



## Don't ignore the women farmers

### A common misconception

1. In India, whenever we talk about agriculture, we think of men as farmers. However, this is far from the truth. According to the agricultural census, 73.2% of rural women are engaged in farming activities but only 12.8% own landholdings.
2. Due to cultural, social and religious forces, women have been denied ownership of land. This stems from the perception that farming is a man's profession.
3. The India Human Development Survey reports that 83% of agricultural land in the country is inherited by male members of the family and less than 2% by their female counterparts.
4. Thus, women are mostly left without any title of land in their names and are excluded from the definition of farmers.
5. Besides, 81% of women agricultural labourers belong to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, so they also contribute to the largest share of casual and landless labourers.

### Need for Recognition

1. The government too turns a blind eye to their problem of non-recognition and conveniently labels them as 'cultivators' or 'agricultural labourers' but not 'farmers'.
2. Without any recognition, women are systematically excluded from all the benefits of government schemes.
3. Moreover, they are not guaranteed the rights which they would otherwise be given if they were recognised as farmers, such as loans for cultivation, loan waivers, crop insurance, subsidies or even compensation to their families in cases where they commit suicide.
4. They have unequal access to rights over land, water and forests. There is gendered access to support systems such as storage facilities, transportation costs, and cash for new investments or for paying off old dues or for other services related to agricultural credit.



5. There is also gendered access to inputs and markets. Thus, despite their large contribution to the sector, women farmers have been reduced to a marginal section, vulnerable to exploitation.

### **The farm laws**

Now they have a new worry: the farm laws. Women are barely in a position as empowered agents who can either understand or negotiate (written) agreements with traders and corporate entities who are seeking to enter into agreements with the farmers to purchase their products or for other services.