



Women Farmers & Climate Challenges

This editorial is based on "[Climate change and women in agriculture: Navigating challenges and fostering resilience](#)" which was published in Financial Express on 15/08/2023. It talks about the significance of women in the agriculture sector and the challenges that they face due to climate change impacts.

For Prelims: [Climate Change](#), Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana, [DAY-NRLM](#), [UN FAO](#), [Regenerative Agriculture](#), [Agroforestry](#)

For Mains: Role of Women in Agriculture, Impact of Climate Change on Women Farmers

[Climate change](#), characterised by **escalating temperatures, shifting weather patterns, and heightened extreme events**, poses a significant threat to various sectors, with **agriculture being the most vulnerable**. As these impacts intensify, it becomes essential to analyse how marginalised groups are affected, particularly focusing on **women involved in agriculture**.

There exists an **intricate connection between climate change and women's roles, responsibilities, and livelihoods in the agriculture** sector with significant economic and social hardships arising out of this issue.

This article highlights the urgency of investigating these challenges from changing weather patterns and extreme events, discussing cultural impacts on gender roles, examining adaptive strategies and addressing gender-specific repercussions within agricultural adaptation efforts.

How Significant is the Role of Women in Agriculture?

- **Percentage and Role of Women Agri-workers:** Women constitute a significant force in global agriculture, accounting for around **43% of agricultural labourers**. In countries like India, where subsistence farming is prominent, **women constitute 33% of the workforce and nearly half of self-employed farmers**.
 - About **18% of the farm families in India**, according to NSSO Reports, are **headed by women**.
- **Increasing Feminisation of Agriculture:** The increasing migration of rural men in search of better job opportunities has led to the [feminisation of the agriculture sector](#), with the participation of women in agriculture and allied activities becoming more significant.
 - Women are actively engaged in cultivating crops, from planting and tending to harvesting and post-harvest activities like threshing, cleaning, processing, and storing crops.
 - Their roles go beyond just **crop cultivation and livestock rearing to food processing and marketing**.
- **Women and Traditional Knowledge:** Women are repositories of traditional agricultural knowledge and practices. They often **pass down skills related to farming, herbal medicine,**

and resource management through generations.

- They often possess traditional **knowledge about local crop varieties and agricultural practices** and play a **crucial role in minimising post-harvest losses** and ensuring the quality of harvested produce.
- **Women as Drivers of Innovation and Sustainability:** Women contribute to the development and adoption of innovative farming techniques and strategies, driven by their **close connection to the land and their ability to adapt to changing conditions**.
 - Women's roles in agriculture often **align with [sustainable and regenerative practices](#)**, as they tend to prioritise the long-term well-being of their families and communities.

Note: Recognizing the critical role of women in agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has declared **15th October of every year as Women Farmer's Day**.

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP):

- MKSP is a sub component of the [Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-NRLM \(DAY-NRLM\)](#) which seeks to **improve the present status of women in Agriculture**, and to enhance the opportunities available to empower them.
- MKSP **recognizes the identity of "Mahila" as "Kisan"** and strives to build the capacity of women in the domain of agro-ecologically sustainable practices.
- Its vision is to reach out to the poorest of poor households and **expand the portfolio of activities currently handled by the Mahila Kisan**.

How does Climate Change Affect Women Farmers?

- **Extreme Events disrupt On-Farm Operations:** Changing weather patterns and extreme events deeply impact women's roles in agriculture. **Variable rainfall and prolonged droughts lead to reduced crop yields**, jeopardising food security for farming-dependent households.
 - Women have **traditionally been integral to on-farm operations** and are often responsible for tending to crops and managing household food supply and **consequently bear the brunt of these disruptions**.
- **Economic Implications:** The economic implications of climate change for women in agriculture are substantial.
 - Floods and extreme weather events can devastate crops and infrastructure, compelling women to prioritise family care and alternative income generation.
 - **Diminished crop yields** due to extreme weather events translate to **reduced incomes**, further **exacerbating existing gender inequalities**.
- **More Vulnerable due to Lack of Resources:** Cultural norms and **discriminatory practices hinder women's access to land ownership**, a critical asset in agriculture.
 - Women's lack of control over assets **restricts their access to credit, loans, and insurance**, rendering them **vulnerable to climate-induced losses**.
 - According to the [UN FAO](#), if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could **increase yields on their farms by 20-30%**
- **Water Scarcity and Access:** Women are primary users of water for domestic purposes and irrigation in many communities. Water scarcity, a climate change consequence, **disproportionately affects women who often bear the responsibility of water collection**.
 - Moreover, limited water availability can reduce agricultural productivity, impacting both food security and income.
- **Vulnerability to Health Risks:** Extreme weather events and changing disease patterns associated with climate change can lead to health risks for women working in agriculture.
 - Exposure to harsh weather conditions during farming activities can result in **heat stress or other weather-related health issues**.
 - Increased health risks can disproportionately **affect pregnant women** and young children, for whom **women are often the primary caregivers**.

What can be Done to Support Women Farmers in Response to Climate Change?

- **Adaptive Strategies for Women Farmers:**
 - To navigate climate-related challenges, women farmers should be **encouraged to adopt adaptive strategies, including income diversification** and cultivating climate-resilient crops.
 - Offering **training programs to help women develop new skills** that align with emerging economic opportunities will enhance their resilience in the face of the evolving agricultural landscape.
- **Training, Capacity Building and Weather Information:**
 - Providing women farmers with **training in climate-resilient farming techniques**, such as [agroforestry](#), crop diversification, water-efficient irrigation, and soil conservation practices.
 - Also, ensuring that **women farmers have access to timely and accurate weather forecasts** to help them make informed decisions about planting and harvesting.
- **Financial Inclusion:**
 - Another prudent approach would be providing women with **access to microfinance services and insurance products that cover climate-related risks**, ensuring they have the financial capacity to adapt and recover from climate shocks.
 - Establishing women's savings groups that serve as **safety nets during times of crop failure or economic stress**.
- **Access to Resources:**
 - Facilitating **women's access to climate-resilient crop varieties** that are suited to changing climate conditions, emphasising traditional and indigenous knowledge.
 - Enhancing **women's access to water-saving technologies and efficient irrigation methods to cope with water scarcity** caused by climate change.
- **Role of Policymakers in Resource Availability:**
 - Governments and organizations must **ensure equal resource access, credit availability, and decision-making power** for women.
 - **Land tenure reforms that prioritise women's rights** and insurance mechanisms tailored to their needs can bolster resilience against climate-induced risks.
- **Social Security:**
 - Ensuring adequate **social cover for all women who work in agriculture** is another indispensable factor in **modern sustainable farming**.
 - A **social security** blanket would ensure that women have a robust support system to juggle household responsibilities, child-rearing, and financial burdens while also managing work.

Conclusion

It is imperative to adopt gender-responsive strategies to address the specific needs of women in agriculture. This includes ensuring access to resources such as credit, training, and technology, enhancing women's participation in decision-making processes, and developing policies that promote equitable adaptation and resilience-building efforts.

Recognizing and addressing the differential impacts of climate change on women in the agriculture sector is crucial for building more sustainable and resilient agricultural systems.

Drishti Mains Question:

Climate change impacts necessitate collaborative action and gender-responsive policies with regard to women working in the agriculture sector. Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q. With reference to the circumstances in Indian agriculture, the concept of “Conservation Agriculture” assumes significance. Which of the following fall under the Conservation Agriculture? (2018)

1. Avoiding the monoculture practices
2. Adopting minimum tillage.
3. Avoiding the cultivation of plantation crops
4. Using crop residues to cover soil surface
5. Adopting spatial and temporal crop sequencing/crop rotations

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1, 3 and 4
(b) 2, 3, 4 and 5
(c) 2, 4 and 5
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 5

Ans: (c)

Q. With reference to the ‘Global Alliance for ClimateSmart Agriculture (GACSA)’, which of the following statements is/are correct? (2018)

1. GACSA is an outcome of the Climate Summit held in Paris in 2015.
2. Membership of GACSA does not create any binding obligations.
3. India was instrumental in the creation of GACSA.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 3 only
(b) 2 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

Mains:

Q. Discuss the various economic and socio-cultural forces that are driving increasing feminization of agriculture in India. (2014)