Addressing gender disparity

What is the issue?

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Despite the significant participation of women in agriculture and allied activities, gender disparity manifests in various ways.

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How far is women's participation?

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- Women comprise around 30% of the total cultivators and 40% of agricultural labour (2011 Census).
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- In as many as 23 of the 29 states, women’s share in the total workforce in agriculture, forestry and fisheries is over 50%.
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- In states such as Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, this share exceeds 70 per cent.
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- Women are seen to be engaged in all kinds of jobs ranging from crop sowing to irrigation, fertiliser application, weed removal and crop harvesting.
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- They are also actively engaged in allied activities including livestock rearing, fodder collection, beekeeping, mushroom cultivation, poultry, etc.
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- Typically, their contribution to agriculture is more in hilly regions where agriculture relies heavily on females, than in the plains.
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- Gender disparity is less in states such as Nagaland, Manipur and Himachal Pradesh.
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- On the other hand, states such as Punjab, Haryana, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha have relatively high gender work participation disparity.
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What are the concerns?

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- Despite this significant participation, women are grossly discriminated against in several respects.
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- They are invariably paid less than the male workers; in most cases nearly 60 per cent of what men are paid.
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- They lack ownership of property, the land being rarely in their names.
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- Consequently, they have little access to cheaper credit and other agriculture-related sops, which are usually linked to land ownership.
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- They have little say in decision-making. They are not often the members of cooperative societies.
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- A relatively larger proportion of non-property-owning females face psychological and physical abuse, than those who own land or other property.
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What are the initiatives in this regard?

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- **Information -** Bhubaneswar-based Central Institute of Women in Agriculture (CIWA) has developed a "General Knowledge System Portal".
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- The portal offers to provide all the information on gender-friendly technologies, statistics, publications and official schemes related to farm women.
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- This could be swiftly operationalised to function as a single-window knowledge source on gender-related matters for policymakers, researchers, extension workers, etc.
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- **Training** - The country's 680 Krishi Vigyan Kendras (agricultural science centres) are training women in various income-generating pursuits.
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- The centres promoted different women-oriented technologies in their working fields.

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- Women are trained in typical agri-rural fields as well as in rural handicrafts, tailoring and stitching, etc
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- **Measures** - The agriculture ministry has recently taken many gender-sensitive, positive steps to promote the welfare of farm women.
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- It has begun to encourage leasing of agricultural and domestic land in joint names.
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- Kisan Credit Cards are being issued to women to enable them to access cheap bank credit.
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- Women are being motivated to form self-help groups to deal with microfinance.
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- Most importantly, 30 per cent of funds are being set apart for women under the various schemes run by the ministry.
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- These efforts could be more targeted, directly or indirectly, at economic empowerment of women, ensuring gender parity.
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Source: Business Standard

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