
SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN KARNATAKA: A STUDY OF DHARWAD DISTRICT



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Research Guide
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CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, POLICY SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment is a broad, and indeed open – ended concept of development. Multiple dimensions play their role in women empowerment. The important aspect that needs to be understood is that empowerment of women agricultural labour simply does not depend only on the well defined dimensions at global or regional levels but many other aspects have their role in enhancing capabilities and functioning of women agricultural labourers. The distributional impact of various dimensions needs to be given utmost importance. At the root of the problem of empowerment of women agricultural labour lays the participation of women agricultural labourers in household decision making. Participation in household decision making will determine the extent of opportunities for women labourers. The future policy options should be directed towards disappearance of ‘unequal characteristics’ of the opportunity structure. The micro level decision making has to be based on estimates of various socio-economic factors.

The construction of more comprehensive and feasible index is needed for assessment of empowerment status of women agricultural labourers at micro level. Constructing a suitable index that depicts the disparities in women empowerment status at village level across various dimensions was the main aim of this study. The study also tried to decompose the index value and attempted to measure the contribution of different dimensions and indicators used in construction of women empowerment index. An attempt is being made

to address various inadequacies policy making for women agricultural labourers at micro level. The present micro level study offers a suitable technique that uses primary survey and secondary data, which captures the holistic perspectives of empowerment of women agricultural labourers. The women empowerment index thus accommodates multidimensionality of disempowerment, poverty and discrimination. The present study attempted to capture disparities across various cleavages of society like gender, social groups, location, etc. The strength of micro level study on women agricultural labourers presently being studied is that, most of the socio – economic information are captured at household level, which is the basic social and economic unit in rural area.

6.2 MAJOR FINDINGS

The study has reviewed the importance of women agricultural labourers in development strategy and has explained the need of women empowerment with multiple strategies. The study argues that issues of women empowerment needs to be addressed in policy making so as to bring a holistic development in the society. This section provides the current study's findings in summary form:

- In the study area, about 65 per cent of respondents (i.e. women agricultural labourers) are from the age group of 25 to 45 years. About 10 per cent of the respondents included in the sample were of the age above 60 years.
- Large share of women labourers in all social groups sampled for the study were between the age group of 25 to 45 years.
- Only about 49 per cent of respondents' households with women agricultural labourers own agricultural land. Across social groups, 65

per cent of the ST households own land followed by respondents in OBC category (60 per cent). Among SC respondent households, the percentage of land holding households was only 32 per cent.

- The study finds that out of the 135 households owing agricultural land (out of the total sample of 275 households), 49 percentage of them were marginal land holders and 51 per cent were small land holders. There were no respondent households with land above 2 hectares in any of the 6 villages.
- Across social groups, among surveyed agricultural women labourers, most of them felt that ‘agricultural labour’ work is easy to obtain in the residing village compared to any other skilled or non-farm employment in the village.
- About 52 per cent of the women agricultural labourers surveyed were illiterate. Only 10 per cent of the women surveyed have attained lower primary education, 21 per cent of women with higher primary education and 14 per cent of women have got high school education. Only two percent of women have attained PU level education.
- It was found that the percentage of literate agricultural women labourers goes on declining with the rise in age. It was found that about 50 per cent of literate women agricultural labourers are from the age of below 30 years.
- The study finds that among all the households with women agricultural labour, 48 per cent households were of joint family nature.
- 80 per cent of the households in the study were provided BPL cards about 9 per cent of households were provided Antyodaya cards. Across

social groups, it was found that about 30 per cent of the SC households were provided with antyodaya cards. There were no SC or ST households with APL cards.

- The average size of family was found to be 3.9 and it varied between 3.8 in OBC category to 4.3 in SC category.
- Out of the 275 respondents surveyed in field investigation, 188 women (68 per cent of the total sample) were working as agricultural labourers choosing it as the main occupation. This share varies from 62 per cent in ST and ‘Others’ category to 88 per cent in SC category.
- Out of the total sample size of 275 women agricultural labourers, 48 per cent do not go for any subsidiary work. But 32 per cent of women report that they do agricultural labour work as subsidiary employment option. A small number of women gain subsidiary employment from petty business, cultivation and casual (non-farm) labour. About 28 per cent of the respondents receive pension income from different government schemes as subsidiary income.
- With regard to ownership of dwellings / house, 83 per cent of respondents live in their own house. About 10 percent of households are provided shelter in government housing scheme. Only 21.5 percent of households reside in pucca houses. The share is lowest (8.8 %) for SC category. Most of the households with women agricultural labour reside in semi pucca houses.
- About 83 percent of the household out of all surveyed households depend on piped water supply. Bore wells (8 per cent), dug wells (4 per

cent), other sources like pond/ tank, stream, etc. (16 per cent) are also the common sources of drinking water in surveyed villages.

- Overall only 45 percent of household surveyed in all the household of all villages has toilet facilities. Ganjigatti village is the best performing village with 53 percent of households having toilet facilities followed by Yaliwal with 51 percentage of households. Surprisingly across social groups, highest percentage of households with toilet facility is found in SC category (about 67 per cent). In others category households where agricultural women labour reside, still 65 of them do not have toilet facility in the household.
- About 63 percent of the women reported that they have to fetch water from sources which are at mean distance of more than 200 metres from their house.
- About 78 percent of the women respondents reported that they gather or collect fuelwood from forest, hill, bushes, scrub forest, etc.
- About 79 percent of the surveyed households rely only on biomass or fuelwood for cooking. About 20 percent of the households use both biomass and modern source of fuel i.e. LPG, at different times of cooking.
- The study finds that half of the total households surveyed report that the male member consumes alcohol. The consumption of alcohol is highest in ST households.
- On an average about 60 per cent of the respondent women reported that they have experienced verbal abuse by their husbands. On the other

hand, domestic physical abuse was reported by around 28 per cent of the respondent women.

- About 21 out of every 100 individuals covered under the survey reported having fever/ typhoid, 31 persons suffered from cold/cough, 14 persons suffered from body pain, 18 from blood pressure, 19 from diabetes and 9 persons suffered from diarrhea in the past year.
- About 34 percent of the respondents informed that they were unemployed for more than one month in the previous year.
- Of the 96 respondents who remained unemployed for more than one month, 72 per cent of them gave the reason of drought.
- The study shows that about 75 per cent of the total respondents surveyed report that they are aware of the scheme and have job card. Among the households who are aware, only 57 per cent have availed the work for at least one day. The average number of days worked in the scheme is only 50 days per year considering all the six villages. None of the respondents have availed the maximum stipulated 100 days of employment in the previous year.
- Disempowerment head count ratio shows the percentage of women agricultural labourers disempowered out of the total sample studied in each village. Disempowerment Head Count Ratio is found to be highest in Shivanagar, followed by Saunshi and Ganjigatti.
- Highest intensity of disempowerment is found in Alagwadi, followed by Yaliwal and Shivanagar.

- Shivanagar has the lowest score of women empowerment index among all six villages. Nalavadi has the highest women empowerment index.
- In Shivanagar, about 35 per cent of the disempowerment value is contributed by income dimension. This shows that women agricultural labourers lack the control over use of income in Shivanagar.

6.3 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Creating employment for large number rural women agricultural labourers on sustainable basis is the single most important challenge facing the Indian economy. High importance should be given to increase the productivity levels in agriculture. The majority of those who depend on agriculture are poor agricultural labourers in general and women agricultural labourers in particular. Hence, any agricultural strategy should be framed without threatening the livelihoods of these vulnerable groups.

After analysis of socio-economic conditions and empowerment status of women agricultural labourers in selected villages Dharwad district, it is observed that there are number of possible measures which may improve the conditions of women agricultural labourers. Revealed through the study, following are the remedial measures that may require immediate attention:

- Areas with low arid with little irrigation potential offer the greatest conundrum to policy makers. Here policy focus must be on basic social and economic infrastructure to improve the quality of life of women agricultural labourers.

- Housing conditions of women agricultural labourers are very poor. Government can implement a separate scheme targeting the women agricultural labourers on top priority basis.
- Majority of the women agricultural labourers are living below poverty line as inferred through various socio-economic indicators in the present study. The kind of work done by women agricultural labourers are very hard labour work though their income is very low.
- With very hard work on one hand and very low income on the other, women agricultural labourers suffer from insufficient nutrition levels which are revealed through illness indicators studied in Chapter 4. Government schemes shall try to increase the purchasing power of poor women agricultural labourers as they can purchase the essential food items to maintain the calories and other nutrients.
- Policy focus in well developed villages with high potential in agricultural development should be on developing food processing sector. Food processing industry as a labour intensive sector has the potential of absorbing low skilled workers from agricultural sector. This strategy can work as a boon for improving socio-economic conditions of women agricultural labourers.
- The government bodies, especially the panchayat should make efforts to successfully implement the Minimum Wages act. The act could be subject to regular revision of wages attached with the increase in cost of living. This measure will strengthen the bargaining power of women agricultural labourers with the landlord/ contractor / employer.

- It is observed from the study that wage rates of women agricultural labourers are lower than men agricultural labourers in both irrigated and non-irrigated areas. Government should take necessary steps to maintain the parity in agricultural wages between men and women agricultural labourers.
- In well irrigated villages, agricultural potential should be augmented by the introduction of high value commercial crops. The high value crops are often associated with high labour requirements. Hence, high value agricultural products are always considered as pro-poor agricultural strategy. So there is a need for high value agricultural products intervention to promote the socio economic conditions of women agricultural labourers.
- Irrigation is the major constraint in villages with low level of women empowerment among women agricultural labourers. Government should try to develop irrigation facilities in non-irrigated villages. Micro – watershed works has large potential to improve irrigation scenario. This is a very effective drought proofing technique. This must be undertaken by government through participatory approach by ensuring an equitable distribution of the benefits.
- There is absence of trade union of women agricultural labourers in Dharwad district and hence women agricultural labourers are not able to fight for their rights. Therefore, efforts should be made for effective organisation of women agricultural labourers.
- The government should generate employment opportunities in the small scale industrial sector and agro based industries sector which are

labour intensive sectors to reduce the number of women agricultural labourers. This measure will also help to reduce the problem of disguised unemployment problem.

- Government should try to provide various agricultural facilities like credit, irrigation, inputs, market facility at concessional rate to land holder agricultural labourers. This step will help to increase productivity, production and finally the income from agriculture for agricultural labourers.
- Large share of women in agricultural labour work shows that large number of women lack skill and training to move out of non-skill agricultural labour work. This underlines the need for providing skill training to women in self employment work like tailoring, followed by institutional support for marketing their product so that the training will lead to gainful employment.
- The government should give importance for implementation of MGNREGA programme during the lean / slack season in agriculture, particularly during the months December to May. Women getting work in MGNREGA scheme informed in the study that there is lack of supportive facilities such as child care, transport, and accommodation in the formal sector of the labor market. Government needs to take necessary steps to increase the women participation in MGNREGA scheme.
- The social organisations should try to establish co-operative credit society for women agricultural labourers to provide loans at low interest rates.

- The government should make efforts to implement pension scheme for landless and below poverty line women agricultural labourers.
- The policy instruments should be designed to address not only the low income and consumption aspects of poverty, but also the complex social dimensions, including class, caste and gender based discrimination.
- A significant aspect of public health sector is the low expenditure ratio. This adversely affects the poor and other vulnerable sections of the society and especially women and children. Supporting innovations in health sector, especially encouraging private health sector on providing more health services to the poor at a lesser cost will go a long way in the direction of improving rural health scenario.
- Community based participatory development programmes should be promoted.
- The government should provide greater focus on technical, vocational and job oriented courses on priority basis on the model of importance given to Sarva Shiksha Abhiyana. This will increase employment generating capacity and capabilities.
- Many of the policy measures that improve the socio-economic conditions of women have strong linkages with macro policies like infrastructural development, financial sector development, restructuring of small scale industries and an overhauling of the agrarian system.
- The micro credit and micro enterprises linked to SHGs should be observed as an important operational tool to facilitate financial

inclusion. These are very important schemes towards efficient use of financial resources and sustained recurring financial benefits.

- Shocks external to household include those related to climatic variations such as droughts in the study area. Internal shocks to household include illness, injury, marriage cost and sudden death. Internal stresses are linked to household lifestyle, changing dependency ratios, marriage expenses and old age. Policy options to internalise the shocks and stresses may go a long way in uplifting vulnerable households from poverty.
- Policies that encourage women to build and retain control over assets are necessary in order to decrease the occurrences of domestic violence. In addition, increasing the awareness and understanding of the relationship between violence against women and employment opportunities are important in preventing domestic violence in the society.
- The study found that women labours with land rights have higher score in empowerment. Traditionally, in Indian society, there has been lack of attention towards the land rights in women empowerment. Policy makers need to identify pathways and outcomes to strengthen the land rights for women.
- Lack of disaggregated data on socio-economic status of women agricultural labourers, landless women labourers, particularly at village is one of the most daunting challenges for framing micro-level policies targeting women agricultural labourers. Strengthening of statistical systems in this direction is of vital importance since it contributes to

better informed decision making in the planning process and therefore impacts policy at village and panchayat level.

- The government should conduct the studies to evaluate the successful implementation of schemes and programmes at regular periods. The recommendations should be effectively implemented.
- Government and non-government organisations should create awareness about the socio-economic conditions and problems of women agricultural labourers in the society. This step can persuade the attitudinal changes among the patriarchal society in general and labour contractors, landlords in particular to have a positive approach in bringing the changes in socio-economic conditions of women agricultural labourers.
- There is a need to improve the working conditions of women agricultural labourers in agricultural fields. The work hours for women agricultural labourers should be statutorily fixed and should be enforced through a proper agency.
- Central to all improve the women empowerment status is governance and people's participation. In this context, the role of households, civil society, NGOs and local participation is considered very important in managing the change. In this background, the long term strategy for women empowerment is to be mediated through strong participatory approach at village level.
- There is a need for generating rural non-farm employment opportunities in the organised and unorganized sector with a focus on promoting self-

employment especially among poor households through education and skill formation. There is a necessity to promote semi – skilled labour intensive sub-sectors within the newly created non-farm sector to improve the access of women agriculture labourers to shift to more remunerative employment opportunities.

- It was noticed that the well organised and integrated farming system with crops and other labour-intensive enterprises like dairy, poultry, vegetable, fruits, mushrooms, etc. can significantly increase the employment of farm families particularly small and marginal farmers having surplus family labour.

There is a need of multi-pronged approach of policy making at village level for the empowerment of women agricultural labourers. The identified indicator could be treated with proper policy prescription at micro level planning process. There is a necessity of identifying the reasons for disempowerment of women agricultural labour in micro level studies in various agro-ecological regions in the way the present study is carried out.

6.4 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The outcome of the study supports the view that government efforts towards improving the socio-economic conditions of women agricultural labour is crucially important for empowering them. Due to resource and time constraints, the following aspects relevant to women agricultural labourers could not be studied but needs attention in future research work on women agricultural labour issues.

- Time – use survey methods can reveal more issues related to socio-economic conditions of women agricultural labourers.
- The analysis of socio-economic conditions women agricultural labourers at disaggregated crops, cropping pattern and the linkages with wage rate of women could throw more light for further investigation.
- The present study examined only the hired women agricultural labourers and not the family labourers who are often unpaid. The socio-economic conditions of women family labour in agriculture could be better explored through better methodological practices in future research.

6.5 CONCLUSION

Women empowerment is a multidimensional concept. The current village level study can be useful in establishing a link ‘development monitoring system’ and ‘planning at village level’ with regard to empowerment of women agricultural labourers. Suitable planning strategies have to be devised separately for different village conditions so that the overall development of the region can be achieved without leaving women behind in the development process.