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Role of women gram panchayat members in agricultural development in Samastipur district of Bihar

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Abstract

This research investigates the role performance of women Gram Panchayat members in agricultural development within Samastipur district of Bihar, noted for its exemplary work compared to neighboring districts. The study, conducted through purposive and random sampling and focused on two blocks; Hasanpur and Pusa. A total of 120 respondents, including one Gram Pradhan and five ward members from each of the selected villages, were surveyed using a pre structured interview schedule in January and February 2024. Descriptive research design was employed to analyze data using arithmetic mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage, minimum, and maximum values. The study finds that most respondents are middle-aged, graduate-educated, and engaged in farming combined with business or service, with moderate land holding, income, and family size. Their information sources, mass media exposure, scientific orientation, risk orientation, and economic motivation were found medium levels. Findings reveal that 55.83% of women Gram Panchayat members exhibit medium-level performance in agricultural development activities, indicating substantial engagement but with room for improvement. About 28.34% show low performance levels, highlighting existing challenges, while 15.83% demonstrate high performance, reflecting significant contributions to local development. These members play a crucial role in equitable distribution of agricultural inputs, facilitating loans, enhancing storage facilities, and generating employment through MGNREGA. They also contribute to infrastructure development and farmer training. Despite their impactful contributions, there is a need for increased support and empowerment to address performance disparities and enhance their effectiveness in local governance. Future policies should aim to strengthen their capacities and optimize their role in driving positive agricultural development.

Keywords: Gram panchayat, agricultural development etc

Introduction

The empowerment of women and their active participation in governance are pivotal to achieving sustainable development and social equity. In India, the Gram Panchayat system represents a fundamental component of grassroots democracy, designed to ensure that local governance is responsive to the needs and aspirations of rural populations. Established under the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992, this system provides for the decentralized administration of rural areas, with the Gram Panchayat serving as the basic unit of local governance. This amendment was a significant step towards increasing local self-governance and promoting inclusive participation in decision-making processes. Women's involvement in Gram Panchayats (GPs) is a critical area of study, reflecting broader themes of gender equality and the role of women in local governance. The 73rd Amendment mandates that one-third of the seats in Panchayats be reserved for women, including the chairpersons of these bodies. This provision aims to enhance women's representation in local governance, thereby addressing historical gender imbalances and promoting their contributions to community development (Nanda, 2000) [6].

Despite these constitutional provisions, the effective

participation of women in Gram Panchayats presents a complex interplay of opportunities and challenges. Women members often face structural barriers, including socio-cultural constraints, limited access to resources, and inadequate support systems. These factors can impact their ability to contribute effectively to governance and development initiatives. On the other hand, women in these roles also bring unique perspectives and approaches to local governance, potentially leading to more inclusive and equitable development outcomes (Sinha, 2005) [7].

Significance of the study

Understanding the role of women in Gram Panchayats is crucial for policy formulation and implementation aimed at enhancing their effectiveness and ensuring gender-equitable governance. By highlighting both successes and ongoing challenges, this research seeks to provide insights that could inform future reforms and support mechanisms, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and effective local governance in India.

Research methodology

The present study was conducted in Samastipur district of Bihar state which was selected through purposive sampling

method. There are total 20 blocks in Samastipur district of Bihar out of that Hasanpur and Pusa were selected through random sampling method. Women gram panchayat were the universe for the study. Selection of respondents was done by random sampling method and 6 respondents (1 gram pradhan and 5 ward members) were selected from each identified village to make a total sample size of 120. Interview schedule was prepared to collect the required information, for that several questions and statements were prepared. The respondents were interviewed personally, either at their home or at enterprise site. The actual work of

data collection was completed in the month of January & February 2024. After establishing report, questions were asked one by one and their responses were recorded. All possible cares were taken to maintain a favourable situation and to get unbiased opinion from the respondents. Descriptive research design was followed. For the analysis of data Arithmetic mean, Standard deviation, Frequency, Percentage, Minimum and Maximum value were used.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Socio-economic profile of the respondents

S. No.	Variables	Categories	Respondents	
			Frequency	Percentage
1.	Age	Young age (up to 35)	32	26.67
		Middle age (36-55)	59	49.16
		Old age (Above 55)	29	24.17
2.	Education	Illiterate (can not read and write)	14	11.67
		Primary	17	14.17
		Middle	18	15.00
		Secondary	22	18.33
		Higher secondary	21	17.50
		Graduation	24	20.00
		Post-Graduation	04	03.33
3.	Occupation	Farming only	72	60.00
		Farming + Business	41	34.17
		Farming + Service	07	05.83
4.	Land holding	Marginal (0-1.0 ha)	67	55.83
		Small (1.01-2.0 ha)	34	28.33
		Medium (2.01-4.0 ha)	14	11.67
		Large (4.01 ha & above)	05	04.17
5.	Annual income	Low (up to 60,000)	44	36.67
		Medium (60,000-1,20,000)	59	49.17
		High (above 1,20,000)	17	14.16
6.	Type of family	Nuclear family	77	64.17
		Joint family	43	35.83
7.	Size of family	Small family (below 4)	19	15.83
		Medium family (5 to 9)	28	23.33
		Large family (above 10)	73	60.83
8.	Information source	Low (14-16)	27	22.50
		Medium (17-19)	67	55.83
		High (20-22)	26	21.67
9.	Mass media exposure	Low (up to 6)	39	32.50
		Medium (7-9)	63	52.50
		High (10 & above)	18	15.00
10.	Scientific orientation	Low (up to 19)	29	24.16
		Medium (20-22)	77	64.16
		High (23 & above))	14	11.66
11.	Risk orientation	Low (16-19)	37	30.83
		Medium (20-21)	57	47.50
		High (22-25)	26	21.67
12.	Economic motivation	Low (18-20)	34	28.34
		Medium (21-23)	59	49.16
		High (24-26)	27	22.50

Data furnished in table 1 reveals that majority of respondents are middle-aged, educated up to the graduate level, and predominantly involved in farming, often combined with business or service. Land holding and annual income levels are largely moderate, and most respondents belong to large, joint families. Information sources, mass

media exposure, and scientific orientation are primarily at medium levels. Risk orientation and economic motivation are also predominantly medium, reflecting a balanced approach among respondents in these areas. Similar finding is also reported by Bhagwanrao (2014)^[2].

Table 2: Distribution of women gram panchayat members according to their role performance

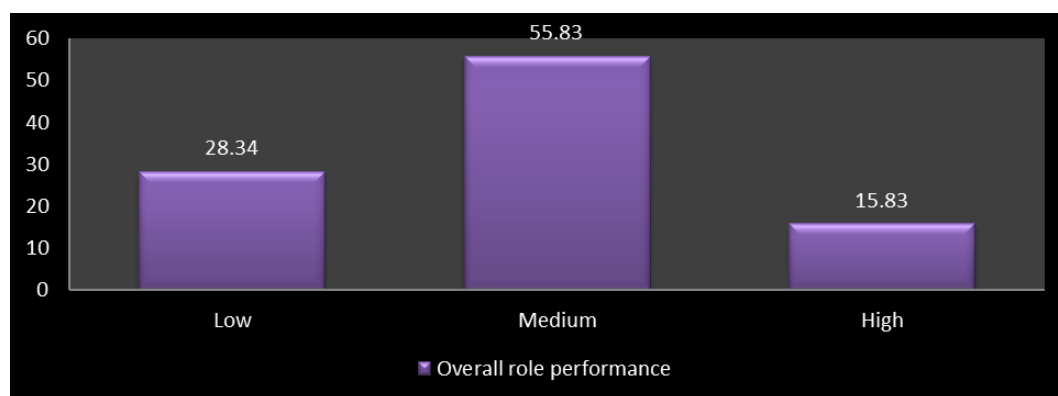
S. No.	Statement	Extent of role performance					
		Good		Satisfactory		Poor	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1.	Confirmation of the fair distribution of inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, subsidies etc, to all the farmers	99	82.50	09	07.50	12	10.00
2.	Help the developmental departments in performing their functions at village/s	109	90.84	04	03.33	07	05.83
3.	Help villagers in getting loan for agriculture and allied activities such as dairy, poultry etc,	59	49.16	43	35.84	18	15.00
4.	Motivation of villagers to repay crop loans	67	55.83	42	35.00	11	09.17
5.	Get irrigation sources constructed and their maintenance	09	07.50	15	12.50	96	80.00
6.	Provide proper storage facilities to the agricultural producers in the village/s	47	39.17	31	25.83	42	35.00
7.	Guide farmers in getting good price for their produces in markets	59	49.16	43	35.84	18	15.00
8.	Creating awareness about various government welfare schemes and arrange for implementation of the same	32	26.66	50	41.67	38	31.67
9.	Generating employment opportunities through MGNREGA and such other employment programmes for the needy	38	31.67	42	35.00	40	33.33
10.	Creating infrastructure facilities like roads, bus stand, electricity etc	53	44.16	48	40.00	19	15.83
11.	Guide farmers for watershed development program	17	14.16	48	40.00	55	45.84
12.	Constructing godowns and warehouses	85	70.84	18	15.00	17	14.16
13.	Organising rally/seminar/tour	54	45.00	24	20.00	42	35.00
14.	Organising training for farmers regarding recent technologies	32	26.66	50	41.67	38	31.67

f: Frequency; %: Percentage

Table 3: Overall role performance level of women gram panchayat members n=120

S. No.	Categories	Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low (18-20)	34	28.34
2.	Medium (21-23)	67	55.83
3.	High (24-26)	19	15.83
	Total	120	100.00

Mean: 23.56, S.D: 1.71, Min: 18, Max: 26

**Fig 1:** Overall role performance level of women gram panchayat members

According to the table 3 & fig 1, 55.83 per cent had medium, 28.34 per cent had low and 15.83 per cent had high level of role performance regarding agricultural development activities. Similar finding was also reported by Ahmed (2015) ^[1].

The majority of Gram Panchayat members exhibit a medium level of role performance in agricultural and rural development activities due to a combination of factors influencing their effectiveness. While these members play a crucial role in local governance and development, their performance is often moderated by constraints such as limited resources, insufficient training, and bureaucratic challenges. Many members, who typically have backgrounds in agriculture or other local occupations, may

not possess specialized knowledge or technical skills necessary for advanced development projects. Additionally, the implementation of agricultural and rural development activities often requires coordination with various stakeholders and adherence to complex regulations, which can impact their ability to perform at a high level. The balancing act of addressing diverse community needs while managing limited resources can lead to a medium level of performance, where members are able to achieve moderate success but face ongoing challenges in fully optimizing their role. Consequently, the medium level of role performance reflects a pragmatic approach, characterized by efforts to improve conditions within the constraints of their operational environment.

Table 4: Relationship between the independent variables and the role performance of respondents.

S. No	Independent variable	Correlation co-efficient value
1.	Age	0.155*
2.	Education	0.206*
3.	Occupation	0.830*
4.	Land holding	0.476*
5.	Annual income	0.021 ^{NS}
6.	Family type	0.080 ^{NS}
7.	Family size	0.230*
8.	Source of information	0.328*
9.	Mass media exposure	0.334*
10.	Scientific orientation	0.572*
11.	Risk orientation	0.023 ^{NS}
12.	Economic motivation	0.417*

*: Significant at 1 per cent level, NS: Not significant

Data furnished in Table 4 annual income, family type and risk orientation were not significant with role performance of women gram panchayat members about agricultural development activities while age, education, occupation, land holding, Family size, mass media exposure and scientific orientation were significant at 1 per cent level with role performance of women gram panchayat members about agricultural development activities.

Conclusion

It is concluded that most respondents are middle-aged, educated up to the graduate level, and primarily engaged in farming, often combined with business or service. Land holding and income levels are generally moderate, and respondents mostly come from large, joint families. Information sources, mass media exposure, and scientific orientation are at medium levels. Risk orientation and economic motivation also tend to be medium, indicating a balanced approach. Family type and risk orientation were not significantly related to the role performance of women Gram Panchayat members in agricultural development activities. The study concludes that 55.83% of women Gram Panchayat members demonstrate a medium level of role performance in agricultural development, showing substantial involvement but also room for improvement. About 28.34% have low performance, indicating obstacles that need addressing, while 15.83% exhibit high performance, reflecting their effective contributions. Women Gram Panchayat members are crucial in distributing agricultural inputs, facilitating access to loans, enhancing storage facilities, generating employment through MGNREGA, creating infrastructure, and organizing farmer training. Despite their important role in rural development, there is a need for increased support and empowerment. Addressing performance gaps and strengthening their capacities can enhance their impact and improve local governance. Future policies should focus on equipping them with the tools and support necessary to optimize their contributions and drive positive community change.

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