Socio-Economic Status of Rural Working Women in Punjab

Executive Summary

Introduction

Employment is an outcome of growth and is also a driver of growth. This relationship is not linear but derives from a host of factors that include the societies' socio-economic and demographic landscape. The participation of women in the workforce has a positive impact on the household's income.Also, as women participation increases, the social constraints weaken, leading to improved social status for women.

However, social and other barriers limit the participation of women in the workforce. The limitations are more for women in rural areas.For the State of Punjab, women in rural areas constitute around 47 per cent of the total population. The literacy rate for women in rural areas is 65.8 percent compared to 79.2 per cent of the urban counterparts. As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2018-19, the Female Worker Participation Rate (FWPR) of Punjab is 17.3, which is less than the national average of 23.3. The FWPR for the rural female is 17.3.

The rural workforce comprises 42.20 percent of the female workforce. The low level of participationof women in the labour force indicatesa need to pay special attention to improve the situation of women in the State.

Beyond analyzing labour force participation, it is critical to look at other aspects of women participation in the workforce, particularly in rural areas. Women participation in the labour force has been changing. There have been several social trends,one being withdrawal from the labour force after the household has reached a certain economic threshold. A socio-economic study of working women can throw much light on the various other factors that need to be considered for the development of society. It can bring out the areas where the governments can intervene

and further the development agenda, thereby benefiting the women and paving for a gender-sensitive society.

For this, the 'Punjab State Farmers' and Farm Workers' (PSFC) has taken up the present study intending toexamine the socio-economic condition of the rural working women in the State.

Methodology

The study is based on survey conducted in 74 villages spread across the different district of Punjab. Each village was selected from a circle comprising of two contiguous blocks in the state.In each village 20 working women were selected randomly from the list of working women in the village. Thus the study is based on 1480 rural working women in the state.

All sample is divided into nine broad categories as per the sector in which they are employed.These sectors correspond to the National Industrial Classification of various economic activities; Agricultural Wage Labour, Cultivation/Dairying/Livestock, Manufacturing, Construction,Retail Trade,Education, Health/Social Work Activities,Other Services and Domestic Services.

The major findings of the present study may be summarized here as follows:

A) Socio-Demographic Profile

- The largest age group amongst the respondent working women is 30-44 years. The older age group (above 60 years of age)constitutes only 7.30 per cent of the respondents.
- The younger age group, 15-29 years, has more representation in the sectors of "Other Services", "Education", and "Construction".
- It has been observed that around 27 per cent of respondents are illiterate and are engaged in the sectors of "Agriculture", "Construction", and "Domestic Services".
- A majority of the rural working women, 57 per cent, are from scheduled castes

- The majority of the rural working women households are Nuclear families (63.72 per cent), and most of the households are headed by males.
- The average family size is 4.78.
- Almost all the rural working women households own house, of which three fourth have separate kitchens and more than half have access to tap water.

B) Value and Composition of Productive Assets of Rural Working Women Households

- The value of assets owned by rural working women households varies widely across the employment sector.
- The value of assets with the respondent from 'Agricultural Wage Labourer', 'Construction' workers and 'Domestic Services', sector is Rs. 0.95 lakh, Rs.0.53 lakh and Rs. 0.26 lakh, respectively. The respondents working in the 'Cultivation/Dairying/Livestock' sector have the highest average value of assets, Rs. 30 lakh, followed by respondents working in the 'Health/Social Work' and 'Education' sector, having average assets worth Rs. 27.28 lakh and Rs. 25.20 lakh, respectively.
- The value of land constitutes 89.93 per cent of the total value of assets held by 19.86 per cent of the respondents who own land.
- The most owned physical productive assets were bicycle and two-wheelers owned by 60.54 per cent and 65.41 per cent of respondents., respectively. 50 per cent and 64.29 per cent of the respondents, respectively employed in the 'construction' sector, have a bicycle and two-wheelers
- Most of the livestock assets are owned by the respondent households engaged in the 'Agriculture Sector'. Further, in this sector, most livestock assets are owned by those working in the 'Cultivation/Dairying/Livestock' sector.

C) Levels and Composition of Household Income and the Contribution of Working Women

- The average annual income of the sample households is Rs.2,45,346. The average household income of respondents working in the 'Agriculture Wage' sector and the 'Domestic Services' sector is 59.73 per cent and 61.88 per cent, respectively,of sample average.For the respondents employed with the 'Education' and 'Health' sector, the annual household income is 146 per cent and 133 per cent, respectively, of the average sample household income.

- Wages and salaries form the highest proportion of total household income.Wages and salaries form a majority of the household income for working women engaged in the sectors of 'Construction' sector (99.67 per cent), 'Agriculture wage' (81.97 per cent) and 'Domestic Services' sectors (87.15 per cent).

- The respondent employed in the 'Retail' sector has the highest contribution from non-farm income to the total household income

- The average annual per capita income of the sample households of the working women in rural Punjab is Rs. 51345. The respondents engaged in the 'Health/Social Work' sector earn Rs.74397 per annum, the highest among the various categories. On the other hand, the respondents engaged in the 'Construction' sector, the 'Domestic Services' and the 'Agricultural Wage Labour' sector has per capita income below the average per capita income of the sample, Rs. 40897, Rs. 34256 and Rs. 31604, respectively.

- The respondent rural working women contribute on average 25 per cent of the total household income.

- MGNREGS contribution to the total annual income of rural working women is Rs. 2780 per annum, which constitutes 4.59 per cent of their total income.

- The contribution of income from MGNREGS in the total income of working women is highest (18.25 per cent) for those working in the 'Agricultural Wage Labour' sector and lowest (0.53 per cent) for those working in the 'Education'sector.

- It is observed that the women working in the 'Agricultural Wage Labour' sector would like to work for more days in a year, but work is not available to them.

- The average wage per day of the respondents, when they are working, is Rs. 213, but for those working in the 'Domestic Services' sector, it is Rs.128.

D)   Consumption Patterns of Sample Women Households

- The average Annual Households Consumption Expenditure (ACHE) is observed to be Rs.2,02,321. It is highest for respondents engaged in the 'Education' sector (Rs. 272108). The ACHE of respondent households of the 'Cultivation/dairy' sector and the 'Health' and the 'Retail' sector is higher than the sample average. On the other hand, the least AHCE is for households of the 'Agricultural wage labour' sector and the 'Construction' sector, which is 70 per cent and 71.8 per cent, respectively of the sample average.

- Food constitutes 31.33 per cent of the ACHE for rural working women households. Expenditure on food constitutes a lower proportion of total expenditure for households whose ACHE is higher than or near the average ACHE of the sample. As such, the rural women workers who are engaged in 'Construction' and 'Agriculture wage labour', having lower ACHE, spend 43.5 per cent and 38 per cent on food.

- The magnitude of variation between the highest and the lowest per capita expenditure by any category of workers on food items is 34 per cent. In the case of non-food items, it is 47 per cent,for consumer durables, 126 per cent (the highest being Rs. 13082 per capita and the lowest Rs. 5768 per capita). The gap is 5.75 times between the highest and lowest per capita expenditure for expenditure category 'services'.

- Within the 'food' items, the most significant item of expenditure is milk and milk products. Among the non-food items, the highest expense is on fuel and light, followed by LPG refills. In the category

of 'consumer durables', the single most important item accounting for nearly 75 per cent of the total expenditure on consumer durables is expenditure on the house construction, addition or repair. Finally, in the category of services, the two most important expenditure items are education and health & medicine.

- A deficit household has been defined as a household where the annual household consumption expenditure is more than the household's annual income. A household can become a deficit household either because income is less for whatever reasons or because the household may have incurred excessive expenditure on specific items or maybe both.

- One-third of household in the sample are deficit. The highest proportion of deficit household is in the 'Agriculture Wage Labour' sector (41.14 per cent) followed by 'Cultivation/Dairying/Livestock sector (35.71 per cent) and 'Domestic Services' sector (34.23 per cent).

- There is a relatively greater preponderance of respondents from SC category in the deficit households. While the proportion of SC/ST households in the entire sample is 57.5 per cent, nearly 60 per cent of these are deficit households.

- 18 per cent of female-headed households are in the deficit category.

- There is a greater incidence of illness prevailing in the deficit category. Consequently, the women worker of this category works for fewer days because they have to attend to the sick members. These households, on average, spend at least 71 per cent more on medicines compared to an average household of the whole sample

E) Extent of Poverty and Indebtedness among sample Women Households

- The extent of poverty in the working rural women was measured using three different criteria. As per the Tendulkar criterion, 25.34 per cent of the surveyed HHs are below the poverty line, as per the Rangarajan poverty line criterion 40.54 per cent and as per the

World Bank criterion, 38.99 per cent of the HHs are below the poverty line. The occupational categories of workers more prone to poverty are 'Agriculture Wage Labour', 'Construction' workers and 'Domestic Services'. On the other hand, those involved in 'Retail Trade', 'Health and Social Work' and 'Cultivator/Dairying/Livestock' have the lowest incidence of poverty.

- 48.38 per cent of the respondent households have debt, with the average debt per indebted households ofRs. 1,51,995/-.

- 64.28 per cent of the respondents engaged in the g 'Construction' sector, 54.95 per cent engaged in the 'Domestic Services' sector (54.95 per cent), 52.57 per cent from 'Agricultural Wage Labour' and 53.06 per cent from 'Cultivation/Dairying/Livestock' are indebted.

- Three relatively poor categories, i.e. 'Construction' workers, 'Agriculture Wage Labour' and 'Domestic Services', have the least amount of debt per indebted household. The amount of debt is Rs. 69,000, Rs. 71,041 and Rs. 73,295 for these three categories, respectively.

- About 55 per cent of the debt comes from institutional.

- All the respondents engaged in the 'Construction Sector' avail loan from non-institutional sources. The share of institutional loans is 18.03 per cent, and 19.50 per cent, respectively, for the households engaged the the 'Domestic Services' and the 'Agricultural labour' sector.

- The rate of interest of loan from institutional sources is 9.25 per cent per annum. In contrast, the weighted average interest rate for loans from non-institutional sources is 13.55 per cent per annum.

- It has been observed that relatively asset poor households depend heavily on non-institutional soirces for loans. Since they lack creditworthiness, their loans from non-institutional sources are much smaller in size.The households belonging to the respondents working the 'Construction', 'Agriculture Wage Labour' and 'Domestic

Services' sector avail loan at an interest rate of 20.14 per cent, 15.57 per cent and 15.55 per cent per annum, respectively

- Nearly 70 per cent of the total debt incurred by rural women worker households is for productive purposes. Another about 8 per cent is for household consumption.

- The relationship between debt and expenditure on 'health and medical aids' is positive and statistically significant. This indicates that health services are inadequate.

F)   Level of Satisfaction, Constraints and State Support

- Nearly 67 per cent of the respondents expected financial assistance from the Government to strengthen and extend their economic activities. Demand for financial aid was relatively higher from the women workers engaged in 'Manufacturing', 'Retail Trade', 'Cultivation/Dairying/Livestock' and 'Other services' sectors.

- The awareness level of various social programmes being implemented in rural areas is high but accruing of benefits varies across the employement sectors of rura women.Nearly three-fourths of the respondent women workers benefited from the government schemes during the last year.80 per cent of the respondents benefitted from the Annpurna/Atta Dal scheme

- 91.82 per cent of the respondents are aware of Aganwari, and of these, 64.39 per cent have availed the benefits.

- The respondents are least aware about the Gram Sabha (39 per cent). None of the respondents working in the 'Construction sector' have benefitted from the Gram Sabha.

Policy Implications

Based on the major findings of the present study, the policy implications may be stated as under-

- The Government's rural housing programme should cover all the needy and poor people in its ambit. Even otherwise, housing construction and repair is a labour-intensive activity. It will generate employment both directly (construction workers, masons, carpenters, plumbers, electricians

etc.) and indirectly (by raising the demand for building material, cement, wood, steel etc.)

- Government should make it mandatory that while leasing out village common land, the priority should go to landless women engaged in small scale dairying individually or jointly through women producer's associations. This can go a long way in promoting female participation in gainful employment, nutritional security and poverty reduction among rural working women households.

- It is suggested that Micro Finance institutions should be promoted in rural Punjab on the lines of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. Since the poor do not generally have collateral to offer to the financial institutions for taking loan, self-help groups can be created in rural areas such as SEWA in Gujarat. Financial institutions can then lend money to self help- groups or extend loan to individuals on the basis of group guarantees.

- Since these poor families do not have enough space at home, these functions are often performed in rented accommodation which adds to the cost. If Government construct and maintain community halls in the villages, the expenditures on marriages and other social ceremonies can be brought down substantially.

- The policy package should include among others, credit, entrepreneurship development program, skills training and assistance in marketing. Such an approach can lift poor out of poverty and empower women.

- Efforts should also be made to utilize the skills and capabilities of successful women farmers and entrepreneurs as last mile extension workers and trainers in order to extend extension services to female farmers, dairy farmers and potential female entrepreneurs in rural areas.

- To make more work available and hence employment round the year for rural working women in 'Agricultural wage labour' & 'Construction sector' MGNEREGA should be further strengthen.

- To further improve the access of various schemes/ facilities being provided by the state government to the rural poor, it should be mandated that Gram Sabha are held regularly and proceeding video

recorded. This would help in making the system transparent & beneficiaries would be able to know about the various welfare works.

- Strengthen the public health care and education facilities. Better and accessible health care facilities will ease the burden of illness among the rural working women households. Also provide free medicines to rural households which are below poverty line.

- Assist poor households depend upon money lender for their credit needs. The money lender registration should be made compulsory as enacted by the "The Punjab Registration of Money Lender Licence Act 1938''.

- An audit of the rural and women development programme being implemented by the state should be done in which stakeholders and beneficiaries are involved.