so as to ameliorate and enhance their conditions in a manner conducive. (Alam, 2003)

Justification for the Study

Pakistan is a country defined by its agricultural potential. An agricultural country, Pakistan is largely dependent upon the latter for its economy and the fact that about 66% of the country's total population is involved with agriculture for their livelihood is evidence enough for this fact. Despite being one of the most significant and critical areas of Pakistan's economy, it is disconcerting to know that there remains a large class which is persecuted and prevented from taking part in the operations of agriculture. This class pertains to females, who while having a strong presence in the machinations of agricultural sector still struggle to gain a foothold in the sector. Women constitute more than half of the total population of Pakistan and their contribution toward their family has undoubtedly vastly important ramifications. But the society gave them less regard and exposure when it comes to taking part in the many works and matters of the agricultural sector. Therefore this research shall try to identify the socio-economic and demographic factors which evince decisiveness over women work participation. There are numerous causes and factors that perpetuate problems and restrictions for women in taking explicit participation within the agricultural sector. This study is basically an endeavor to identify, collate, and decipher these numerous factors. Through this study, potential improvement in the conditions of women within the agricultural field can be made possible.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the determinants that guide and decide the participation of female workers in agriculture sector.
- To discern the effect of education in pertinence to determining female labor force participation in agriculture sector
- To provide suggestions directed towards improvement of conditions for working women of the agricultural sector.

Methodology

The study was conducted in accordance with Quantitative parameters. The population was the female workers of the agricultural sector within the context of Sargodha. A multi stage sampling method was employed for the selection of respondents for the study. First one tehsil of Sargodha was purposively selected. Secondly, from one tehsil one rural union council named 74 was purposively selected. All villages of this rural union council were selected purposively. Therefore, 300 hundred female respondents who were participating in agriculture sector were purposively selected for information from these three villages. An Interview Schedule was employed for eliciting data from the respondents. The significance of the tool lies in its ability to obtain data from both literate and illiterate respondents, and that is precisely why it was utilized.

Results and Findings

As a consequence of the study, the following results were garnered.

Table No. 1.1

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Variable	Frequency	Percent
Age			Education level		
21-30	34	11.3	Illiterate	96	32.0
31-40	65	21.7	Primary	112	37.3
41-50	108	36.0	Matriculation	54	18.0
51-60	81	27.0	Intermediate	33	11.0
61-70	12	4.0	Other than Intermediate	5	1.7
Number of children			Marital Status		
No children	83	27.7	Unmarried	4	1.3
One	77	25.7	Married	250	83.3
Two	112	37.3	Widow	9	3.0
Three or more	28	9.3	Divorced	37	12.3

As is apparent from the aforementioned table, the majority of the respondents are the ones that lie in the age limit of 41-50 years. This is in accordance with the trend incumbent amongst female workers of the agriculture sector. Also, it is apparent that the majority of the respondents was illiterate or evinced having limited levels of education. This shows that having dilapidated levels of educational acumen is also a determinant that drives women towards a life of hardships and consternation within the field of agriculture. Most of the respondents were married and had children to support as well, which can be deemed as being sufficient motive for delving into the diligent and rigorous field of agricultural operations.

Table No. 1.2

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Variable	Frequency	Percent
Children under School age			Household Monthly Income		
None	145	48.3	Below 4000	167	55.7
One	63	21.0	Up to 8000	112	37.3
Two	92	30.7	More than 8000	21	7.0
People living in home			Source of Family Income		
1-5	43	14.3	Farming	176	58.7
6-10	47	15.7	Labor	123	41.0
11-15	179	59.7	Job	1	.3
16 or More	31	10.3	Joint	172	57.3
Family Type			Cultivating Area (Acres)		
Joint	172	57.3	1-5	108	36.0
Nuclear	128	42.7	5-10	145	48.3
-	-	-	20 and More	47	15.7
Total	300	100.0	Total	300	100.0

This table clearly shows that the majority of the respondents suffer from destitution and exhibit lowered levels of income. That is another cause which drives females of the house to seek out wages in the agricultural fields. With having to support large families, as is apparent from the aforementioned results that show the majority of the respondents hailing from joint families, any monetary support can be perceived as being alleviating against the crushing onslaught of poverty.

Table No. 1.3

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Variable	Frequency	Percent
Working male in family			Farm Work		
None	217	72.3	Traditional	22	7.3
1-2	83	27.7	Necessity	184	61.3
			Duty	94	31.3
Monthly Income			Labor Force Participation		
1-5 thousand	256	85.3	Full time	228	76.0
6-10 thousand	9	3.0	Seasonal	53	17.7
10 and more	13	4.3	Occasional	19	6.3
More	22	7.3			
Effectiveness of Labor			Training in Agricultural Techniques		
To some extent	219	73.0	To greater extent	4	1.3
Not at all	81	27.0	To some extent	235	78.3
			Not at all	61	20.3

The results from this table show that most of these women have no working male members, in their agricultural fields or otherwise, and that is why they have to work in the fields. Through the course of this study it was also uncovered that working in the agricultural fields is a practice borne from tradition and necessity, thereby proving to be another determinant for driving women into the sector of agriculture. The majority of these respondents was destitute and poor and had to turn towards the option of working in the field as a channel for mitigating their hardships and boosting economy. That is why most of them work full time in the fields, evincing the monumental role that women play in the field of agriculture. Their labor is deemed effective on a major scale and they possess the requisite skills and capabilities necessary for performing their tasks admirably and explicitly.

Conclusion

From this research, it can be surmised that though women are in much strength within the agricultural sector of Pakistan, their presence and contributions remain unrealized and unrecognized. This is in large part due to the traditional and conventional constraints of the region as well as the financial burdens heaped upon them. Most of these women are forced to work in the fields full time and despite their profoundly diligent endeavors, they received little note and remuneration in return. What's more, their efforts and struggles are met with wages that are not commensurate with their exertions. The determinants like family support, family size, and financial matters and so on play a vital role in acting as impetus for women to take on the challenges of agricultural sector.

Recommendations

Following are some future prospects, recommendations and suggestions for the role of women in the agricultural sector of Pakistan:

1. For progressive participation of women in the agricultural sector, there should be equal educational opportunities.
2. Vocational training must be given to rural females. So that they can participate more efficiently in the agricultural sector.
3. It is recommended that equal pay for equal work should be implemented for more participation of female in agriculture sector.
4. The women should be treated equally and without any discrimination.
5. There should be enough tools for them to work on the farm.
6. The markets should be easily accessible to them so that they can get more profit.
7. Future researches should be based on comparison of male and female determinants for their participation.
8. Majority of the respondents face harassment at their work place. So, a channel should be formulated to report all incidents of harassment.
9. Future researches should be based on large sample size.
10. Programs about new technologies should be introduced to increase the awareness.
11. Government should start a rural development programs to create more employment opportunities for women.
12. Importance of female participation in agriculture development should be recognized in agriculture growth policies.
13. Loans should be provided to rural women who are involved in agriculture activities through micro finance bank.
14. Dual responsibilities of women should be decreased by educating the male society to assist their women in their daily activities.
15. Rural women should have participation in planning and agriculture decisions.

16. The contribution of rural women should be strengthened through print and electronic media.
17. Poor rural women should be facilitated with land, agriculture and livestock services.

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