

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Assessment of Empowerment of Women Farmers in Decision Making in Agriculture and Livestock Activities

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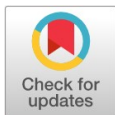
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Abstract— In Pakistan, women constitute about 67% of the agricultural labor force, engaged in agriculture and its sub-sectors to support their families. Because of the patriarchal society, women have been discriminated against in acquiring fundamental rights and decision-making in numerous aspects of life, including various farm and livestock-related activities. No or very limited studies have been conducted regarding women farmers' empowerment, especially in the Ghotki, Naushahro Feroz, and Badin districts of Sindh. Hence, this qualitative study was carried out in districts Ghotki, Naushahro Feroz, and Badin, Sindh to determine women farmers' perceptions about their empowerment regarding decision-making in agriculture activities. Thirty IDIs and nine FGDs were conducted through purposive sampling, and the collected data were analyzed through thematic analyses. This study reveals that women farmers perform various agricultural and livestock tasks for about 6 to 8 hours a day with their man folks. Illiteracy and poverty were the main reasons behind their engagement in the sector, and they worked as unpaid labour with their men. Women farmers have limited decision-making authority in various crop activities, the sale and purchase of agricultural goods, livestock, and its by-products, due to cultural constraints, they have no access to the agricultural market. This study suggests that education, professional training, and property ownership rights may be provided to women farmers to grow economically and be productive for future generations, society, and the country.

Index Terms— Patriarchal society, Fundamental rights, Illiteracy, Poverty, Unpaid labour, Property ownership, Cultural constraints

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Introduction

In the patriarchal setup of a society like Pakistan, considerable discrimination and gap between men and women cause hindrance in their progress and development (Akram, N. 2018). For understanding women empowerment, Kabeer (2005) has defined women empowerment as the process of enabling women to achieve power, right over resources, and make decisions regarding their life choices. As women have been deprived of their basic rights for a long time, therefore, the UN is focusing attentively on gender parity and women empowerment through education, healthcare, politics, and economic decision making as they may achieve self-respect, awareness, and attainment of rights and opportunities; authority over life choices and power to bring social change. It is also a core concern of the UN that its member nations should guarantee farmers' effective contribution in decision-making, land, and livelihood and forbid discrimination concerning land ownership. The member nations should also provide them education training and improve their technical skills as basic rights of

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rural women. (UN, 1995a, 2018b & 2020c) The constitution of Pakistan also ensures equal legal rights over the sale and purchase of the property the provision of formal, technical, and professional education by eliminating illiteracy from the country, and it also prohibits sex-based discrimination. But unfortunately, the government of Pakistan has achieved little success in implementing its policies to bring out the suppressed portion of the population from subjugation. It shows a critical situation for women in Pakistan to grow as a human. It is essential to provide them education, equal job opportunities, and property ownership for empowering women. Still, due to patriarchy and societal and cultural norms, it doesn't seem easy to empower women in the true sense.

Agriculture is considered a key sector of developing countries, and women play a pivotal role in their economy. About half of the world's total population consists of women (Abate, 2019), from which 41 percent of the world's agricultural labor force is women (Pakobserver, 2018). In Pakistan, about 49 percent of the total population and 67 percent of the agriculture labour force are women (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2017a, 2019b), who perform an important role in agriculture and its subfields such as poultry fisheries, livestock, etc. Women are involved in agriculture to earn livelihoods to support their families with various daily use and sale (Naz et al., 2020), improve living standards, and provide education to their children by empowering themselves. But in the patriarchal society of Pakistan, women are deprived of their legal and equal rights, opportunities, and basic needs like education, healthcare, and authority over resources and life choices, including political rights (Aziz et al., 2021). Women are largely restricted from the right of decision-making related to household and farm activities and have no authority over agricultural or other assets and property. Just because of the cultural norms of society, women are inferiorly treated, and the sacrifices rendered by them are not recognized (Safdar & Pervaiz, 2020). Although women farmers perform more On-farm tasks than men do, they have been considered unskilled labour and paid lower wages. They also have very limited decision-making authority related to crop activities; access to the market for selling and buying agricultural and livestock products. They also have very limited property ownership rights, and they face many hurdles in empowering themselves in the course of life. To discover women farmers' say regarding their authority in decision-making in agriculture tasks, this study was conducted in Ghotki, Naushahro Feroz, and Badin, the Sindh districts, through IDIs Sindh districts, through IDIs FGDs.

The study covers various rural women's roles in agriculture, determining their right to property ownership and decision-making related to crop and livestock activities. So the study would significantly help bring forth gaps relating to the empowerment of rural women for the policy builders to formulate future policies and guidelines and strategies to fill these gaps to improve the life standard of farming women.

Research objectives

How do women farmers perceive their say in decision-making?

Literature Review

Pakistan has a largely agricultural setup that is the backbone of the country's economy, and woman farmers perform an important and chief role in agricultural practices and household activities. They also have proved themselves as a dynamic worker in increasing farm production. According to estimation, women produce about 50 percent of the world's total food (Ishaq & Memon, 2016). Women participate in farm activities such as sowing, weeding, reaping, bundling and storing the crop, cleaning, drying seed, etc., with their men (Muhammad et al., 2020). However, tough chores like preparation of land and seedbed using fertilizer and pesticides are performed by men while the rest of the activities are shared between men and women (Akter et al., 2017). Apart from crop activities, women farmers also play a vital contribution to livestock by performing several activities like taking care of animals and poultry, milking, preparation of ghee and yogurt, dung preparation for fuel, cleaning of animal sheds, selling of eggs and poultry (Manzoor et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2020). Although women produce more than half of Pakistan's food, yet eat less and are food insecure (Pakobserver, 2018).

In Pakistan, though, women have a significant role in agriculture, livestock, horticulture, poultry, fisheries, and food processing. Still, they are discriminated in decision-making at different levels, especially in the decisions relating to crop activities. They do not have the right to access education, professional training, ownership of land, and financial services also (Rashid et al., 2017). The head of the household takes almost all the decisions concerning agriculture, and decision-making is deemed men's domain in India (Paul & Rani, 2017). Hence, in Pakistan, most female farmers have no authority to decide to select the land for the cultivation of a particular crop. While Hussain & Hussain (2011) revealed in their study that about 90 percent of the female farmers from the study area were not responsible for making decisions for the activities like crop selection, crop or fruit harvesting, labour hiring, weeding practices, and threshing of the crops, therefore, male farmers were the key respondents for such decisions. Ishaq & Memon (2016) also revealed that women do not possess any right to sell crop products. About one-third of women farmers of the study area had no decision-making authority regarding selling agricultural products and buying different pesticides and weedicides or chemical fertilizers. The women's role in buying farm machinery, seeds, and other farm implements and paying labour charges was negligible. Moreover, woman farmers do not have access to inheritance rights and land ownership, which shows women's negative impact on their economic resources in Sindh (Brohi & Kakepoto, 2013). In

Pakistan, generally, women are unaware of their property ownership rights; therefore, the land, the house, and other assets are owned by their husbands or other male family members (Akter et al., 2017).

The land inherited by a woman is mostly transferred to her husband or another male family member because it is a general perception in Pakistan that the land cannot be operated by a woman (Afzal et al., 2020). Therefore, in Pakistan, women labour on the land (FAO, 2015) and do not get any share or wages from the earnings of the land. Thus, their decisions in the household and crop-related activities are affected (Abbasi & Jafri, 2013). The men who hold the land possess a good financial status compared to women in Pakistan (FAO, 2015). As the authority over the land decides, people's financial and social status, the women who possess the land feel more secure and are strongly involved in decision-making at various levels. Hence, it can be concluded that the main hindrance in the advancement of women's social and economic status is their limited access to economic resources (Khowaja et al., 2014).

Despite women's major role in agriculture production, they are always less prioritized for long. The role of woman farmers has always been underestimated regarding mobility, insufficient access to education, training, and other informative sources (Usman et al., 2019). Women also have an inadequate approach towards agricultural extension, and very limited extension training was held for women farmers to achieve the required crop yield. As a result, most women farmers collect information related to agriculture through their male members and colleagues. It is also observed that there was no availability of female extension workers to train female farmers or seek agricultural information. A very small number of female farmers attended farm-related training arranged by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The female farmers trained by NGOs were more efficient than those who were not provided any training or had been restricted from the training (Safdar & Pervaiz, 2020).

Like crop activities, women have always played a major part in livestock management practices, but they are mostly disempowered in the number of livestock decision-making activities (Akram et al., 2019). While in some cases, women can make decisions relating to the sale and purchase of poultry and dairy products. The study results of Naz et al. (2020) revealed that woman farmers were highly empowered in activities related to milk or milk by-products and their sale, health-related problems of livestock, animals' shed, and breeding of animals. Hence, the contribution of women in livestock activities increases their empowerment in decision-making in livestock management compared to domestic matters and crop-related activities. Due to limited access to the market and inadequate professional knowledge, women are less empowered, especially in the sale, buying, and breeding of livestock, cutting of fodder, cleaning, and repairs of sheds of animals (Bhanotra et al., 2015; Naz et al., 2020) as these jobs are not in women's domain. Additionally, the earnings from livestock and its by-products are not used by themselves because they were bound to give away the amount to the head of the family (Akram et al., 2019). But, the study of Godara et al. (2014) revealed that more than half of the women respondents took their own decisions in the number of livestock to be reared, and in purchasing and selling of domestic animals in India.

Methodology

The qualitative study, is regarded as a method of discovering the facts in a natural setting in which the researcher can collect details through his participation and in real experiences, and through this method, a researcher can investigate and understand complications of a phenomenon in a better way (Williams, 2007), was carried out through purposive sampling—which is a non-probability or judgment sampling technique. It is a technique used to select a respondent for the qualities that it possesses. It is a method that needs not set theories or several informants (Tongco, 2007). It is also known as convenience sampling—to collect primary data through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Thirty IDIs and nine FGDs (Ten IDIs and three FGDs from each district) were conducted from three districts of Sindh, i.e., Ghotki, Naushahro Feroz, and Badin, and the data were analyzed through thematic analysis.

At first, the screening questions were asked. Only those respondents were selected for interviews and FGDs who were actively involved in the agriculture sector (as farmers) or its sub-sector like livestock. All the selected respondents were married, above 35 years of age, having two or more children. The interview schedule was based on the objectives of the study.

The women were asked questions to know their say in On-farm decision-making activities related to crop and livestock management. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. It is a qualitative analysis used to evaluate classification and set themes concerning data. (Alhojailan, 2012). The collected data from IDIs and FGDs were transcribed. New themes have been developed from transcribed data.

Result and Discussion

The Study's findings elaborate the perception of women farmers about their say in decision-making relating to farm and livestock activities like sowing, selection of seed crops, irrigation, weeding, harvesting, storing, selling, and buying of the crop and livestock. The detailed finding is as under.

Farm-related activities and decision making

On-farm activities and reason for involvement in the sector

Generally, farm-related activities are divided among male and female farmers. In IDIs and FGDs, Female farmers briefly explained that they participate in farm activities like sowing, weeding, picking, cutting, harvesting, gathering, and bundling of different crops along with their men as their helpers (unpaid labourers) and remain busy with about 6 to 8 hours a day in all three districts including Ghotiki District which is regarded very rigid and conservative region in Sindh. The finding is supported by the study results of Dudi & Meena (2017) who their study in Rajasthan, India, and Aziz et al. (2021) carried out in AJK, that rural women actively participate in various field operations like sowing to harvesting the crop, food processing, storage, and livestock management activities. Corresponding to previous studies, a respondent from Ghotiki District narrates his experience of empowerment as:

"I do all farm-related chores. I carry the sheaves of the harvested crop on my shoulders and gather them in the field at a place, and my husband helps me carry the sheaves. I not only harvest the rice crop but also thresh it with my hands. My husband also helps me in this activity."

Similar results are presented by Rashid et al. (2017), who carried out the study in Faisalabad Tehsil and found that most of the women participated in crop-related activities like sowing, striping of sugarcane, cotton picking, wheat harvesting, and cutting of fodder was a major activity performed by women. Another woman farmer reported:

"I don't do strong physical work, but my husband does. He prepares the land, applies the fertilizer and pesticides to the crop, irrigates and threshes the crop, stores the crop and grain, loads and unloads the crop yield for the market, etc."

When women were asked about their involvement in the agriculture sector, most of the respondents said that they were illiterate and unaware of technical know-how. The household's economic condition made them involved in the sector. They had no other option for livelihood except this. A woman farmer from Ghotki district in FGD said in the Sindhi language:

[According to the rule, farmers are responsible for labour charges of harvesting or picking the crop. If we, female household members, don't participate in the fieldwork, we will have to hire other labour. Apart from this, we also need some amount for personal use. So, to save our labour charges and increase household income, we do all these activities].

Her statement was supported by other women in the group as well. So, the study reveals that poverty was the main reason for the respondents to be engaged in the agriculture sector and livestock management. They work with their husbands in crop fields and raise livestock to support their families to meet household expenditures. Roy et al. (2017) found more or less similar findings in Bangladesh that women perform most of the agricultural activities side by side with men to generate household income.

Decision making relating to crop practices

On inquiring the question regarding crop or land selection for sowing, almost all the female farmers responded that male farmers decide the selection of the crop for sowing. A female farmer Jannat Bibi, aged between 50 to 55, at a village in district Badin, said:

"There is a shortage of irrigation water, and the land is largely saline, so we grow wheat and vegetables here. We have small patches of fields where we grow our crops. We, women and men, work there, but regarding the selection of the crop for growing, it is purely the men's business. Our men know the importance of crop according to season and the market value better than us. We, female farmers, are illiterate and don't possess such knowledge because traditionally, we are not involved in market activities"

Other women in the group also endorsed this point, and the same results were found in other districts also. But a female farmer named Shabana, aged about 38 years at district Naushahro Feroze said, "I am Matriculation pass and have some knowhow regarding this, but due to family limitation I am not allowed in such decisions." Though she is educated and has awareness about some rights, she cannot exercise her decision-making power because of living in a male-dominated society. Similar results were found in the study carried out by Abbasi and Jafri (2013) they found that the majority of the respondents had (82%) had no right to make any decision for the selection of land for crop cultivation conducted in Pakpattan, a district in Punjab. The study of Dudi & Meena (2017) also supports the finding that women did not have decision-making authority regarding farm-related activities.

Responding to this question, most of the women farmers in the study area replied that their men decide the time of sowing of the crop, irrigating, weeding, using pesticides to the crop, and harvesting the crop. In a focus group discussion, a 45 years old woman named Sakina, from a village near Tehsil Moro, district Naushahro Feroz said, "Decisions regarding such activities are taken by my husband because I possess no knowledge when to perform what activity. I just work as my husband commands me to do." This study reveals that illiteracy is one of the major reasons women's ability to make decisions. Because they live in remote areas, there is a lack of schools and unavailability of training from the agriculture department and civil institutional support. So, it is clear that some women farmers need education, proper training, and awareness regarding farm and livestock activities by the agriculture extension department. Similar answers were given by other female participants in the Focus Group discussion in all three districts. They were of the view that the decision making regarding sowing, irrigating, weeding, harvesting, and applying pesticides to the crop is the primary job of men because they have

better knowledge than women, so all of them were of the view that such activities related to crop should be done by men because they can perform well than the women. Hussain and Hussain (2011), in their study in Pulwama, Kashmir, have also found that women were mostly illiterate, so men were responsible for such field operations. But Roy et al. (2017), in their study conducted in Bangladesh, found that women perform a great deal in decision making in post-harvesting activities.

Dealing in access to market for selling and buying crop products

When women were inquired about their access to the market pertaining sale and purchase of crop yield and agricultural goods and products, all the respondents said that men do buying and selling of crops and crop products because female farmers have no access to the agricultural market due to family opposition, as cultural norms are set by the society. These findings are supported by the study conducted at Feteabhad, a district of Haryana in India, by Godara et al. (2014) and Ishaq and Memon (2016) at Lahore, Pakistan, that women farmers have no participation in the agriculture market for selling and purchasing agricultural goods, but Roy et al. (2017) in Bangladesh, found that women had sufficient decision-making authority in selling and buying of agricultural products.

When the same question was asked from a 43 years old woman at Tando Bagho, district Badin, she said:

"We have no permission to deal in the agriculture market because no woman deals here. Once, I tried to convince my husband that I should deal in the market when he (my husband) is out of the city searching for livelihood as he mostly remains. He strictly prohibited and warned me that I would face hard consequences if I did so and asked me that I should do my assigned chores. Since then, I have never talked about this. Probably, he was right. It looks odd in our society that a woman is fetching loads and selling it in the market."

From the above replies from respondents that they are restricted from dealing in the agricultural market, for selling and buying farm yields and goods, due to the cultural set up of the society. She further said, "It is also true that women also have certain other household responsibilities to carry out. Therefore, such activities should be done by men only."

Ownership of wages and property

Concerning the questions of ownership on earnings, the majority of the women farmers replied that they work with their husbands as unpaid labourers to save labour costs. A respondent named Hurmat from a village at Talhar, district Badin, said:

"Picking of the cotton crop is done about three times. The yield from the first and second time of picking is sold out, while the third time's picking is taken as wages by us, the women of the household. I use that income for my personal and children's needs like clothing and medicines or other household needs".

Another woman named Maryam, about 44 years of age, from a village, district Badin, said:

"My family is leading tooth and nail life, and due to this condition and compulsion, I work with my husband and do extra work as a labourer on the fields and get wages about 200 to 300 rupees a day. I use this income in household expenditure or give away to the husband when he is in dire need".

Another woman in a village in district Nausharo Feroz said:

"I work with my husband in fields. I help my husband in harvesting wheat and picking the cotton crop. I am not given wages in cash except a small amount to buy a few food articles. So, I sell some kilograms of cotton or wheat to fulfill my needs without informing my husband."

There are critical conditions regarding land ownership rights in Pakistan for women, especially after divorce or death of the husbands, because those women live authoritative, self-sufficient, and comfortable life who have independent access to land than those who are dependent on their husband's family (Rehman et al., 2019). In this regard, a woman named Sikiladhi, aged 46 years, from a village, district Ghotki said:

"Here in our village, women don't get a share from their father's property, but in rare cases, they get, while they are mostly denied from this right because it is considered that women's property is transferred to her husband. Therefore, it had better she should not take a share from the property. But I think a woman should take her share. By this, she will be independent. My father did not have any property, my mother owned five acres of land from her parents' property. She supported my father during his whole life. When my father died, my mother fulfilled household expenditures from it. We are four sisters; our mother has given each of us one acre of the land, I work with my husband, but this small property (one acre of the land) has become a support to me in meeting household expenditures. I think if a woman owns some property, she will not feel any dependency."

But a female farmer from district Naushahro Feroz said:

"Who won't want that she should not have her own income and property? Women want their share from the property, but they are not given their due share. Whatever small property my parents had, I demanded my share from that, but I was denied and told that the dowry given to me was my share. I am literate; I know Islam has given women the right of inheritance, so they must be given their fair share. But due to tradition, men don't give such rights to women. I also don't own any property."

From study findings, it is obvious that women remain busy in household and farm-related activities for the whole day. In return, they are provided food, shelter, clothing, and other things of use that they need. The study revealed that few women farmers get some amount from the income earned from the crop. They save that amount for utilizing in household expenditures whenever the head of the family needs it. It was also found that women are given low labour charges compared with men. Similar results were found by Zaheer et al., (2014). They found that women are paid lower wages in spite of rendering more work than men, and hard work is invisible. The majority of the women responded that they neither possess any kind of property nor they can buy due to the financial condition of the family. If they could have bought some property, it would have been transferred to their men. It is due to the reason that there is no such tradition that women may own any property. This study also revealed that the women farmer who inherited one or two acres of the land feel secure themselves compared to the female farmers who don't possess any land. Similarly, Muhammad et al., (2018), in their study, in Bangladesh, and Afzal et al. (2020), have also found that rural women have very limited access to land or property ownership in Pakistan. Even in some cases, they inherit the land, but being illiterate, they cannot operate it, and the land is transferred to their male family members.

Paul and Rani (2017) have also found in their study that the main assets like land and livestock are owned by men in India. Likewise, Abbasi and Jafri (2013) conducted a study in Pakpattan, Punjab. They also found that the majority of the rural women did not get any of the share generated from crop yield. Only male family members had ownership over family assets like land and house, and even they had no right to sell any of the assets. Brohi and Kakepoto (2013) found that rural women don't have property ownership or inheritance rights in Sindh. But Akter et al. (2017) found in the study that women are unaware of their property ownership rights in Indonesia, while in all study areas i. e. in Thailand, Myanmar, Philippines, and Indonesia, the decisions regarding the sale and purchase of main family assets and large expenses are taken jointly.

Access to extension services/training etc.

Relating to the question of access to extension services or training, most of the female framers from these districts said that they had not been provided any training by the government or any NGO regarding crop and livestock management. These findings are supported by the study results of Safdar and Pervaiz (2020). They found that limited extension training was arranged for women while women had limited access to these training due to cultural norms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. But a female farmer at village Punhal Khan Siyal, district Ghotki said:

[I have received training from an NGO regarding sowing vegetables, rearing livestock, and protecting them from diseases. Training were also arranged to save ourselves from flooding (training on Disaster Risk Reduction, DRR) in the whole UC by the same NGO. But, the government has neither helped us nor arranged any training, and not even any of the extension workers have ever visited to train the farmers.]

The findings are supported by Awan et al. (2021) in their study in Bahawalpur, Pakistan. Their study revealed that women farmers had very poor access to training and veterinary services.

Participation in livestock management and decision making

In the study area, buffaloes, cows, and goats are mostly reared, and women have a great contribution in performing livestock activities. Most of the female farmers perform numerous livestock management activities like rearing, taking care, grazing or feeding, watering, and milking the domestic animals. They also participate in making and cleaning animal sheds with their men. In some cases, men fetch the fodder from the field, while women cut the fodder at home to feed the animals. Similar results were found by Khan et al. (2020) in district Chiniot, Pakistan, and Andaleeb et al. (2017) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, that the women perform numerous livestock management chores in rural areas of the country. In this regard, a woman said:

[Certainly, I perform livestock management activities, my husband helps me in making sheds, cutting of the grass, while I perform activities like feeding, milking and taking care of animals, cleaning animal sheds, dug collecting, etc. so other women do the same here in our village.]

Due to poverty, a majority of the women rear livestock to generate household income to fulfill daily household needs. This result is supported by the findings of Riasat et al., 2014 and Ali (2016), who found that poverty was the main reason which made women rear livestock to meet the needs of the family in district Faisalabad, Punjab, and district Charsadda, KPK respectively. While few rear livestock to meet the personal and additional needs of the household. A few women just help their husbands in rearing the livestock. As a woman from village Taj Muhammad Ruk, district Ghotki, said:

"I sell milk in my village and take the income, but I use that amount in small needs of my children." She further said, "A few months ago, I sold two calves and used the amount in my daughter's marriage."

Almost all the activities relating to livestock management are carried out by women. But, since women have no access to the market because of cultural norms, the selling and buying of livestock and its by-products is done by men. But, they neither can take decisions

independently nor take income earned from it. However, in a focus group discussion at Naushahro Feroz, participants said, "If there had been such tradition of women participation in the market, we would have done well also because we are mostly associated with livestock." A woman in the group said, "Despite the strict limitations, I sometimes deal in selling goats with an animal buyer who visits in our village in case the male family member is out of the house or village". So, it was revealed that women were considerably empowered in selling and buying the cattle and its by-products except for any access to the market because of cultural barriers. These findings are supported by Naz et al. (2020) study in Mohmand Agency, KPK, and Bhanotra et al. (2015) in Jammu & Kashmir, India. They found that due to male dominancy and traditional beliefs, women had limited decision-making power in the sale and purchase of livestock.

When women farmers were enquired about ownership over income earned from livestock and its by-products, most of the women respondents said that they sell livestock by-products like milk, ghee, and butter locally and in the market daily, and their male members help them in these activities. They said that they take income from livestock by-products, and it is mostly utilized in daily household expenditure and personal needs as well. They further informed that, in case of marriage of their son or daughter, construction of the house, or some serious illness or situation, they sell out their livestock and use money in it. Most of the respondents said that they have right over the income earned from livestock or its by-products. Their males do not take it from them forcibly. They use that income in household needs of their own will. In this regard, a woman named Shaharbano, from a village in taluka Tando Bagho, district Badin, said:

"Livestock is my property because I have bought it from my savings. I also sell milk and ghee, so I take the whole amount. My husband doesn't take this income; he helps me in buying and selling the cattle, milk, or ghee because due to tradition, we females are not allowed to deal in the market."

Only one woman named Shabana from district Naushahro Feroz said:

"I don't have right over income earned from livestock. I am just provided milk for my children while I performed all livestock activities, I had purchased a few goats from my savings, but when I sold them, the income was taken away by my father-in-law. Since then, I have never thought of keeping cattle."

Thus, it was again revealed that women farmers were considerably empowered to have ownership and authority over the income gained from livestock and its by-products and had the right to use such earnings on their own choice. The study findings were supported by the Naz et al. (2020) in Muhmand Agency, Pakistan, and Godara et al. (2014) in India. They found that women have significant decision-making power regarding the sale and purchase of livestock, its by-products, and income.

Conclusion

It is concluded from the study that most of the women farmers from the study area were illiterate, and the reason behind their illiteracy was the lack of schools (especially girls' schools) in the village the cultural norms of the society. Illiteracy and economic conditions of the household compelled women to get engaged in agricultural and livestock activities, and a majority of the respondents (women farmers) were unpaid labourers and helped their husbands to save labour costs and generate income for which they are provided basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing. While they were not forced labour at all, they worked due to the economic conditions of their household and their sense of responsibility to support their men in household expenditures. The study also reveals that women participate in all field operations and livestock management except for a few strong physical activities, which are completely men's jobs. Their contribution to crop and livestock decision-making was observed at a very minimum level. The majority of the woman farmers had zero decision-making authority in the activities like selection and sowing of the crop, irrigating, weeding, using pesticide and fertilizers, harvesting the crop, dealing in agro-market for selling and buying crop yield, agricultural products, and livestock and its by-products. Besides this, women farmers did not have property ownership rights. But, decision-making was largely observed in the head of rearing, sale and purchase of livestock and its by-products, ownership on income earned from livestock and its by-products. It was also concluded women were empowered in some heads due to cultural values. Their ownership had nothing to do with empowerment.

Apart from this, they (woman farmers) have not been provided any training from Agriculture Extension Department. Neither female extension worker was there to train women farmers, nor did the male extension worker pay any visit in this regard. Still, a few pieces of training were arranged by an NGO, Sindh Rural Support Program (SRSO), in some UCs of district Ghotiki regarding vegetable farming, taking care of domestic animals, and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

Education, job opportunities, professional training, property-owning rights are fundamentals to make women economically empowered therefore, the study suggests that women may be provided their the rights mentioned above to grow and to be productive for the society and the country, which is essential for the development of the country and betterment of their household and future generations.

In this study, the perception of married women farmers regarding their decision-making has been focused. Further studies can be carried out regarding the contribution of the male farmers and their adult children who work with them, the effectiveness of the earnings of women farmers for their household, harassment of women farmers at their workplace, and the reasons behind their low wages, and how can they get equal rights. The limitation of the study is that the qualitative research approach is used to conduct the study, so it cannot be generalized.

Implications

Women empowerment has been the key concern of the UN. So, it aims to root out all inequalities and discrimination towards women and improve the life chances of the women through Sustainable Development Goals. The study highlights the issues of women farmers concerning their empowerment in Ghotki, Naushahro Feroz, and the Badin district of Sindh. So this study will help policymakers and other organizations of civil society to provide women their basic legal and equal rights with men as they can grow as a human.

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