

NEXT IAS

**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**RIGHTS, JUSTICE, ACTION FOR
INDIA'S WOMEN FARMERS**

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RIGHTS, JUSTICE, ACTION FOR INDIA'S WOMEN FARMERS

Context

- Women's contributions to agriculture remain largely invisible, as **land titles and property ownership continue to remain in men's names**, limiting women's access to resources, institutional support and decision-making power, despite legal reforms such as **equal inheritance rights**.

International Year of the Woman Farmer

- International Women's Day on **8 March 2026** carries particular significance as **2026 is being observed as the International Year of the Woman Farmer**.
- The **theme for 2026** highlights the urgent need to ensure **equal rights, justice and recognition for women in agriculture**.

About India's Women Farmers

- Women constitute the **backbone of India's agricultural sector**, playing a critical role in cultivation, livestock management, food processing and household food security.
- Women form a large proportion of the agricultural workforce in India. Key trends include:
 - ♦ Around **33% of cultivators and about 42% of agricultural labourers in India are women**.
 - ♦ In some rural regions, **60–80% of labour in agriculture and allied activities is performed by women**.
 - ♦ Women contribute heavily to **sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, livestock care and post-harvest processing**.
- Women's agricultural work is often **undervalued or underreported in official statistics**, particularly when women work on family farms.

Issues / Concerns Facing By Women in Agriculture

- **Feminisation of Agriculture:** India has witnessed the '**feminisation of agriculture**', a phenomenon where women increasingly take responsibility for farming activities. It is driven by **male migration** to urban areas for non-farm employment; increasing **agrarian distress and rural poverty**; and rising reliance on **women's unpaid labour in family farms**;
 - ♦ However, it often reflects a '**feminisation of agrarian distress**' rather than **empowerment**, because women assume more work without access to resources or decision-making power.
- **Land Ownership and Resource Inequality:** One of the most significant challenges faced by women farmers is the **lack of land ownership**. Key observations include:
 - ♦ Women hold **only about 12–14% of operational landholdings in India**.
 - ♦ Most agricultural land is registered in **men's names due to patrilineal inheritance practices**.
 - ♦ Cultural norms often discourage women from claiming inheritance rights.
- **Women's Nutrition Crisis:** India continues to face a serious nutrition crisis among women and girls. Key concerns include:
 - ♦ High prevalence of **anaemia among women of reproductive age**;
 - ♦ Widespread **micronutrient deficiencies**;
 - ♦ Diets dominated by cereals with low intake of pulses, fruits and animal-source foods;
- **Other Barriers Faced by Women Farmers:**
 - ♦ **Limited Access to Credit:** Banks and financial institutions often require **land titles as collateral**, excluding women who do not own land.
 - ♦ **Lack of Access to Extension Services:** Agricultural training and extension programmes frequently target male farmers, leading to **information gaps for women**.
 - ♦ **Technological Constraints:** Women have limited access to **modern farm technologies and mechanisation**, increasing labour intensity.

- ◆ **Social and Cultural Norms:** Patriarchal structures restrict women's mobility, decision-making authority and participation in agricultural markets.

Impact on Food Security and Nutrition

- Women's empowerment in agriculture is closely linked to **improved household nutrition and food security**. Research indicates that when women control agricultural resources:
 - ◆ Household diets become **more diverse**;
 - ◆ Spending on **health and education increases**;
 - ◆ **Child nutrition outcomes improve**;
- Land ownership and decision-making power among women farmers are strongly associated with improved nutritional outcomes.

Work Burden and Health Impacts

- Women farmers often face **heavy physical labour**, lack of **drudgery-reducing technologies**, limited access to healthcare, and dual burden of **productive and reproductive work**.
- Research indicates that women engaged in agriculture frequently experience **high workloads and poor health outcomes**, particularly during peak agricultural seasons

Policy Initiatives Supporting Women Farmers

- **National Policy for Farmers (2007):** Recognises farmers based on **activities rather than land ownership**, allowing inclusion of women cultivators and agricultural workers.
- **Self Help Groups (SHGs):** Women's SHGs have improved access to **credit, collective farming and livelihood opportunities**.
- **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP):** Aims to **empower women farmers through capacity building and sustainable agriculture practices**.
- **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM):** Promotes women's economic empowerment through **collective institutions and rural entrepreneurship**.
- **Existing Policy Initiatives: National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013** provides:
 - ◆ Subsidised cereals through the **Public Distribution System (PDS)**;
 - ◆ Supplementary nutrition through **Anganwadi services**;
 - ◆ Maternity benefits for pregnant and lactating women;
 - Several states have introduced **millet, fortified foods and local crops** into nutrition programmes.

Way Forward: Key Policy Priorities

- **Recognising Women as Farmers:** Policy frameworks must formally recognise women's agricultural roles by:
 - ◆ Collecting **gender-disaggregated agricultural data**;
 - ◆ Adopting the **National Policy for Farmers definition**, which identifies farmers based on activities rather than land ownership;
 - ◆ Recognising women as cultivators, labourers, tenants and forest gatherers;
- **Strengthening Land and Resource Rights:** Improving women's control over productive resources requires:
 - ◆ Effective implementation of **equal inheritance laws**;
 - ◆ Promotion of **joint land titles for spouses**;
 - ◆ Gender-sensitive land registration processes;
 - ◆ Strengthening women's role in managing **common land and water resources**;
- **Aligning Agriculture with Nutrition:** Agricultural policy must integrate **nutrition-sensitive food systems** by:

- ◆ Promoting cultivation of **nutri-cereals, pulses, fruits and vegetables**;
- ◆ Linking public procurement with **smallholder and women farmers**;
- ◆ Strengthening distribution through **PDS, Anganwadis and school meals**;
- ◆ Encouraging **kitchen gardens and community seed banks**;
- **Improving Technology and Extension Access:** Women farmers require better access to labour-saving agricultural technologies, climate-resilient farming practices, market information and extension services, and training and skill development.
 - ◆ Access to appropriate technologies reduces **drudgery, time poverty and health risks**, while improving productivity and resilience.

Source: IE

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] The feminisation of agriculture in India has not necessarily translated into empowerment for women farmers. Examine the reasons and suggest policy measures to ensure equitable access to land, credit and agricultural resources.

