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## GENDER EQUITY ISSUES IN INDIA

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### Introduction:

Over the last several decades, considerable effort has been made throughout the world to provide women farmers and women on the farm with efficient, effective, and appropriate technology, training, and information. The positive effects are beginning to show in agricultural production statistics and in indices of family welfare. Yet these successes still fall far short of what is needed at a time when public sector investments in agricultural research and extension are under pressure, when ever-greater demands are being placed on rural women in the face of rapid social transformation, and, in an increasing number of areas, when evidence of environmental degradation is mounting.

Sociologically the word gender refers to the socio-cultural definition of man and woman, the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles. The distinction between sex and gender was introduced to deal with the general tendency to attribute women's subordination to their anatomy. For ages it was believed that the different characteristics, roles and status accorded to women and men in society are determined by sex, that they are natural and therefore not changeable. Gender is seen closely related to the roles and behavior assigned to women and men based on their sexual differences. As soon as a child is born families and society begin the process of gendering. The birth of the son is celebrated, the birth of a daughter filled with pain; sons are showered with love, respect, better food and proper health care. Boys are encouraged to be tough and outgoing; girls are encouraged to be homebound and shy. All these differences are gender differences and they are created by society. Gender inequality is therefore a form of inequality which is distinct from other forms of economic and social inequalities. It dwells not only outside the household but also centrally within it. It stems not only from pre-existing differences in economic endowments between women and men but also from pre-existing gendered social norms and social perceptions. Gender inequality has adverse impact on development goals as reduces economic growth. It hampers the overall well being because blocking women from participation in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect the whole society. Many developing countries including India have displayed gender inequality in education, employment and health. It is common to find girls and women suffering from high mortality rates. There are vast differences in education level of two sexes. India has witnessed gender inequality from its early history due to its socio-economic and religious practices that resulted in a wide gap between the position of men and women in the society.

The Constitution of India ensures gender equality in its preamble as a fundamental right but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women by ways of legislation and policies. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights forums to secure equal rights of women, such as ratification of

Convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in 1993. Women have been finding place in local governance structures, overcoming gender biases. Over one million women have been elected to local panchayats as a result of 1993 amendment to the Indian Constitution requiring that 1/3 rd of the elected seats to the local governing bodies be reserved for women. The passing of Pre-natal Diagnostic Tech Act in 1994 also is a step in removing gender discrimination. This Act seeks to end sex-determination tests and female foeticide and prohibits doctors from conducting such procedures for the specific purpose of determining the sex of the fetus. The Government also announced the National policy for empowerment of women in 2001 to bring out advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Government has also drawn up a draft National policy for the empowerment of women which is a policy statement outlining the state's response to problems of gender discrimination. As persistent gender inequalities continue we need to rethink concepts and strategies for promoting women's dignity and rights. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has stated, "Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance." There is a need for new kinds of institutions, incorporating new norms and rules that support equal and just relations between women and men. Today women are organizing themselves to meet the challenges that are hampering their development.

Gender discrimination continues to be an enormous problem within Indian society. Traditional patriarchal norms have relegated women to secondary status within the household and workplace. This drastically affects women's health, financial status, education, and political involvement. Women are commonly married young, quickly become mothers, and are then burdened by stringent domestic and financial responsibilities. They are frequently malnourished since women typically are the last member of a household to eat and the last to receive medical attention. Additionally, only 65.46 percent of Indian women are literate as compared to 82.14 percent(censuses 2011) of men. Women receive little schooling, and suffer from unfair and biased inheritance and divorce laws. These laws prevent women from accumulating substantial financial assets, making it difficult for women to establish their own security and autonomy.

In Rajasthan, all of these problems are aggravated by high levels of seasonal migration. For many men in Rajasthan, migration is required since rural parts of Rajasthan often lack a sufficient economy to provide income for a family year-round. Women are commonly left behind to care and provide for the entire household. This is increasingly difficult because it is estimated that an average woman's wage is 30 percent lower than a man's wage working in a similar position. While these mothers work, they must also tend to domestic responsibilities. This formula for supporting Rajasthani families leaves little resource for the growth and development of women's rights and education levels.

A strong "son preference" exists in the region, as it does throughout the country, and high rates of female infanticide and female feticide plague the area. In 2011, for every 1,000 males living in Rajasthan there were only 926 women (censuses 2011). The literacy rate in Rajasthan is 67.06 percent, with male literacy rate at 80.51 percent and female literacy rate is 52.66 percent. Having sons is economically advantageous to families due to cultural institutions; these institutions serve to drastically devalue the roles women play in the

traditional society. Women continue to struggle to achieve equal status to men, making gender equity an issue of particular importance for Rajasthan.

**Gender sensitization in Agriculture:**

It is now widely demonstrated that rural women, as well as men, throughout the world are engaged in a range of productive activities essential to household welfare, agricultural productivity, and economic growth. Yet women's substantial contribution continues to be systematically marginalized and undervalued in conventional agricultural and economic analyses and policies, while men's contribution remains the central, often the sole, focus of attention.

**Gender –based disparities in areas of agriculture:**

This section presents gender disparities on variables that impact on agriculture

- 1 Access to and Control Over Land
- 2 Access to and Control over Farm Implements
- 3 Access to Knowledge and Skills- Extension Education
- 4 Division of Labor
- 5 Participation in Decision-making

**Gender sensitization:**

The aim of human right education and gender sensitization is to build a universal culture of human rights through imparting knowledge and skills and the molding of attitude.

**A gender perspective:**

- ❖ Takes into serious account the existing belief system, roles and responsibilities of men and women.
- ❖ Men and women do not necessarily have the same access to resources.
- ❖ Open-mindedness is needed.
- ❖ Aim is to ensure the fullest possible participation of both men and women.

**Gender Equality:**

- Entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles, or prejudices.
- Gender equality means that the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally.
- It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

**Gender Equity:**

- Means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs.
- This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.
- In the development context, a gender equity goal often requires built-in measures to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages of women.

**Gender mainstreaming:** In July 1997, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defined the concept of gender mainstreaming as follows:

“Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels.

It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.” Within its technical cooperation programme, the ILO has piloted ways to promote gender mainstreaming through a two-pronged approach, including: All projects/programmes should aim to systematically address the concerns of both women and men through gender analysis and planning. Targeted interventions should be designed to enable women and men to participate equally in, and benefit equally from, development efforts.

**1. The WID (or Women in Development) approach:**

The WID (or Women in Development) approach calls for greater attention to women in development policy and practice, and emphasises the need to integrate them into the development process.

**2. Gender and Development approach:**

In contrast, the GAD (or Gender and Development) approach focuses on the socially constructed basis of differences between men and women and emphasises the need to challenge existing gender roles and relations.

- The main objectives of a Gender and Development approach (GAD) are to strengthen the effectiveness of development work in improving the situation of both women and men, and achieving progress towards social and gender equality.
- The focus is on social and gender equality as an objective, rather than women as a target group.

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