

## Women surge ahead in agriculture education growth

Women have been playing a significant role in agriculture; they comprise 43% of the agricultural work force in developing countries. Many historians believe that a woman was the first cultivator of a crop on land<sup>1</sup>. Data of the 68th round of the National Sample Survey released in 2013 indicate that in comparison to 59% men, 75% women in rural areas work in agriculture.

In India, only 0.77 students are enrolled in the faculty of agriculture and veterinary sciences. There are three faculties, namely education, medicine and agriculture, where the enrolment of women is more than 50% (refs 2 and 3). The role of women in Indian agriculture is going to be more pronounced in future as girls are now a dominating force in agriculture education. It has been reported that 50% of the students in agricultural universities across the country are girls and in some important agricultural universities their share is around 60% (ref. 3). Human resource development is critical for sustaining, diversifying and realizing the potential of agriculture. The role of women in agriculture remained in the shadow for centuries as silent workers. But this changed after independence with the establishment of separate agricultural universities in our country, particularly after 1962. Agricultural human resource development is a continuous process being undertaken through the coordinated efforts of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) with proactive role of the state governments<sup>4</sup>. Today, the well-established infrastructure of agricultural education comprises 55 State Agricultural Universities (SAUs), 5 Deemed to be Universities (DUs), 1 Central Agricultural University (CAU) and 4 Central Universities (CUs) with agriculture faculty in different parts of the country. All these institutions have about 265 constituent colleges with intake capacity of more than 35,000 students each year.

In the beginning, girls were not so keen to make a career in this field. Till 1980, their enrolment was less than 5%

in most of the agricultural universities. In the next two decades, the enrolment of girls picked up steadily. In 1995–96, the enrolment of girls in agricultural institutions was 14.3%, which further increased to 17.4% in 2000–01 (ref. 5). During this period, the enrolment of girls in veterinary sciences increased from 18% to 20.9%. Now, the overall enrolment of girl students has reached 50% in our country. Some prominent agricultural universities/institutions have reported enrolment of more than 50% girl students. Leading such institutions is the Tamil Nadu Agriculture University with 70% enrolment of girls students followed by Kerala Agricultural University (60%), Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology (58%) and Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana (56%)<sup>6</sup>. In Karnataka, women constitute 46% of the students in agricultural universities. The University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore has 54.5% girl students in 2012–13. Further, in G.B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology (Pantnagar), Dr Y. S. Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry (Solon) and Chaudhary Sarwan Kumar Himachal Pradesh Krishi Vishvavidyalaya (Palam-pur) girls constitute more than 50% of the total strength<sup>6</sup>. The increasing trend is also visible in Central Agriculture University (Imphal), where enrolment of the girls is 43%. Almost similar trend is visible in Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agriculture and Technology (Srinagar) and Bidhan Chandra Krishi Vishvavidyalaya (Nadia) with around 35–40% enrolment of girls. However, the enrolment of girl students is still 21.7% in the prestigious Indian Agricultural Research Institute (New Delhi). The wind of change is less in Acharya N. G. Ranga Agricultural University (Hyderabad) where the enrolment is around 35%, followed by Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University (Hisar), (30%) and Anand Agricultural University (Anand) (25%). Similar is the situation in Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology (Kanpur) and Sardar

Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture and Technology (Meerut), where the enrolment of girls is less than 20%.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, if women had the same access to productive resource as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30%, raising total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4% (ref. 7). This gain in production could lessen the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17%, besides increasing the income of women.

1. Singh, Y. V. and Nayak, J., *Kurukshetra*, 2011, **59**(11), 6–9.
2. [http://www.ugc.ac.in/ugc/pdf/208844\\_HE-glance2012.pdf](http://www.ugc.ac.in/ugc/pdf/208844_HE-glance2012.pdf)
3. [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1130208/jsp/odisha/story\\_16535080.jsp#.UiMtM-Gc7pdg](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1130208/jsp/odisha/story_16535080.jsp#.UiMtM-Gc7pdg)
4. <http://www.icar.org.in/files/NAEP-Project-documentt.pdf>
5. [http://www.ias.ac.in/womeninscience/INSA\\_1-17.pdf](http://www.ias.ac.in/womeninscience/INSA_1-17.pdf)
6. Gautam, H. R., *The Tribune*, 2010; <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2010/20100928/edu.htm>
7. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e00.htm>

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