Employability of Women in Agriculture

Mains: GS III - *Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*

Why in news?

Even though more women are getting involved in the agriculture sector, which is the largest employer of women, about half of them work without pay.

What is the Status of Agriculture sector in India?

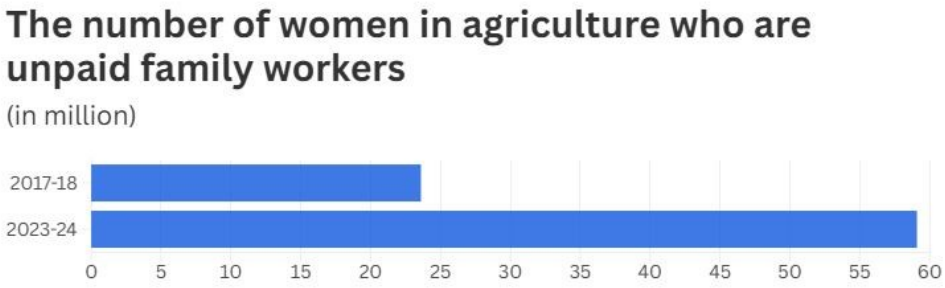
- **Global leadership –** India is a global leader in agriculture, ranking as a top producer of milk, pulses, spices, fruits, vegetables, and sugarcane.
- It also has the world's largest area under wheat, rice, and cotton.
- **Robust growth –** In 2025, India's agricultural sector is showing strong growth, marked by a global-record *3.7% growth* in Q1, robust export performance, and increased foodgrain production.
- **Increased production –** Foodgrain production saw a strong rise, growing to an estimated 347.44 million tonnes in 2024–25.
- **Strong exports –** Agricultural exports continued to surge, with exports in the first quarter of 2025-26 *rising by 5.8%* year-on-year.
- **Employment –** Women's employment in agriculture surged by 135%, and they now account for over *42% of the sector's workforce*.
- According to Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2024*, 2 out of every 3 working women are now in agriculture.*

  *As per the **2011 Census**, around 80% of rural women are engaged in agriculture, with 3.6 crore women farmers and 6.15 crore women agricultural labourers.*

What challenges do women encounter in the agriculture sector?

- **Lack of recognition –** Women are not officially recognised as farmers as opposed to their male counterpart.

- **Fluctuating role of women –** With growing rural to urban migration by men due to climate stress, shrinking farm returns, and industrial employment, *women are stepping in to manage farms, livestock, and household food systems*.
- **Diverse roles –** There is increasing number of women in multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs, labourers and managers of allied agricultural activities such as dairy, horticulture, and forestry.
- **Feminization of agriculture –** The rise in women's participation in the agricultural labor force is referred to as the feminization of agriculture.
- **Land holdings –** Women own only 13-14% of land holdings, and earn 20-30% less than men for equivalent work.
- **Unpaid family works –** Despite women's growing presence on farms, their contributions remain systematically unremunerative.
- Nearly half of the women in agriculture are unpaid family workers, with their *numbers jumping 2.5 times* from 23.6 million to 59.1 million in just 8 years (Today, 1 in 3 working women in India is unpaid).
- States like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, more than 80% of women workers are in agriculture, and over half of them receive no wages.



- **Reinforcing inequities –** Feminisation of agriculture reinforced inequities rather than enabling women's economic empowerment.
- Women's greater participation has not translated into higher income for the economy, as agriculture's share of the national GVA fell from 15.3% in 2017-18 to 14.4% in 2024-25.
- **Lack of Resources –** Women often lack equal access to resources, training, technology, and financial support compared to men.
- **Gender wage gap –** Women agricultural laborers are routinely paid less than men for the same work.
- **Structural barriers –** Such as low digital literacy, language gaps, and limited access to affordable devices.

What are some measures to enhance women's employment in

agriculture?

- **Collective action –** Tackling these challenges requires collective action by all ecosystem actors — government, private sector, NGOs, self-help groups, and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs).

United Nations General Assembly – Declared 2026 as the ***International Year of the Woman Farmer****.*

- **Shift in trend –** Global trade trends are opening new windows for women's economic inclusion in agriculture.
- It will enable women to move from unpaid, low-value tasks into higher-margin segments like processing, packaging, branding, and exporting.
- **Free Trade Agreement (FTA) –** If FTA-embedded provisions for women, such as training, credit access, and market linkages, are catalysed, it could enable women's transition from farm labourers to income-generating entrepreneurs.

The ***India-U.K. Free Trade Agreement (FTA)*** *will boost Indian agricultural exports by 20% within three years, granting duty-free access to over 95% of agricultural and processed food products.*

- **Export-led opportunities –** With the rising global demand for organic products and superfoods, India's value chains are poised for expansion — sectors where women are already strongly represented.
- **Shift to premium products –** Geographical Indications, branding initiatives, and support for meeting export standards can help women producers shift from subsistence farming toward premium, value-added product markets.
- **Digital innovations –** It can play a decisive role in bridging the gap and helps to formalise women's labour while expanding access to schemes, credit, and fair pricing..
    - **For examples** – e-NAM, mobile-based services, voice-assisted applications, and precision agriculture tools.
- **AI-enabled solutions –** BHASHINI platform and Microsoft–AI4Bharat's Jugalbandi are extending multilingual, voice-first access to government services.
- L&T Finance's Digital Sakhi programme has trained rural women in digital and financial literacy across seven States.

- **State level initiatives –** Odisha's Swayam Sampurna FPOs, Jhalawari Mahila Kisan Producer Company in Rajasthan, training programs for women farmers in Assam's tea sector, etc are help in leverage the position women farmers at the forefront of export competitiveness.

What lies ahead?

- To transform women's role in agriculture, land and labour reforms are equally vital.
- Policies must recognise women as independent farmers by promoting joint or individual land ownership, which in turn strengthens their eligibility for credit, insurance, and institutional support.

Reference

1. The Hindu | More women employed in agriculture, but remains unpaid
2. India Brand Equity Foundation | Agriculture and allied sector in India

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering