Estimates of private consumption
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ecological considerations. Recent research has shown that trees can lessen the impact of floods. Wetlands have an astounding capacity to absorb so much water that hydrologists believe that it could be the solution for a different method of flood management, one based on restoring enough wetlands to sponge up water naturally. An interesting suggestion offered by some of the Malda residents is that local contractors should not be given any work. Instead, capable and reputed contractors selected on an all-India basis should be given the responsibility of building embankments and concreting banks.

The year 2000 saw Nadia, North 24-Parganas and Murshidabad blighted by floods. Malda and Midnapore were, in comparison, given a breathing space by Providence; but for how long sheer luck can offset the machinations of the mandarins is unknown. At the release of UNDP's Human Development Report 2000, Brenda Gael McSweeney, UNDP's resident representative in India, had said that a decent standard of living, adequate nutrition, health care, education, proper work and protection against calamities are not just development goals, they are human rights as well. If that be true, then the right to be protected against calamities has been grossly transgressed by the entire establishment in Malda and Midnapore, repeatedly.

Keeping in mind the misdemeanours of the authorities in Malda and Midnapore, the time is right to institute a Public Interest Litigation so that such supineness and criminal negligence is never repeated. One fervently hopes that eminent lawyers take up this issue to shake the government out of a torpor which is responsible for wrecking the lives of thousands. [The views expressed here are exclusively the author's.]

Women On and Off Farms: Building Links

Women are an integral force in India's agricultural system, yet their efforts go largely unrecognised. Not only are there a large number of untrained women working on farms, there are also many skilled, educated women in the field of agriculture. Linkages between professional women in the field of agriculture and rural women are needed to ensure real development of India's agricultural economy.

Aneela G

Women constitute nearly two-thirds of the workforce in agriculture in our country. From the moment of sowing all the way to carrying crops back home, women must engage themselves in all these activities for their livelihoods. Besides agricultural operations, the decision-making by women in farm-families is increasing. However, they are not getting due recognition for their efforts towards making both ends meet. Indian agriculture is striving towards the new millennium with new technology, but it is a fact that the fruits of research are not reaching rural India, especially rural farm women. They are even deprived of formal training for betterment of their agricultural practices and methods. The farm women are bestowed with invisible hands and unheard voices.

According to the study on 'Professional Women in Agriculture in India', sponsored by department of science and technology, there were about 20,000 women graduates in agriculture in the country of whom only one-third are employed mostly in state departments, agricultural universities, or the ICAR. However, two-thirds of professional women are not economically active. Since agricultural education is relatively costly, i.e., about Rs 2 lakh per graduate, the country cannot afford to ignore the wastage of this valuable human resource.

At this point of time, it is worth taking a bird's-eye view at why women are taking up agriculture as a profession and what are they looking for in this profession. Firstly, many of these women are joining this profession as their second preference, their first preference being medicine, because of the first employment opportunities, without any time lag, after completion of the study. The second reason is that by pursuing postgraduation in agricultural education, women can better their professional prospects. After graduation, most available jobs are in the field-based, whereas pursuing PG courses increases urban-based employment opportunities. Moreover, these women have had school education from urban private English medium convent schools which have supported the general feeling of growing urban character of agricultural education. Though these professional women had overwhelming support from their mothers to join agricultural courses, they have greater restrictions on their mobility, and this single reason would account for their relatively low proportion in obtaining doctorate degrees.

Women who had pursued their PG and doctorate prefer employment in R and D and in the finance sector. However, not all professional women prefer this. A majority of graduate women in agriculture are employed in universities and state departments involving frequent fieldwork. They are not new to this kind of work as they are exposed to the real on-field situation of the farm and the rural agricultural scenario and extension systems through rural work experience programme during their graduation. Gradually, they are developing skills in transfer of technology and in developing new technology, etc., during their job tenure.

Yet, by the time they gain some professional experience, their task is made harder because they have no work to do to maintain a balance between the responsibilities at work and at home. Not only that, the working environment of professional women in agriculture is no better than the other professional working women. Spouse employment, absence of creches near work place, non-availability of school in nearby their organisation, low salary, lack of accommodation, health and transport facilities, etc., are revealed as the chief causes of these women quitting their field-based extension jobs. Still, it is interesting to note that the majority of them are ready to take up extension-related jobs during the initial stages of their profession. The profession has no gender bias unlike other professions. At the work place or at the field level, no marked differentiation exists between men and women agriculture graduates.

At this juncture, it must be made mandatory for graduate women in agriculture to be made a part and parcel of the rural upliftment programmes. The extension system, which is male-dominated so far,
has to adjust to the infusion of women. In certain areas like extension of agricultural technologies it is often that women are better suited than men as women have better access to rural women, and hence, to rural households. The professional and rural women linkages can be further strengthened through formulation of gender-sensitive, location-specific, inter-disciplinary research with compulsory involvement of rural women in planning, technology re-assessment and evaluation processes.

The study directed the National Commission for Women (NCW) to plan and instruct policy-makers in such a way that women be made part of rural development programmes and efforts made to utilise to the maximum extent the skills of these women in agriculture. The study also recommended the ICAR, State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) and developments departments to take up the following action plans:

- Women students with rural background are to be encouraged to join agricultural courses so as to increase the number of women graduates in agriculture.

- Developmental departments and extension agencies. They should be given due preference in transfer of technology.

- The curriculum for agricultural education at graduation level in all streams must be revamped and gender-sensitised. Rural work experience programme encompassing gender specific issues should be made compulsory in agriculture education throughout the country.

- To place more women graduates in Transfer of Technology (TOT) programmes, there has to be special consideration in their placement, provision of transport, accommodation and spousal employment, etc. To encourage women to take up extension-oriented jobs, the organisational climate in the line departments needs to be made gender-friendly.

- In order to increase mobility, policies aiming at easy grants of leave without break in service, consideration in spouse employment, provision of contract jobs, preferential placement, and other benefits are recommended.

- The presence of professional women is negligible in decision-making bodies, high-level advisory boards and national academies. Appointments are not keeping pace with increased number of professional women candidates with expertise.

- In order to facilitate better professional competence, more women professionals should be encouraged to become members/officers in professional societies and more opportunities should be given to them to participate in conferences and training programmes.

- Vocational counselling and guidance service should be provided to rural women by professional women in R and D sectors.

- Professional women should document and revalidate indigenous technologies developed by rural women and help them gain due recognition.

- The development and training programmes should involve more women beneficiaries and professional women can play decisive role in this.

Networking of women professional among themselves and with NGOs and other grass roots level social organisations working with rural women should be set into motion and strengthened.

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VACANCY - REGIONAL DIRECTOR, PANOS SOUTH ASIA

Panos South Asia is a regional information and communications not-for-profit organisation based in Kathmandu, Nepal, with a country office in New Delhi, India. Panos South Asia works with the media, policy-makers and international agencies throughout South Asia to provide information and stimulate debate on developing issues.

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