

# Empowering the Woman Farmer

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## Empowering the Woman Farmer: Towards Inclusive Agricultural Growth

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### Context

In a landmark decision, the **United Nations General Assembly**, with support from over **100 countries**, has declared **2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer**. This move brings global attention to the **critical yet under-recognised role of women in agriculture**, especially in developing countries like India.

This recognition also brings into focus the **systemic challenges** faced by women farmers and the **innovative solutions** emerging to address them, particularly through recent **government policies and collaborative initiatives in India**.

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### Central Role of Women in Agriculture

- Women are essential contributors to global food production, especially in developing countries.
- They contribute to **60% to 80%** of food production in developing nations.
- In **South Asia**, women form **39%** of the agricultural workforce.
- In **India**, nearly **80% of economically active women** are engaged in agriculture.

Despite this, their contributions are **undervalued and largely invisible in policy and planning**.

- Only **14% of landowners** in India are women.
- According to the **National Family Health Survey (NFHS)**, just **8.3%** of women own land.

This impacts:

- Access to **institutional credit**
  - Use of **modern tools and technologies**
  - **Productivity**, income, and autonomy in agriculture
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## Government Support and Policy Measures

Recognising these disparities, the Government of India has launched several initiatives:

- **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)**: Focuses on skill-building and access to productive resources.
- **Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanisation**: Offers **subsidies on farm machinery** to reduce drudgery.
- Under the **National Food Security Mission**, **30% of the total budget** is allocated for women farmers across States and Union Territories.

These schemes aim to:

- Reduce the **gender gap** in agriculture
- Promote **sustainable farming practices**
- Ensure **access to credit, technology, and inputs**

However, the impact depends on:

- **Effective implementation**
- **Geographical reach**
- Creation of **supportive local ecosystems**

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## Gendered Impact of Climate Change

Climate change disproportionately affects women farmers due to pre-existing gender roles and limited access to resources.

- Women face heightened risks due to **erratic weather**, crop failure, and limited coping capacity.
- Domestic responsibilities further reduce their time and flexibility to adapt.

A promising intervention is the **ENACT project (Enhancing Climate Adaptation of Vulnerable Communities)**:

- Implemented by the **World Food Programme (WFP)** with support from the **Government of Assam** and **Norwegian government**
- Focuses on **flood-prone regions** of Assam
- Promotes **climate-resilient crop varieties** and **livelihood diversification**
- Over **300 women farmers** receive **weekly weather and agriculture advisories** through mobile phones
- Establishes **Climate Adaptation Information Centres** for video conferencing and community meetings

This approach integrates **technology, capacity building, and local engagement**.

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## Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration and Scalable Solutions

ENACT is an example of effective multi-stakeholder cooperation involving:

- State departments
- Meteorological agencies
- Agricultural universities

- Rural livelihood missions

It promotes:

- **Smart seed production systems**
- **Market linkages**
- Use of **nutrient-rich local crops**

The project demonstrates that when equipped with the **right tools, information, and networks**, women farmers can lead **climate adaptation at the grassroots level**.

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## **Need for Gender-Sensitive Agricultural Reforms**

Despite some progress, deeper reforms are needed to achieve **gender equity in agriculture**.

Policy frameworks must be:

- **Data-driven** and based on **sex-disaggregated data**
- Designed to address **diverse needs of women farmers**

Priority areas include:

- Designing **tools and technologies** suited to women's needs
  - Expanding access to **credit, savings, and insurance**
  - Supporting **women-led agri-value chains**
  - Strengthening **self-help groups** and promoting **women's leadership**
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## **Conclusion**

The declaration of **2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer** is a timely opportunity to make women central to agricultural discourse and development.

Women farmers are not just contributors to food production but are **key agents of sustainability, resilience, and rural transformation**.

Empowering them through targeted interventions and addressing structural barriers is essential for building a **more inclusive, secure, and sustainable agricultural future**.



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