

Women's Perception on Decision Making in Integrated Farming System

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ABSTRACT

Results of the study revealed that the farm women perceived their involvement in the decision making process of Integrated Farming System (IFS) was relevant (6.7 score), correct (6.6 score) and essential (6.4 score), acceptable (6.0), good (5.5), useful (5.5), practicable (5.5) and active (5.5). Contributions of the farm women's in Integrated Farming System was found substantial. Whereas, they had to try hard to consider their ideas and alternatives in the decision and its implementation by negotiating with the family decision maker (100%) followed by the help of their family members especially through their children (88.45 %) and reminding repeatedly (87.5 %). With the rapid advances in new agricultural technologies, their transfer to the farm women had largely been ignored. There is an urgent need of empowering them with latest knowledge, skill and increase their involvement in decision making process, which will make them more accessible and responsive to contribute more effectively to the agriculture production process. These apart, the extension services need to be reoriented to change stereotyped and conservative attitude of the male dominated society towards the women through various possible means.

Key words: Perception of rural women on decision making; Decision implementing strategy: Women's participation in agriculture

In developing country like India, women constitute the most important labour force in agriculture and allied activities. According to 2001 census, female population is 48% out of which 73% inhabit rural areas. Emerging studies suggest that increasing number of rural women in India are not simply housewives but are in fact farmers (Shiva, 1991). Several reports and studies recorded that the rural women play significant role in almost all agricultural and allied farm activities from beginning to end. Although, the pattern of division of labour between men and women varies according to regions, socio-economic status, culture, nature of enterprises, etc, they involved in diverse farming activities, both outside and within the household. In spite of their active involvement and significant contribution, they have not been duly recognized, appreciated and are ignored in decision making process. In addition, farm women's contribution to agriculture is not adequately reflected in the available statistics (Adiguru et. al., 1999). Decision-making is a mental process based-on conscious reasoning (Rogers, 1962). It is common experience of normal human beings that their mental involvement in the work and its outcome lead to reduce mental and physical stress. Unfortunately, the farm women's involvement in decision-making related to farm activities is very meager (Punam Kumari, 1999 and Sharma et. al., 2002). Centuries of inertia, ignorance, conservatism, patriarchal and taboo-ridden Indian society have ignored the role that women can play in society very efficiently. With this backdrop, this study was conducted to know the details about nature of participation of the farm women, perception of decision making process and its implementation pattern in relation to Integrated Farming Systems so as to improve their quality and standard of living, of their family and ultimately of the nation.

METHODOLOGY

In this study Integrated Farming Systems (IFS) refers to agricultural and allied activities such as raising crops, vegetables, fruits and livestock including poultry, fish rearing and agro-forestry varying with the physical and socio-economic resource-base. For the purpose of this study, decision making patterns and its implementation modalities for only two agricultural enterprises (crop husbandry and animal husbandry practices) including nature of participation of rural women in different activities of IFS through secondary source were explored. The study was conducted at Sikohpur village, Sohna block in Gurgaon district of Haryana which was a adopted village of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, ICAR. It was selected purposively because the diversified farming was being done by the villagers and most of the women were involved in varieties of farm activities. Since, the purpose of the study was to find out the perception about involvement of the rural women in decision making pattern, the woman members of the household who were actively involved in farm operations were selected as respondents. In total 90 such women respondents from the village were selected randomly from the different age groups who were involved in the IFS. The data were collected through personal interview and group discussion by using Participatory Rural Appraisal tools, observation technique. For measurement of decision making pattern and its implementation strategies, the Semantic Differential (SD) and Preferential Ranking Techniques were used respectively. Fifteen bipolar adjectives, which were highly relevant to this study were selected. The adjectives were placed on seven-point scale which, was found to be useful as stated by Osgood (Kerlinger, 1998). Accordingly scores of 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 were assigned between each bipolar and mean score of each was calculated (Table 1). The strategies which were

being commonly followed by the rural women to implement their decision in IFS were asked with open-ended questions to the group of six key informants namely, Kasturi (65 years), Ramfali (58 years), Dhanapati (52 years), Chandrakala (49 years), Krishna (42 years) and Kamala Devi (45 years) and recorded as per their preferences. Enlisted all the strategies and they were asked to draw a line of extent of use of the strategy against line drawn on a paper of sheet by the investigators between the each bipolar as 100% for full use.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The attempt has been made to assess extend of participation of the farm women in several farm as well as household activities through their perceptions and experiences. The results of the study are discussed hereunder in two parts. The first part i. e. related with the involvement of women in decision making process and the second part consists of strategies followed by the women for implementation of their decisions.

Table 1

Women perception on their involvement in decision making process in relation to Integrated Farming Systems

Sr. No.	Dimension	Mean Score
1	Relevant	6.7
2	Correct	6.6
3	Essential	6.4
4	Acceptable	6.0
5	Good	5.5
6	Useful	5.5
7	Practicable	5.5
8	Active	5.5
9	Credible	5.2
10	Productive	4.5
11	Successful	4.5
12	Systematic	4.5
13	Satisfied	4.2
14	Involved	4.2
15	Always	3.0

Decision making pattern : Decision making is explained here as the process of consciously choosing course of action from the available alternatives and integrating them for the purpose of achieving the desired goal. It involves deciding on what goals are to be achieved, what means and method are to be adopted in reaching them based-on resources available and their modes of integration. Mostly, the women respondents played role in the decision making process of IFS by suggesting their different appropriate alternatives to their family decision maker to meet the common goal on the basis of their practical experiences. Their

perceptions regarding involvement in decision making process of the family were studied and are projected in Table 1.

On perusal of the Table 1, it is observed that the role of the women in decision-making was perceived as 'relevant' (6.7 score) followed by 'correct' (6.6 score) and 'essential' (6.4 score) in the agriculture and animal husbandry business. They also felt that their decisions were found feasible and gave positive effect which were attributed as 'acceptable' (6.0), 'good' (5.5), 'useful' (5.5), 'practicable' (5.5), 'active' (5.5) and 'credible' (5.2) in conducting activities under IFS. In further probe, they reported that it was due to frequent contacts with the KVK and ICAR scientists at their village.

However, 'always' (3.0 score) indicate that most of the women's perception towards involvement in decision making about agricultural as well as animal husbandry is not always considered in other words they were often bypassed. They were not much satisfied with the way they involved in the decision making process ('satisfied' 4.2 score). It was noted that though the women have contributed significantly in almost all the farm activities, but were not involved easily in this process by the family decision maker who were generally male family head and or their male counterpart. On further investigation, it was revealed that in most of the cases, they involved forcefully themselves in the decision making process. It is therefore, felt that there is essential need to empower them by providing education and training on latest improved farm technologies so that they can improve their decision making ability than the present status as productive, successful and systematic dimensions were perceived below 50 percent (4.5 mean score). At the same time, there is need to educate the men of their family to change the mindset towards women as, they are too equal contributors of the human development. It will encourage them to improve quality of their outputs and standard of life.

Decision implementation strategies : The women, who were involved in the decision making process were further probed to find out how their involvement in this process was recognized through its implementation. The various strategies which were applied by them to consider their ideas and alternatives in the decision making process regarding IFS and its implementation were enlisted as per their preferred rank order and further its extent of use was also computed in percentage. It was observed that their order of decision implementation pattern and its magnitude of use were different. The findings related to consideration of their ideas and alternatives in the decision making process regarding IFS and its implementation and it's extent of use are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Decision implementation strategies followed by the rural women in IFS

Sr. No.	Strategy	Extent of use (%)
1.	Through negotiation	100.00
2.	With anger	32.00
3.	Through family members	88.45
4.	Through relatives & neighbours	68.00
5.	Village leader (<i>Sarpanch</i>)	28.00
6.	Scientists / Officers	44.00
7.	Repetition	87.50

Step-wise use of decision implementation strategies : Most of the women reported that the step by step strategies they followed to get considered their ideas and alternatives in the decision making process were; primarily through full negotiation with the family decision maker. When they found this way was futile, then followed with anger, then through their family members especially through their children, further with the help of closed persons such as relatives, neighbours, after these village leader (*Sarpanch*) and the scientists or Government officers. Lastly in sequence they kept it repeating till their decision got implemented (Table 2).

Extent of use of the decision implementation strategies : As per extent of magnitude of the strategies used to get their decisions implemented was concerned, they made full use of negotiation mode (100%) followed by, with the help of their family members especially through their children (88.45 %). If these were not found effective, they kept reminding their decision repeatedly (87.5 %). This large extent of use shows that they had to exhaust lot of energy for this mode of implementation. Further their attempt was through intervention of mediators such as, through their closed relatives and neighbours (68.0 %) and ICAR scientists/ Government officers (44.0 %). They used option of anger (32.0 %) and also get implemented their decisions through village leader (28.0%) at very less extent It may be, to avoid conflicts and keep congenial family environment and felt uneasy to meet with elder people frequently as per culture of the society, respectively. They learnt on the basis of earlier experiences that the last strategy i. e. anger was least effective and sometimes violating.

Detailed investigation from the family decision maker regarding the difficulties in implementations of their decisions revealed that they treated them as innocent about outside activities as well as illiterate or less educated than the male members. It was also stressed by the findings of several studies conducted in this area that women's higher self education, family educational status, social participation, knowledge about latest cultivation practices, exposure and

extension contact and innovation prones were highly significant and positively correlated with their higher involvement in decision making and effective performance in farm and home activities (Tamilselvi and Somasundaram, 1999, Anita Kumari and Singh, 2002 and Prasad et al., 2006). Their ability and competency can be improved by educating and providing training on IFS as is being done for male farmers. However, the family decision maker had stereotyped view on women's caliber as lesser intelligent than men, unable to handle the skillful jobs, etc. Thereby, they had to do less skill and or unskillwork. It was also confirmed in support of this observation that in agriculture and allied activities, where less skill required, farm women participation was found to be very high (Adiguru et. al., 1999).

The family decision maker also had understanding that the decision making was the job of only man especially family head or active male member and involvement of women in this process was perceived as not prestigious to them in the society. They also didn't like their frequent contacts with the outside persons without their permission. This shows the conservative and stereotyped mindset of their male family members against women folk.

It was also reported that they were afraid to involve them in the decision making process because of checking their monetary allotments and transactions by their female counterparts which make restrictions. Therefore, they wanted to keep them unaware of the monetary matters so that they could enjoy more. This finding was also supported by Anita Kumari and Madan Singh (2002) where they stated that men were dominated in farm and money related decisions and women in the field of socio-religious decision.

Therefore, there is need to empower the rural women through adult education and need-based training on latest technical knowledge and skill about improved IFS through extension personnel so that, they can easily understand and negotiate with the family head. Similar recommendations were also made by several researchers (Adiguru et. al., 1999, Umarani and Thangamani, 1999 and Premlata Singh, et. al., 2004). Special emphasis should be given to change stereotyped lookout, age old understanding and conservatism of the society about the women folk through the viable Government policy, Non-government and social organizations by providing the gender-oriented adult education, training, awareness programmes etc.

CONCLUSION

Findings of the study indicated that the farm women perceived that their decisions were feasible and gave fruitful results. They contribute immensely and used their full potential in agriculture production process. However, they were kept in isolation from the

decision making process and try hard to get it implemented due to conservative and taboo-ridden mind set of the male dominated family. Moreover, their efforts are not duly recognized and appreciated. Unless, changes in attitudes, perceptions about women's roles as farmers and new approaches to research, training and extension are made, farm women will remain neglected. They should be provided training for empowering them with knowledge and skill, reorient the extension services toward women farmers in building awareness among both the extension and research staff at all levels leading them to make themselves more accessible, responsive and efficient in

their agricultural and other developmental activities. Especially, the policy maker and male partners of the society need to be sensitized regarding their vital role and contribution made in human development. There is need to empower farm women through various feasible means such as, gender-specific education, need-based training, results demonstrations, awards for their unique efforts, gender awareness programme, providing opportunities to get more exposure on latest farm technologies, women's self-help group and target group-oriented extension services.

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