



A STUDY ON DECISION MAKING BEHAVIOUR OF FARM WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

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Abstract:

The present study reflects the decision making behaviour of women in farm related activities. The participation of women in farm management and other areas of decision making varied in relation to their status in the family and size of holding. The non-participation and partial participation of women is due to several reasons such as inadequate exposure to mass media, lack of extension contact, social restriction, lack of time, illiteracy and large size of the family which are to be taken care of to bring women to the mainstream of development.

Key Words: Decision Making Behaviour, Farm Women, Agriculture Sector & Participation.

Introduction

Decision making is an inseparable part of human life process. Over a period of time, human beings developed not only as thinking but also as decision making animals. Further evolution granted a sexist division with regard to decision making of human beings and such a branch of activity of human life process manifested itself in several facets and took several forms. Although the idea of decision making is common in all its forms like individuals taking decisions at the level of family, farm and industry, the content in each case is bound to vary.

Decision Making of the Farm Women

The State of the Art:

In the language of the Oxford Dictionary, the idea of decision refers to the act of 'resolving the issue'. The Chambers 20th Century Dictionary defines decision making as 'the act of making up one's mind' on a given issue. The idea of decision making has been conceptualised by different scholars as per their line of work, but in majority of the cases the emphasis has been on looking at the pros and cons and finally leading to the course of action (Johnson and Harver, 1953; Litch Field, 1958; Alexander, 1958; Sitton, 1960; Thornton, 1962; Sinha, 1966; Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971).

A careful look at the literature cited above will reveal that the act of decision making involves:

- ✓ Analysis of the existing situation and definition of the issue.
- ✓ Consideration of alternative means.
- ✓ Identification of the pros and cons and choice of the alternative means.
- ✓ Putting the decision into action.

It is a widely held belief that in rural agrarian economy, women merely contribute their labour but have little role to play in the decision making process of the farm centred activities. Some scholars go on to point out that wives and other women in a farm household may be consulted, but the final decision is taken by husbands and heads of the household (Kargbo, 1983; Spencer, 1978; Westphal, 1987).

The role of women in agriculture has, however, changed dramatically in developed countries after the advent of science and technology in farming practices. Historically, it is believed that it was the women who first domesticated crop plants, and thereby initiated the art and science of farming (Swaminathan, 1990). While men were out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating plants for the sake of food, feed, fibre and fuel. Even today this tradition has continued in many parts of the developing world. Further, on analysing the decision making behaviour, it is found that the women in the largely patriarchal society of ours are no longer confined only to the traditional daughter-in-law, mother, mother-in-law, and so on, status. The arbitrary divide on the basis of sex is getting obliterated. Men for 'war' and women for 'hearth' is now an anachronism.

Rural women are presently seen to be performing multiple roles. Besides working as labourers in the farm sector, they are responsible for the rearing of children, fetching drinking water, cooking food, cleaning utensils and other practices related to domestic management. Women are also called upon to share the responsibility more often than the usual when other sources of labour are inadequate or not available (Tripp, 1978; Westphal, 1987; Swaminathan, 1990) and also where the work has to be done urgently (Gunther, 1978). Recent trends of research on agricultural farming reveal that gradually, more and more women have taken up the role of men in farm related activities. The specific areas in which women, in the farm sector, have performed their role are:

- ✓ Ensuring the seed quality and deciding which crops are to be sown.
- ✓ Seed treatment.
- ✓ Management of the seed crop.
- ✓ Deciding the time for harvesting, threshing and cleaning of the seed crop.
- ✓ Treating, bagging and storing the seed.
- ✓ Deciding the form, time, place and at what price to sell marketable surplus.

It is in all the above mentioned areas that women not only contribute their labour, but give the apt suggestions as to how the activities are to be carried out most effectively (Pattnaik, 1988). Bala and Deshpande (1972) report that the decision regarding expenditure is made by the male head in 51 per cent of the cases and decision regarding loans is taken by the male head in 60 per cent of the cases. Pattnaik (1988) concluded that the housewives, in addition to taking part in the decision about family planning measures and settlement of marriage, also involve themselves to a greater extent in decision making of the farm related activities. Pattnaik (1988) argues that women's role in farm-management and other areas of decision making process varied partly in relation to their status in the household and the farm enterprise. Their role in farm management and other decision making process is highest when they are heads of the household.

Bala and Ray (1979) and Kulkarni (1983) observe that rural women participate and give suggestions in areas of purchase of seeds, fertilisers, animals, land, sale of the product, cropping pattern, storage, and so on. Susheela *et al* (1991) mention that decision making by women in farm related aspects was found to be very low except in storage of grain and taking care of animals.

Research Gap:

In the light of the discussion above, it goes without saying that in my own discipline of Home Science, which is an area of women's work (decision making in farm related activities and home management), in a field not generally noted for the attention paid to it by those who fund research, those who develop theories or those who record economic activity. It is at the bottom of most political and academic agenda if at all it makes any appearance. The gap in the earlier researches set forth the rationale for the present study. In view of the tremendous contribution that women are making and can yet make, is it not a matter of little concern? A time has come when it has been realised that, for development in agriculture, their involvement needs and decision making behaviour are to be properly assessed and known.

Objectives:

- ✓ To study the decision making behaviour of farm women in different areas of agricultural operations.
- ✓ To analyse the participation of farm women in decision making.
- ✓ To find out constraints faced by farm women in taking decisions.
- ✓ To make necessary suggestions.

Methodology:

This study combines an exploratory and descriptive research design. The study was undertaken in Shikaripura Taluk of Shivamogga district in the state of Karnataka. From eight villages, a total of 180 respondents were selected at random. The selection of the respondents was done on the basis of the size of holding. They represented the landless (38), the marginal (45), small (50) and large (47). The database of the study is drawn from a variety of secondary sources and the primary data was collected through observations and interview schedules. For the purpose of the present research 'decision making role' means acting on one's conviction and/or situational necessity.

Findings:

Areas of Decision Making:

The respondents identified around 15 areas of farm operations in which they take part. The facts presented in Table 1 give a picture of the different areas of women's decision making in farm sector. The primary data depicts that a higher percentage of women are taking decisions on storage of farm produce, followed by care of animals, harvesting of crops, weeding operation and management of labour.

Relatively less percentage of women are taking decisions on selection of varieties, intercultural operation, method of sowing, marketing of farm produce, irrigation, buying of farm implements, crop loan, threshing of crops, application of FYM/fertilisers and insecticides. The total number of respondents being 180, it is seen that the overall participation of women in farm operations is marginal.

Some trend in regard to women's decision making in farm-related activities tends to be clear from the rank order involvement of women as seen from the primary data. The tasks of application of insecticides, application of fertilisers, threshing of crops, crop loan, buying of implements are said to have been taken up by male members and women's representation is found to be substantially less.

Extent of Participation in Decision Making Process:

On identifying the different areas of decision making in which rural women take part, it was imperative to know about the extent of their participation. It is found that some participate 'fully' (cover maximum area) and some 'partially' (cover a part) and some do not participate in the decision making at all. Four categories of the respondents were identified, on the basis of their size of the land holding: Landless (having no landed property

and who merely work as wage labour), Marginal (up to 2.5 acres), Small (2.6 to 5 acres) and Large (5.1 acres and above). The primary data shows some significant facts about the correlation between the categories of the respondents and the extent of their participation.

As can be observed from data, the participation of farm women in decision making process varies with the size of land holding. The landless labour who hire themselves out, do not represent themselves in the fully participant category which is just obvious. However the participation of landless in the decision making is confined to care and management of domestic animals while majority of them (57.89 per cent) do not participate in any form of decision making at all. Amongst the marginal farm women, 20 per cent and 24.44 percent are found in the 'fully' and 'partial' participant category respectively, and 55.56 per cent of them do not participate in the decision making process. Farm women having small land holding figure most (32 per cent) in the fully participant category and as such the number of non-participants amongst them is relatively less. The remaining 28 per cent of them partially participate in the decision making process. Farm women having large landholdings are lowest in number in the fully participant category (17.02 per cent). Among them 34.04 per cent are found in the partial participant category and 48.94 per cent of them do not participate in any form of decision making process. Further it is found that the average participation of women in the decision making activities is seen to be 50 per cent, although the percentage of fully participant is low, i.e., 17.25 per cent on an average. Those women who partially (participation in up to seven items referred to earlier data) take part in the decision making process, form, on an average, 32.15 per cent of the sample respondents, i.e., nearly double the fully participant (participation in more than seven items referred to earlier data). The extent of participation swings more towards partial participation and non-participation. As some of them point out, they are not yet given unrestricted and real freedom. In our society a woman continues to be under the surveillance of her father in her childhood; her husband in her youth; and her sons after the death of her husband. Nonetheless it is expected that the traditional age old restrictions will be obliterated and full participation of rural women in decision making is likely to grow. On the other hand the non-participation of farm women is due to several factors which is analysed from the primary data.

Constraints Faced by Farm Women in Taking Decisions:

Farm women face a lot of problems in taking the right type of decisions. The constraints faced by farm women is explained from data reveals that each of the respondents have identified some problem or other. Around 25 per cent of the sample respondents feel that due to illiteracy they fail to take effective part in the decision making process. This study also represents a type of male dominated society where many of the traditional social restrictions have gone against the interest of farm women. One such example, as pointed out by one of the respondents, was that they were not allowed to stand before elderly male members in order to give their suggestions.

Some of the respondents also complained that their suggestions were never taken into consideration. Those who held traditional social restrictions as a major hurdle against women's participation in the decision making process constitute 37.22 per cent of the sample respondents. The most important hurdle is the inadequate exposure to mass media sources (58.33 per cent). It is seen that respondents depend largely on informal sources of information like neighbours and friends. They are very poorly equipped with the mass media sources. Radio was found to be occasionally utilised by the farm women for obtaining certain information. Around 17.77 per cent of farm women are of the opinion that large size of the family acts as constraint in taking decisions and 38.88 per cent of farm women are of the opinion that lack of contact with extension personnel and 26.66 per cent of women are of opinion that lack of time acts as a hindrance in taking active part in family decision making process.

Suggestions

Role of Government and Extension Workers:

The extension workers need to be women to work with women. They can educate and motivate the farm women to take the right type of decisions. The Krishi Vigyan Kendras which are functioning at the grassroot level can make farm women conscious and aware of modern agricultural practices so that they can provide a helping hand and moral support to their husbands. Women need recognition and support in their efforts in the area of agriculture. Scientists who are working in the state governments and in Krishi Vigyan Kendras must provide effective intensive training to the farm women to enhance their knowledge, which in turn, will enable women to take an active part in various areas of decision making. In addition to this the government should sponsor special self-employment schemes for rural women in farm sector. A nodal group needs to be formed and the government should fund objective and independent research in this area. There is a dire need for a government sponsored state wide survey on this.

Scope of Research:

This study is not exhaustive; it is rather specific to the location and farming conditions. It is intended to emphasise the role of women in overall development of farm systems. Since the study is based on a few representative villages, any generalisation from the data is not possible. The study clearly shows the possibility for collection and documentation of data at a village household level. However there is a need for:

- ✓ Analysis of women's productive activities within the farming system including their roles in the household and in the management of agricultural production.
- ✓ Identification of existing, and possible technology options conducive to the expansion of women's production capacity as well as human development potential.
- ✓ Generating greater understanding of the factors supportive of women's increased decision making participation in farming system such as access to information, organisation and productive resources; and access to and control over the fruits of production.

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