Women side of the agricultural crisis

What is the issue?

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In the discussions regarding the distress of the farmers, there is a silence about the role of 80-100 million women farmers or agricultural labours.

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What was the predicament of women since independence?

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- The first ever (1974) national report on the State of India's women, Towards Equality - revealed, that the rural agricultural sector was the biggest employer in India.
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- However, unlike male farmers and cultivators, their female counterparts remained doubly burdened during their peak productive period with their reproductive role seen as fundamental to their gender while the duties it entailed were socially created.
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- Shram Shakti (the first government report on India's women workers in the unorganised sector) reconfirmed the fact that even as women laboured in fields, they continued to have and rear children almost single-handedly.
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- The farm sector, even in 1989, employed the largest number of women workers both as cultivators and daily-wage labourers. But women remained outside the formal definition of "worker" in the census reports.
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What is the current scenario?

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- The latest census figures list only 32.8 per cent women formally as primary workers in the agricultural sector, in contrast to 81.1 per cent men.
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- But the undeniable fact remains that India’s agricultural industry, cannot survive without their labour.
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- From preparing the land, selecting seeds, preparing and sowing to transplanting the seedlings, applying manure/fertilisers/pesticides and then harvesting, winnowing and threshing, women work harder and longer than male farmers.
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What other areas do women handle?

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- Maintaining the ancillary branches, like animal husbandry, fisheries and vegetable cultivation, depends almost solely on women.
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- Apart from running the family, taking care of children and the elderly.
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Why is there a silence from their part as farmers/ agri-labours?

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- The primary reason is that, they are usually not listed as primary earners and owners of land assets within their families.
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- So getting loans, participating in mandi panchayats, assessing and deciding the crop patterns, liaising with the district officials, bank managers and political representatives and bargaining for MSPs, loans and subsidies remain male activities.
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What are the further hurdles?

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- A study says, educated young women do not wish to work in farms. They can now be teachers, nurses, Asha workers.
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- But the same study also reveals that with so many well-educated men also competing for these white collar jobs, rural girls in urban homes, armed with a mere school certificate cannot find jobs.
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Source: The Indian Express

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