

SEWA's Agriculture Campaign, Regenerative Farming and Overcoming Structural Barriers to Women's Empowerment

More than 93% of workforce in India is in the informal sector. Women form a major portion of these and yet their dilution, marginalization and isolation prevent them from the forward and backward linkages that integrate them into the Economy.

The reality of these women workers from the informal economy is that the employment opportunities available in informal economy is never constant due to severe competition, market trends and changing economic policies. Lack of access to and information about current market, raw material, finance and credit, research and development and modern tools, etc. are compounded by disadvantages of being a women worker such as restricted mobility, lack of agency, no control over sexuality or reproductive roles or no control over productive roles.

These women workers are hardly covered by any labor laws, lack social security and end up spending large part of their productive hours in accessing basic necessities like water, fuel etc. - with no security on quantity as well as quality – apart from lack of bodily integrity.

There inequalities for women and girls not only affects decent work, health and dignity of women farmers and girls, but also affects the sustainability of production processes, and thus the entire economy: it impacts Health and well-being, with higher sick leave and continuous stress and trauma of women farmers leading to decreased productivity - a dis-enabler of women's economic empowerment. Economy is also at a loss when women farmers cannot use their own potential.

Thus, It calls for system changes!

Having largest membership from agriculture sector, SEWA initiated agriculture campaign in 1995 to address the challenge of "Why does Farmer remain hungry". The major challenge of small and marginal farmers are climate risk and market risk. The women farmers face further more challenges are access to government schemes, finance and productive resource, market and decision making in farming. Women farmers are not recognized as farmers thus they are not visible and their voices are not heard and may not be counted appropriately under the national database and that's how the policies also miss gender lance in formulation and design. SEWA's approach has been to treat farm as and enterprise and farmer as entrepreneur so that agriculture moves form subsistence to becoming viable and profitable.

SEWA has experienced that Sustainable Agriculture is a Nexus between Women, Water, Energy and Agriculture. Coupling renewable energy solutions with well-thought-out government policies and other technologies for minimizing water and other energy usage the best approach to optimizing the agriculture -water-energy nexus. Moreover, women's access to

ownership of ecosystems-based agriculture is vital to strengthen the agriculture of small holder family farmers.

SEWA's Agriculture Campaign in 1995, which made use of the four services viz: (a) Organizing, Capacity Building and Technical Services, (b) Access to Agricultural Inputs, (c) Financial Services and (d) Market Linkages. On one hand, SEWA's commodity cluster approach helps farmers to reduce the input cost, reach to mainstream market with quantum and increase the bargaining power while on other hand the active advocacy with government and other stakeholders viz banks, micro finance institutions, wholesale buyers, transport providers or storage to actively engage with women farmers as partners in the supply chains.

SEWA's agriculture campaign has adopted natural farming practices and further regenerative farming that revives the land, biodiversity and environment and a strongest action against climate change. Women farmers own and lead in formation and management of seed bank, seed plots, grow seeds, produce and use natural inputs utmost, practice resilient farming practices, install and use bio gas, renewable energy equipment. The campaign also focuses on awareness creation on importance of producing cereal crops, forgetting cereal crops and replace crops with mixed crops. On input side use of vermicompost as manure and natural pesticides, adopt practice of mulching.

The bargaining power and economies of scale for small marginal farmers are being done through collectivization by forming commodity clusters where the cluster farmers buy inputs and services collectively while the marketing is also done collectively which helps them to reach to mainstream market even with their small quantities.

Women led supply chain which works on decentralized supply chain model called RUDI provides market at doorsteps to women farmers the role of middlemen and provides livelihood opportunity and food and nutrition security to rural households. – decent work and living wages.

Small and marginal farmers are prone to climate crises. Resilience building is vital and thus SEWA builds capacity of women to take up new forms of livelihoods viz plantation, biogas, renewable energy, practices which help them to reach to credit market and provide sustainable livelihoods options which help farmers to sustain even when the agricultures is affected by climate shocks.

SEWA is taking up Technology in hands of women which reduces drudgery but does not take away their livelihoods and with this tools and equipment libraries, technology which enhances their access to finance, data driven decisions are focused by imparting trainings, awareness and forming digital groups where the participatory tools, trainings and videos.

Lastly SEWA provides enabling environment which enhance women's choices and ability to participate in agriculture activities and work outside the home, boost public and private investments in organizations that promote women's groups and ensure that food based social safety nets reach resource poor and food insecure households.

SEWA has actively influenced policies to bring in overall perspective as also from women's perspective. While this has been done, a different approach is required for being proactive at

the formulation stage of the policies. The focus on policy influencing becomes even more important to create violence free world of work for women farmers.