



# Digital Media: A Powerful Tool to Empower Rural Women in Agriculture

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## Introduction

Women's empowerment is very essential for the development of any type of society. In the simplest sense, empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercises choice and equal access to fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. Agriculture plays a very important role in rural and national development. There is a strong relationship between gender and agriculture. Women are twice as likely to be involved in agricultural related activity as men. Many women experience a life that is a complex web of multiple roles and multi task. Women in the rural areas are extensively involved in serious farm operation and agricultural activities. They play a vital but unorganized and unsupported role in food production. Looking at the national average of women in the agricultural labour force, they vary but globally they have a principal role in agro business, food processing and consumer related activity. Women consists 60-80 per cent of labour in agriculture starting from production, processing and marketing

of food. The emergence of Digital Media has enabled to collaborate, interact and information in a fast pace which has brought a greater impact on society. Digital Media do play an important role in disseminating a wide range of information and advice leading to knowledge and attitude change among rural communities. Use of Digital Media to promote the expansion of local markets and provide direct access for women producers to international markets and productive resources. The Digital Media is a diverse set of technological tools and resources to create, disseminate, store, bring value addition and manage information. It can be a powerful tool to empower women. The first state of women empowerment is women awakening to the facts of their existence. The concept of women empowerment throughout the world has its root in women's movement. Empowerment is a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material-intellectual and human resources. Digital Media adds tremendous potential for improving rural livelihood.

## Digital empowerment

It equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to navigate our increasingly digitized world. It's about ensuring that everyone, regardless of their social or economic circumstances, has access to technology and can harness its power for their development.

## What is the role of digital technology to the women empowerment?

It has the potential to open up new avenues and opportunities for women, providing them with greater access to education, employment, and



entrepreneurship. Technology can also help challenge and break gender stereotypes and biases that often limit women's potential."

### **How media can help for the empowerment of women?**

Social media can spread awareness of issues that affect women, create a platform for their voices to be heard, and inspire and empower women to take action. The power of social media is immense, and it has changed how we communicate and interact.

### **What are the positive effects of digital media?**

Digital Media allows people to establish and grow relationships without the need for physical interaction. From such interactions, people are exposed to a variety of ideas, cultures, and opportunities.

Even when women farmers have commercial relationships with buyers in formal value chains, for example, by joining a women-led value chain or cooperative, they often face barriers to accessing resources. For example, they may struggle to access: markets to sell their produce; advisory services to learn new techniques and receive market and weather information; agri digital financial services (DFS) to receive capital and risk protection; and inputs and assets to increase productivity.

### **Mobile gender gap**

Although digital solutions can help women access markets, be more productive and improve their incomes, women are less likely than men to own and use a mobile phone. There are several reasons for this, including lack of access to affordable handsets and low literacy and digital skills. These

barriers are also experienced by men, but women tend to experience them more acutely due to structural inequalities and underlying social norms, including education and income disparities between men and women.

### **Best practices to facilitate access to resources**

#### **ACCESS TO AGRICULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS**

Using digital agriculture solutions to ensure that women have access to agronomic advice and market information on their mobile phone, or through trusted community members, goes a long way towards increasing women farmers' skills and improving the overall productivity and quality of agricultural produce.

#### **ACCESS TO FINANCE**

Using digital procurement and mobile money data unlocks access to capital and risk management tools that help women farmers manage their land and improve their productivity and income. Access to finance is a key barrier for women in agricultural value chains since they lack collateral (land) to provide a guarantee to lenders. This prevents them from hiring farm labour, accessing quality inputs and equipment and building safety nets to protect them in case of disaster.

#### **ACCESS TO MARKETS**

Deliberately reaching out to groups of women farmers through community-based organizations, such as village savings and loans associations (VSLAs), has allowed recruiting more women farmers.

#### **ACCESS TO DIGITAL PAYMENTS**

Facilitating mobile money and bank account opening for women farmers is a simple way to ensure women can access



digital payments. Digital procurement payments can have valuable benefits for women (e.g. economic identities, greater financial discipline), but only if they are delivered directly to their phones. This means that women must have a mobile money account in order to receive digital payments.

### **SAFETY AND DIGITAL SKILLS**

Working with community mentors and field agents that women farmers trust has proven effective at building their financial and digital skills and increasing their confidence and trust in digital solutions.

### **Conclusion**

There is a need for more granular, sex-disaggregated data on how women interact with digital agriculture solutions and to identify their specific needs and preferences for digital agriculture solutions in the last mile, such as how to deliver content (e.g. USSD, IVR, and SMS) and what design elements resonate most with women farmers. More specifically, we need to understand what prompts women to decide to use these services. More evidence is also needed to understand the long-term implications of gender-inclusive, and especially gender transformative, approaches that aim to change social norms, including how they work, their short- and long-term impacts and how to scale them up efficiently. This will require trying and testing more gender-inclusive projects to delineate “impact pathways” for women in digitized agricultural value chains.

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