

The Seed Journey of Women Agri- Entrepreneurs Leading to Economic Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

Indian economy is an agrarian economy, shifting from agriculture to agribusiness is essential pathway to make agriculture as a sustainable tool for growth. Agri-entrepreneurship has a potential to contribute to the growth trajectory of Indian economy by contributing to rural employment, income generation, poverty reduction and improving the health & wealth of rural population. Due to the change in the socio-economic dimensions more number of women are taking up Agri-Entrepreneurship as an opportunity. Before it was man's domain, but today most of the women are taking it up and creating wonders with new thoughts. The present study focuses on understanding and building the Agri-business opportunities in the rural areas and made a special focus on measuring the economic progress of women who are into Agri-entrepreneurship. The core idea of the paper is to suggest different stakeholders that if there exists a good agricultural-entrepreneurial ecosystem in place what would be the economic progress of the women. The nine factors which are loaded on rotated component matrix are economic enhancement (.718), small investment (.662), economic reason (.776), fulfilling long felt desire (.584), active participation and involvement in the group (.577), ability of decision making (.577), open to seek help (.559), behavioral & emotional intelligence to solve the problems (.558) and flexibility (.547). In the present study women are keen in taking up the responsibility of managing the money in their respective households (.903). There is a positive correlation between the economic reason to join the group by the women and the factors loaded indicating that women investing their time and energy in agri-entrepreneurship has a positive impact towards leading to economic empowerment in the larger perspective. The results show that there is a positive economic progress of women groups in all dimensions.

Keywords: Agri-entrepreneurship, Agripreneurs, Income generation, socio – economic, Sustainable tool, Ecosystem.

INTRODUCTION:

Since ancient times, women who first domesticated crop plants and there by started the art & science of farming, they started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed and fodder. They have played and continue to play a key role in protecting the health of the soil through organic recycling and promoted crop security. Women have been traditionally known to conserve genetic diversity (seed banks, selection and preservation) and champion good agricultural practices. Agri-entrepreneurship is the profitable combination of agriculture and entrepreneurship. In Agri-entrepreneurship your farm turns into an agribusiness hub. Women turning into 'Agripreneurs' will be a good move in achieving economic independence in the rural base which refers to agribusiness establishment in agriculture and allied sector. The terms, Entrepreneurship and Agri-preneurship are frequently used in the context of education and small business formation in agriculture. Agripreneurs are individuals who are proactive, inquisitive, determined,

persistence, visionary, hard -working, honest, integrity with strong management and organizational skills who undertakes a variety of activities in agriculture sector in order to be an entrepreneur. Agri-entrepreneurship is a good avenue for women to march forward to words achieving economic empowerment. Empowerment would be achieved only when advancement in the conditions of women is accompanied by their ability to influence the direction of social change gained through equal opportunities in economic social and political spheres of life. The time is to realize that paradigm shifts have occurred from seeing women as mere recipients of welfare benefits to mainstreaming gender concerns and engaging them in the development process of the country. Successful business ventures and economic development do not just happen. They are the result of the combination of right environment, proper planning, sustainable effort and innovation. It is also the result of applying human skills with advanced technology, supported by capital and other infrastructure to set in a development process.

Journey of Agriculture leading to empowerment:

The farmer producer societies at the village level has a vision of consolidating these village groups into vibrant economic groups by empowering them through organic farming. The vision seems to be a reality today by facilitating all the women action groups who are collectively progressing towards the economic empowerment through their Agri- journey. Initially it started off with the intention of ensuring the simple sustenance needs but the women have taken it the next level with their collective effort. It is a tool of empowerment for them today to address the larger issues of food security, natural resource enhancement, education, and health needs of the region. The conscious integration of various activities the Society has helped to retrieve women's natural leadership positions in their communities, and to fight back one of the empowerment dimension i.e the lack of access and control over their own resources. As part of the mission these women have taken the responsibility of preserving the traditional crops by saving the seeds. These women agripreneurs believe and understand that seeds' hold special place in the journey of farming which leads to empowerment. These small grains are the basis for the future generations. They shape, at each life cycle, the types of food people eat, how it is grown, and who grows it. Every woman in the society has taken the oath to cultivate and conserve the traditional varieties of crops. As the quality of the seeds decides the output generated.

ORIGIN OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM:

In India, very few studies have been done in the field of building agricultural- entrepreneurial ecosystem in rural areas for increasing worker participation through cooperative Agri-business incubators by involving small empowered groups in the process. Hence, the present study makes an attempt to study the same taking one of the case-study which made remarkable progress through seed journey in rural areas for enhancing economic empowerment among small groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

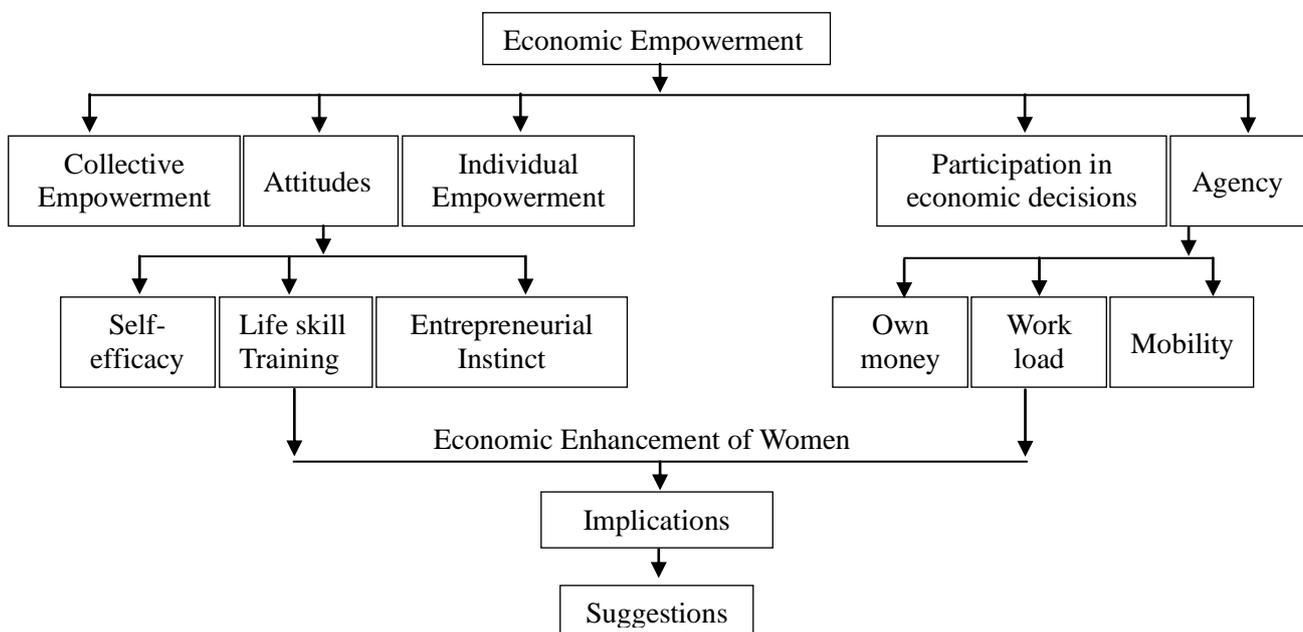
Skill development for forest based, livestock –based poultry and fisheries – based livelihoods will be encouraged as part of the inclusive strategy in agriculture. Women farmer's collective farming enterprises will be incentivized by providing support for post-harvest storage, processing and marketing facilities. ((2016 Draft), May 2016). When women's productivity and incomes increase, the benefits amplify across families and generations. Women tend to devote a larger fraction of their income to their children's health and nutrition, laying the foundation for their children's lifelong cognitive and physical development. (Thomas, 1990). Agriculture is an engine of economic growth and provides the basis for most livelihoods in developing countries. (World Bank , 2008). Women play a vital role in advancing agricultural development and food security. They participate in many aspects of rural life – in paid employment, trade and marketing, as well as many unpaid activities, such as tending to crops and animals, collecting water and wood for fuel, and caring for family members. (World Bank 2011, 2012). Development of micro-enterprises at grass-root level means for amelioration of several socio-economic problems stemming from poverty and unemployment. Micro entrepreneurs can gain economic empowerments, better market access, and control over their environment through appropriate institutions. (N.Mohanan and V.Kulandaiswamy, 2004). As the global community works toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) -- among them, SDG2, which aims to end hunger and malnutrition by 2030. Women can be the key agents of change in agriculture, nutrition and rural development. Women participation in agriculture will be acknowledged when women farmer will actively participate to build and improve their knowledge and gain access to new and necessary information to make use of most of them in their farming activities. By linking the knowledge and information flow amongst women

socio economic progress can be achieved. (Dhaka.al, 2012). (Farid.et.al, 2009) discussed the major role of women in farming & non- farming activities especially in post-harvest operations, homestead gardening, livestock and poultry rearing, selling labor etc. The primary need of women working or seeking employment in various agricultural and non –agricultural activities is to meet the family needs and to enhance the family income.(Mun Ghosh & Ghosh, 2014) analyzed in their paper that Agriculture sector as a whole has developed and emerged immensely with the infusion of science and technology. But this latest emergence is not capable of plummeting the ignorance of women labour as an integral part of this industry. In developing countries like India, agriculture continues to absorb and employ female work force but fails to give them recognition of employed/hired labour. Women constituted 38% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. It is also estimated that 45.3% of the agricultural labour force consists of women. But a large number of women have remained as "invisible workers”

METHODOLOGY:

To understand the journey of Economic Empowerment of women through Seeds among the women members at DDS a survey was conducted. The survey was done based on Focused Group Discussions (FGD) format. As the members are farmers themselves getting them on to the job of filling the questionnaires individually was very difficult and was time consuming. The researcher used stratified sampling for sample selection particularly, homogenous stratum based on age characteristics. (L.E.Enticknap, 1981). This survey was conducted during the period between November 2016 to July 2017 for 9 months. In the first three months few visits were made to understand the details of the work they do and the process, for this the researcher attended their monthly meeting and recorded. FGD’s were planned with the involvement of the ground staff for next 6 months. With the help of the local staff 30 groups were made with 10 members in each group of total samples of 300 members. This 30 groups are divided keeping in mind their age, experience and their years of enrolment as a member in the group, their contribution to the group etc. This initial care of blending the groups helped the researcher to extract more information. To protect the women’s Confidentiality and avoid potential conflicts within the household, women who participated in the FGD’s were invited to speak in terms of hypothetical situations & generalities. Initial discussion was initiated with normal personal things to make the group members acquainted and comfortable with the process. This enabled the researcher to win the trust of the members as most of the members came from vulnerable background. In the process of discussion, the researcher tried to focus the discussion in the direction where the detailed opinions were recorded on seven-point scale of opinions for preformulate 54 questions. All the women participated in the discussion with utmost interest & enthusiasm.

Fig 1: Research Design of Economic Enhancement of Women



Developed by Author

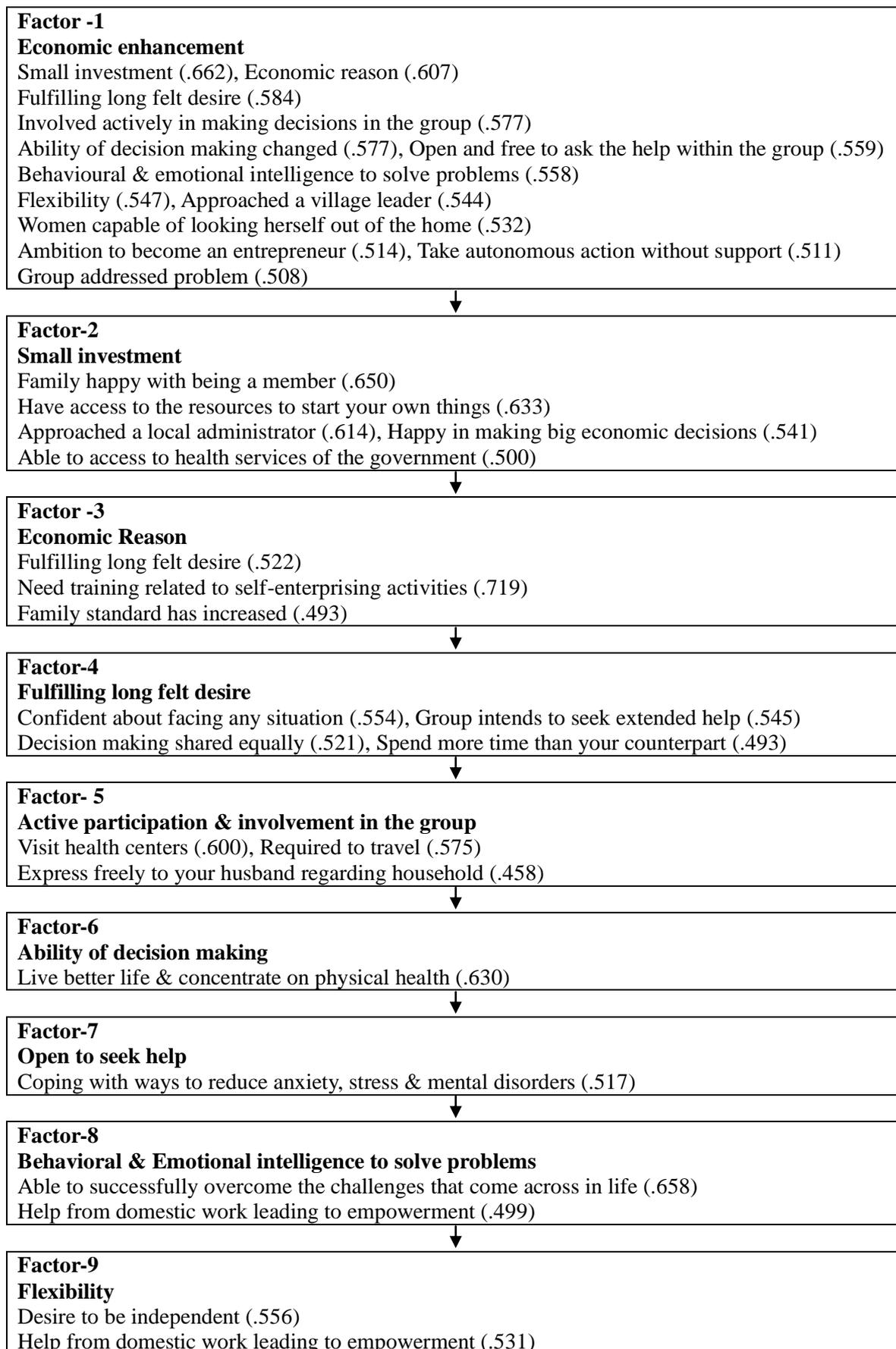
DISCUSSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

In the present study to understand how women Agri-entrepreneurs are economically empowered in their seed journey they were asked to express their feelings in focused group discussions (FGDs) based on that opinions were recorded. The demographic outline of the member (women Agri-entrepreneurs) were categorised into three categories, the data showed i.e below 35 years-126, below 45 years-113 and below 55 years-61. Women between the Age 25-45 were very enthusiastic to make some remarkable change in their lives. In the total taster literate women were 111 and Illiterate women were 189 out of the total sample. The minimum period considered as a member in the group is 1 year, the three categories considered are below 3 years -64, between 3-5 years- 81 and more than 5 years -155. The maximum they are in the group their experience in dealing with and involvement in the group things have considerably increased. In the present trial Un-married women -36 , Married women -201 and Widower/Separated – 63. It is general belief that marriage brings a sea change in a person's life due to additional responsibilities, changes in the priorities, interchange of mutual cultures, etc. This change is seen more in women as they are care takers of the family. This occurrence of change is bound to affect the performance of the women at work place as well, and the entrepreneurs are no exception to that but to some extent entrepreneurs have a liberty to choose their working schedules. Surprisingly Most of the women in are choosing the entrepreneurship as a profession after the marriage which enables us to conclude that they are getting enough support from the family. People usually learn leadership best by doing. Self- leadership is an enabling process, where by a person learns to know him/herself better, through this better self- understanding he /she is able to steer his/ her life better. In the present model, women are self-learners to know more about their economic enhancement and their involvement in the family decision-making further statistical analysis was conducted.

The purpose here is to understand the empowerment dimension. From the available data the factor analysis was conducted and the respondents are tested for responses and the data was analysed to test for the hypothesis framed. The KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) value is arrived at 0.457 since it is greater than 0.05 and is suitable for conducting factor analysis. Therefore, the factor analysis was conducted. According to the extracted communalities among 300 respondent's 80 percent respondents felt that the following are the factors are important for marching towards economic empowerment. The Factors loaded on the rotated component matrix. The total 54 factors got reduced into 17 factors which are having the eigen value above 5. The communalities are Group addressed problem(.850), Decision-making shared equally(.821), Approached local administrator (.835), Approached village leader(.821), Involved actively in making decisions (.848) , Open decision about entrepreneurship in the group (.862), Open and free to ask the help within the group(.856), Express freely to your husband regarding household (.843), Are you happy about making big economic decisions (.835), Are you happy with your say in final decision about how many children you should have (.859), Used the loan money for economic value generation (.826), If your husband is taking the responsibility are you comfortable in asking the expenses (.826), Help from domestic work leading to empowerment (.861), Spend more time than your counterpart(.837), A women place is in the home (.834), Women capable of looking herself outside home (.817), Are you able to achieve most of the goals that you set for yourself (.884), Are you able to successfully overcome the challenges (.857), Take autonomous action without support (.811), Having good interpersonal skills (.853) and Attend educational classes & workshops (.856). Among the communalities extracted the following are the four factors which proves that women are having the entrepreneurial instinct like Small investment (.830) Flexibility (.853), Fulfilling long felt desire (.814) and Government concession (.867). From the factors created it is clearly evident that the urge to explore inner talents and the desire to do something creative plays an important part in influencing women's decision in taking part in economic value creation. Their dream and long felt desire for many women in the illustration, which is backed with flexibility to balance their work and family. The urge to explore inner talents and the desire to do something creative plays an important part in influencing women's decision. They turned their aspirations into reality with their unique skills which are internal to each women and external factors like family support, spouse support and government initiatives to encourage, played an important role in turning them to agri-entrepreneurs. The suitable support and the assistance from the both internal and external environment are suitable for women to establish their own identity in farming and non-farming activities to increase their economic enhancement. Women consider financial success as an external confirmation of their ability rather than as a primary goal or motivation to start a business. This lead them to stand on their feet and build their confidence in the long run. Self-assessment, self-confidence, self-control and creativity are the five skills of personal competencies which form the basis for leadership success and promote for entrepreneurial success.

The following is the fig-2 explains about the factors loaded on the rotated component matrix

Fig 2: Economic Enhancement Factors loaded on rotated component matrix



Source: Survey data, developed by author

The above factors loaded on Factor:1 clearly indicates that women have joined the group to fulfill their long-felt desire to be achieved with entrepreneurship as an option with small investment to gain economic independence. With the active involvement in the group. Women in the taster also admitted that they are happy with the change in their decision-making ability. Their behavioral and emotional intelligence levels have also been increased when compared with the before and after the group involvement. The factors loaded on Factor-2 clearly shows that women with small investment are happy in making themselves involved in big economic decisions and their family is also happy with the increase in the standard of living. The factors loaded on the Factor-3 specifies that to accomplish economic independence and to fulfill their long-felt desire it is necessary and important to get themselves trained in new technologies to succeed in enterprising activities. They believed that in a way this will enable them to increase their family standard of living. Factor-4 indicates that in the process of fulfilling their long-felt desire the group shared responsibility equally and extended their support. Factor-5 shows their active participation and involvement in the group. Factor-6 explains about their increase in the ability of decision-making. Factor-7 shows their openness to the seek help. Factor-8 demonstrations their capacity of solving behavioral and emotional intelligence in solving problems and their ability to successfully overcome the challenges that come across in the life. Factor-9 displays the desire to be independent with flexibility in doing the work. Striking a balance between work and family life, and finding time to pursue personal interests is one of the most challenging issues that confront working women these days. The ability to balance work, family and leisure time is a major factor that determines the quality of life. Traditionally creating and managing a balance between the work-life was considered to be a woman's issue. To explain further Correlations were used. Correlation estimate the strength of the linear relationship between two variables. Here in the present study the researcher tried to establish the relationship between the Economic reason of the member to join the group and the few factors leading to economic empowerment are been considered. The following are the tables which indicate the correlations.

Table 1: Strength of relationship between Economic Reason & Factors Effecting Economic Enhancement

		Economic reason	Group addressing the problem	Belonging to group have more voice	Desire to be independent	Fulfilling long felt desire
Economic reason Correlation	Pearson	1.00	.554**	.424**	.263**	.253**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	300	300	300	300	300
Group addressing Correlation the problems	Pearson	.554**	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	300	300	300	300	300

Source: Survey data output through spss

Interpretation: According to the Table:1, The correlation coefficient for Optimism and Satisfaction is 0. 554.The number of respondents in the sample answering both items are 300. p-value for this correlation coefficient is .000. Because $p < .05$, there is a relationship between the two variables i.e the Economic reason and Group addressing the problem and can be concluded that the relationship

According to the Table:1, The correlation coefficient for Optimism and Satisfaction is 0. 424.The number of respondents in the sample answering both items are 300. p-value for this correlation coefficient is .000. Because $p < .05$, there is a relationship between the two variables i.e the Economic reason and Belonging to the group have more voice and can be concluded that the relationship is statistically noteworthy.

According to the Table:1, The correlation coefficient for Optimism and Satisfaction is 0.263. The number of respondents in the sample answering both items is 300. p-value for this correlation coefficient is .000. Because $p < .05$, there is a relationship between the two variables i.e the Economic reason and Desire to be independent and can be concluded that the relationship is statistically substantial.

According to the Table:1, The correlation coefficient for Optimism and Satisfaction is 0.253. The number of respondents in the sample answering both items is 300. p-value for this correlation coefficient is .000. Because $p < .05$, there is a relationship between the two variables i.e the Economic reason and fulfilling long felt desire and can be concluded that the relationship is statistically important.

SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Stereotype saying goes that women are at home and men are farms, but today most of the women are taking up agriculture as their occupation out of passion by some and out of compulsion by someone. The reasons might be different but the efforts they put in bringing quality is appreciable. Work and mothering are seen as 'Competing devotions' that cannot be adequately performed in conjunction with other responsibilities. Standing out as successful women entrepreneur women have to strike a better balance between career & family. Sometimes there is a lot of pressure from own family and outside families that women are not committed to their works because of pressures coming from family. Balancing emotionally and building career of choice is always walking on a see-saw. Women often choose entrepreneurship too lead without compromising their other life priorities. In the present study, the results reveal the same that they (women) have chosen agri-entrepreneurship for the same reason. They are however experiencing organizational, industrial, and societal obstacles even though they are their 'own boss'. Entrepreneurship with its strong implication of creativity, adventurousness and risk-taking is often considered a masculine endeavor. But women are also proving that they are go-getters with their strong involvement.

The results in the present study proved that once women put in that extra effort which is needed to demonstrate their competence, they are finally rewarded by proving that it is a completely a merit driven industry. This move of women taking positive path breaking steps in the field of agriculture will eventually change the managerial dynamics in the future.

As a part of the study the researcher named the women groups as, Women empowered participatory entrepreneur groups (WEPEG). These groups are becoming one of the important means for the empowerment of poor women through entrepreneurial activities in almost all developing countries, including India. The entrepreneurial opportunities can be generated in rural areas in agricultural supply chain by linking the empowered groups with co-operative businesses. Rural women could be motivated to avail finances for starting the entrepreneurial activities. Awareness can be created about various credit facilities, financial incentives and subsidies. As women were found technologically less empowered, they are to be imposed to the technologies which are labour saving, drudgery reducing, income generating and productivity increasing. Entrepreneurship education and trainings could be introduced at all levels in the rural community. It could be helpful in inducing positive self concept, self reliance, self confidence and independence in rural women.

CONCLUSION:

One cannot exist in harmony without the other and it all starts with the self-grooming and self-understanding. This is the foundation of any human-being and particularly to carry on the legacy. The self is the whole package of spirituality, health, personality and education. The sense of well-being then reflects on every facet of life-family and work. The secret is to put your own oxygen mask on first to be empowered to support and nurture the people around you. Happy and healthy women make great role models for their families also drives them to be successful entrepreneurs. The focus of the 48th World Economic Forum (WEF) held at Davos is on 'Creating a shared future in a fractured world' fractured world is to focus on marginalized communities and concentrating on inclusive growth. It is time to invest on women entrepreneurs at the institutional level. Interventions are to be worked out for scaling the small farming activities to the next level of production by training women. If these positive steps are taken the share economic value generated by women will add to the GDP of the developing nation.

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