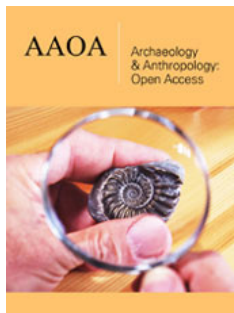


# Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture; Roles of Women in Agriculture, Constraints and Legislative Initiatives in Sindh, Pakistan


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## Abstract

The agriculture sector is one of the most important sectors in the world. Many countries in the world, especially in Asia, are purely dependent on agriculture-related work, and women's participation in agriculture is an essential area. Pakistan is an agricultural country, and Sindh province contributes widely to agricultural production in Pakistan. This review paper has studied the key roles of rural women which are performed in the agriculture sector in Sindh. There are different challenges women face in various ways, so this paper has highlighted some key challenges women face in the agriculture sectors in rural areas of Sindh. The public and private sectors have made many efforts to minimize the challenges faced by agricultural women and achieve gender equality; this paper has also highlighted a few insights into the legal initiatives. The paper provides a few recommendations for policy and other initiatives to empower agri-women in the province.

**Keywords:** Gender equality; Agriculture women; Rural women; Agricultural initiatives; Legal initiatives**\*Corresponding author:** Meetha Ram,  
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DOI: [10.31031/AAOA.2024.05.000630](https://doi.org/10.31031/AAOA.2024.05.000630)**Copyright@** Meetha Ram, This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

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## Introduction

Most of the population in most of the developing countries in Asia is engaged in agriculture-related work, so women's participation in agriculture production is also essential. It has also been found from the analysis of different studies that the more net profit in terms of economy is from small-scale irrigation rather than large-scale irrigation [1]. Various studies have discussed women's lack of access to irrigation and have also highlighted the social or cultural taboos critically, the biases, and the political economy, which is purely technical and dominated by men and decreases women's participation in agriculture systematically. There are various challenges in this regard, which are highlighted by various studies firstly, men and women have differences in preferences and bargaining powers [2], secondly, the irrigation policies and practices that supervise the women's role [3] and thirdly, the power gaps among men and women within the house or within the community and consequences in terms of irrigation effectiveness and equity [4].

There is a very strong conceptual relationship between participation in water management and gender; it has been discussed in many ways in the previously available literature. The gender concept in relation to agriculture participation has been viewed in various ways and has remained a subject of key debate from time to time [5]. This type of gender conceptualization included "women in development" in the 80s, later to "gender and development" in the 90s, and the later progress transformed the conceptualization as "gender mainstreaming" [6]. It has been argued [7] that the conceptual approach may fit

well for women's equality, but there is still more criticism of the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming because, without a proper process of institutionalization, the concept has no meaning. In the same way, the participation, especially from marginalized groups like women, has always been in the appropriation of power by the powerless. The real participation of such groups may leave some impacts other than the manipulation of powers, including the so-called participation, which has nothing to do with reality [8].

In today's modern world women's participation in each sector and their involvement in terms of opinions and values are taken as very important [9]. This participation involves various sectors in it; the agriculture participation of women also comes under this domain of women's participation and equality [10]. On the other hand, the developmental records show that there has been a dynamic growth of agriculture sectors in various countries, which has contributed to economic growth widely. In the case of Pakistan, agriculture activity is one of the key activities of the rural population, the interesting thing is that a major part of the Pakistani population lives in rural areas and agricultural growth has strengthened the rural population economically [11]. The role of women is also significant in this context in terms of participation in agricultural production. The available data shows that out of the total labor force of Pakistan, there are 72 percent of women are engaged in the agriculture sector [12]. So, this paper discusses the different roles performed by rural women in agriculture production. The study has focused on the Sindh province of Pakistan. It has also highlighted the legislative coverage for women regarding agriculture participation and gender mainstreaming in agriculture. The highlighted policy coverage is limited to Sindh province, and one legal initiative has been made part of this study.

## Background

In Pakistan, Sindh comes in second place among provinces in terms of its economic output and population. Sindh has a rich culture, and it is representative of the oldest civilization, the Indus civilization. Sindh province also comes in second in the country as the most urbanized province, and it has the country's financial hub, Karachi. The recent figures show that half of the province's population resides in urban areas, and the trend has changed recently, where the rural population is decreasing rapidly, and the urban population is increasing [13,14]. Of the total workforce of the country, 45.1 percent of the agriculture and fisheries workforce is from Sindh, and it makes 24.7 percent of the workforce is from Sindh [15]. Sindh is based on the agriculture sector, mainly expecting Karachi, which is the financial hub. The main crops of the province include cotton, rice, sugarcane, wheat, bananas, and mangoes. The quality of cotton from Sindh is very popular, it is also produced in larger quantities [16].

There are 5.45 million hectares of land in Sindh is cultivable out of 14 million hectares of total land [17]. The remaining no cultivated land covers the deserts, riverine forests, or hill ranges. There is 60 percent arid land in the province because the river

Indus flows in the middle of Sindh [18]. There is a lot of migrations that occurred from rural areas towards urban units in the last two decades in Sindh; people have also migrated abroad. The key reasons for migration from rural areas include finding better economic opportunities and avoiding exploitation by landlords. As a result of migration, the work burden on women has increased, and their role in agriculture-related activities has also increased. Women in rural areas of Sindh now work about 12 to 14 hours a day on on-farm and off-farm work. Women in Sindh are engaged at each stage of agriculture production, which is not limited to harvesting or rearing livestock. But the women are not recognized as women farmers in Sindh, they are recognized as helpers or sharecroppers [19].

The agriculture women need to be considered as women farmers other than the helpers or sharecroppers. On the other hand, historically, women are discriminated against for their land rights in Pakistan. There are different efforts made by women for their equal rights in the agriculture sector historically [20]. Though a large struggle has been made for women's land rights, there are rarely any efforts that have been made regarding the participation of women in agriculture and water resource management. There were many legislative efforts made for the agriculture water resource management legislation, but women were not taken as one of the stakeholders in this regard till the 90s [21]. In Pakistan, irrigation technology is still considered a different world that belongs to men only [22]. However, various legislative covers have increased women's participation in the agriculture sector. After the application of participatory irrigation reforms, women's participation was made compulsory because of the donor-driven nature of the project. However, the initial growth in legislation did not prove so beneficial for the women, but later different legislative initiatives were taken for strong women's participation [3].

The legislative initiatives like "Sindh water management ordinance 2002" and "national water policy 2018" have strengthened women for their formal role in farmers' organizations at managerial levels as well as their decision-making role in agricultural water [23]. After the 18<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment of Pakistan, the provincial governments could draw the legislation in some specific sectors. In August 2014, the provincial assembly of the Government of Sindh approved a bill, "Sindh women agriculture workers act 2019," aiming to end discrimination and abuse faced by agriculture women in Sindh [24]. Such legislative initiatives are strengthening the agriculture women in Sindh for their strong participation in agriculture-related matters, especially their land rights, their formal arrangements regarding agricultural labor, and their decisions in agriculture matters like distribution and management of agricultural water.

## Material and Methods

This study has applied a descriptive type of study and used previously available literature. The results and discussions of this study are analyzed from different secondary data sources, including

published research papers, research reports, online data sources, available public data, and other related data sources.

## Result and Discussions

### Role of women in agriculture in Sindh

Women's role in agriculture has not been recognized up to the mark as much as they have contributed. The contribution of women to agriculture in Sindh is greater than that of men, but their contribution is not so recognized due to local cultural and social norms. Women are discouraged by traditional and cultural norms to gain equal benefits as men in agriculture production. Rural women not only play an essential role in agriculture production but also perform different other roles in the household in terms of preparing food for the family, doing household chores, taking care of children and elderly people, and many other roles [16]. Women in Sindh highly make the cultivation of rice and cotton; it is one-third of the total contribution. On the other hand, cotton production is taken is women-led agriculture production in Sindh because there is more contribution of women in this production [25]. There are different roles played by women in the agriculture sector in Sindh; some of the key roles are highlighted below

#### The overall engagement of women in crop production:

Table 1 below mentions the overall engagement of women in crop production in Sindh. From the secondary data sources, various types of women's engagement in crop production are mentioned in the table below. As per the data of Table 1 above, many women are engaged in threshing and weeding in their overall engagement with crop production. The second most common activity performed by women was drying and then sowing and transplanting, binding, and preparing the land are also come under the activities which women perform. The data in Table 1 has been taken from the [26] which has been published before.

**Table 2:** The time allocation in household activities by rural women.

Type of Activities	Mostly		Sometimes		Never	
	Total Samples	%	Total Samples	%	Total Samples	%
Preparing food	143	95	7	5	1	1
Collecting fuel	103	69	35	23	12	8
Doing embroidery work	67	45	56	37	27	18
To knit textile or fabric	92	61	44	29	14	9
Doing other handicrafts	56	37	86	57	8	5
Taking care of family members	141	94	9	6	0	0

**Level of earning and days worked by agriculture women workers:** The level of earnings of agricultural women workers varies from activity to activity. As mentioned in Table 1, there are different activities that women do. Table 3 below mentions the days to work and earnings in rupees. The data in Table 3 above mentions the agriculture women workers who are engaged in different

**Table 1:** The overall engagement of women in crop production.

S. No.	Type of Activity	Mean	Rank
1	Preparing the land	2.14	5
2	Sowing and transplanting	2.47	3
3	Weeding	2.61	1
4	Binding	2.46	4
5	Threshing	2.61	1
6	Drying	2.57	2

#### The time allocation in household activities by rural women:

The rural women in Sindh have limited access to performing other services, formal jobs, and other earning sources. Due to various constraints like time or the level of education, women are limited to performing household work or agriculture work [16]. It has also been generally observed that women only perform limited types of work in the rural areas of Sindh because they have limited choices of work within their access. The constraints are not limited to the level of education or time constraints, but the social and cultural taboos are also among the hurdles for women in performing such limited activities. Below Table 2 shows the time allocation in household activities by rural women the data in Table 2 above mentioned that 95 percent of rural women are engaged in preparing food for their families, and 94 percent of rural women are engaged in taking care of their family members. Similarly, there are 69 percent of women are engaged in collecting fuel, and 61 percent are engaged in knitting textiles or fabric. As per the data of Table 2 from [26] 54 percent of rural women do embroidery work, and only 37 percent do other handicrafts work.

activities of crop production. The number of days of engagement can be seen as 03 days for preparing the land, 31 days for sowing and transplanting, 39 days for weeding, 04 days for binding, 07 days for threshing, and 10 days for drying. The average earning for each activity is at least 200 PKR at the average wage.

**Table 3:** Level of earning and days worked by agriculture women workers.

S. No.	Type of Activity	Total Days to Work	Wages in Rupees (PKR)
1	Preparing the land	3	200
2	Sowing and transplanting	31	200
3	Weeding	39	200
4	Binding	4	200
5	Threshing	7	200
6	Drying	10	200

### The key challenges faced by rural agriculture women

Women in rural agriculture face various challenges in Sindh. The reason for various challenges is the illiteracy among rural women. The key challenges involve poor or no access to modern technology by rural women, the use of advanced technology in agriculture production, and the behaviors of landlords faced by rural agricultural women workers.

**Behaviors of landlords for rural agriculture women:** The physical environment's strong role in agriculture production and the level of performance of agriculture workers. According to data collected by [26], in different chosen areas of Sindh province, 74 percent of rural women responded with various views regarding the behaviors of landlords with women workers, as mentioned in Table 4 below. The level of behavior of landlords with rural agriculture women has been mentioned in Table 4 below [26]. Table 4 shows that only 26 percent of rural agriculture women responded that landlords' behaviors are good, while others don't. Thus, 37 percent of rural agriculture women responded with satisfactory landlord behavior.

**Table 4:** Behaviors of landlords for rural agriculture women.

Level of Behavior	Total Samples	%
Good	39	26
Satisfactory	55	37
Not too good	32	21
Bad	24	16
Total	150	100

**Challenges about sources and rank of information:** The discussion made by [26] has mentioned that the key sources of information on rural women are very limited. It was found that only 7 percent of rural agriculture women get information through media sources like electronic and print media, while 97 percent of women get information from their elderly family members or their husbands. The lack of market information is the major hurdle for women workers and farmers in getting better prices for their agricultural production.

### Legal initiative for agriculture women workers; Sindh women agriculture workers act 2019

The agriculture community faces various challenges, but the

rural agriculture women and girls face some additional issues. A report by UN Women 2018 highlighted that about 60 percent of the women's labor force in the agriculture sector is doing unpaid work in Pakistan. Such discrimination is the result of a broader understanding of gender inequalities. The literacy rate among women is also low as compared to men. On the other hand, the literacy rate of rural women is very low; 35 percent of rural women are literate compared with 69 literacy rate of urban women. Similarly, the literacy rate of men in rural areas is double that of women, which is 63 percent [27]. A recognition for rural women was made by the united nations human rights council in 2018 by adopting a "declaration on rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas" regarding their key role in the economic survival of their families as well as their key role in sustaining the rural economy as well as boosting up the national economy.

The UN Committee guided the declaration on "elimination of discrimination against women" about rural women's rights [28]. The provincial government of Sindh, Pakistan, took essential steps for rural women to minimize their challenges and value for their work. In this regard, the Sindh government approved the "Sindh women agricultural workers act 2019" in August of 2019 [24]. The bill was approved further in January 2020 and now acts as the "Sindh women agricultural workers act 2019" [13,14]. The agriculture sector is one of the biggest employers in Pakistan, but agricultural workers often face issues regarding the protection of their labor rights. Many of them don't have a written agreement to work, and the biggest problem they face is that they don't receive the exact payment for their work; they are paid less [29]. This new law recognizes women workers' rights in various ways.

The law makes it mandatory to have written contracts for rural women workers, their minimum wage level limits, and social security measures with additional support regarding welfare benefits like benefits for children's health, maternity leaves, and easy access to government credit or subsidies. The law also highlights gender equality in the wage system. It is the first time in history the rights of agricultural women workers are recognized and legalized by a legal cover [24]. This law has proved to be a baseline for treating women in the agricultural sector; such efforts can be extended to the federal level. This step is the beginning of the long route to achieving gender equality. On the other hand, now there is a need to invest in information dissemination campaigns to aware the women in understanding and defending their rights



[30,31]. The efforts can also be made to change the general mindset of public to shift their overall narratives regarding the agricultural women workers and also that shift can bring more benefits in terms of opportunities for women in agriculture sector of the province as well as whole country.

### Key Recommendations

The recommendations below are based on the results and discussion of this paper. There are some key recommendations mentioned below

- A. There should be promotional interventions in rural areas of the province to create awareness among rural women about their contribution and role in agriculture sectors and provide them a platform to link with the market and generate more profit. It may help to increase the quality and innovations in products by the key role of women.
- B. Women should be recognized as female/women farmers rather than taking them only as sharecroppers or helpers.
- C. Women's technical skills should be improved, especially regarding the use of technology in agriculture, by establishing technical institutions in rural areas, which should be easily accessible to rural women.
- D. Agricultural training programs should be arranged for rural agricultural women to raise their awareness about ongoing modern approaches to agriculture.
- E. In most rural areas, women face very poor financial conditions, so there should be easy options for rural women in terms of financial support or loans from government or private institutions through public-private partnership programs.
- F. There is also a need to raise general awareness among women to claim equal rights within families, communities, and society and also in their formal engagement in working in the agricultural sector.
- G. Rural women should be trained in food preservation and be aware of it through electronic or print media as well as other locally used sources.
- H. There should be a strong information dissemination system regarding the new act for rural agricultural women workers among rural women.
- I. Strong efforts should be made to implement the law properly to achieve real women's empowerment in rural areas.

### Conclusion

The vast majority of the population in Asian countries is engaged in agriculture-related activities. Pakistan is one of the agricultural countries of the world, and most of the country's rural population is working in agricultural production. Sindh, a province of Pakistan, contributes widely to agricultural products. According to [16] the main crops of the province include cotton, rice, sugarcane, wheat, bananas, and mangoes. The quality of cotton from Sindh is very

popular, and it is also produced in larger quantities. This study aimed to elaborate on the different roles that are performed by women in agricultural production in Sindh and also highlighted the key challenges that rural women face. This study has also discussed the legal initiatives taken by the provincial governments of Sindh to provide legal cover to agricultural women workers. This study has resulted in the agricultural women workers playing various roles in the agriculture sectors of the country.

In Sindh province, the women perform the role at each stage of agricultural production, from sowing to drying, preparing the land, and other roles. The study has found that women are paid very little for their role in agricultural production. It has also been found that women are recognized as sharecroppers or helpers, not as women farmers. Discussions of this study also focused on the legislative initiatives of the provincial government of Sindh. A new law, "the Sindh women agricultural workers act 2019," has been highlighted in this study. The law mentions various interventions for gender equality and women's empowerment in the province's agricultural sector. The agricultural women workers are supported with different legal covers under this law. This study recommends that there is a need to shift behaviors towards gender equality, and strong sensitization should be made to accept and recognize the key role of women in the agriculture sector. There is also a need to disseminate information about the new law among rural women and implement it purely to achieve the real objective of this new law.

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