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Status of Women in Agriculture (YSR District, 2014–2024)

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Abstract

Agriculture in YSR District (Kadapa) is heavily dependent on women, who constitute the majority of the rural workforce. Despite the "feminization of agriculture" driven by male migration to urban centers, women's contributions often remain invisible or undervalued. This study tracks the status of farm women from 2014 to 2024, highlighting their pivotal role in crop production and the emerging livestock sector.

In crop cultivation, women perform nearly 90% of labor in rainfed groundnut farming—specifically sowing, weeding, and harvesting—and dominate paddy transplanting in irrigated belts. While male migration has forced them into de facto managerial roles, they perform these tasks with high drudgery. Activities like manual weeding and groundnut picking are physically demanding, leading to widespread musculoskeletal disorders and Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI). This physical toll is compounded by the "double burden" of managing domestic chores alongside farm labor, often resulting in chronic fatigue and nutritional anemia.

A notable positive shift is the "Livestock Revolution." Aided by government schemes like YSR Cheyutha, women have transitioned from unpaid family workers to owners of buffaloes and sheep. Partnerships like Amul-Andhra Pradesh facilitate direct payments to women's accounts, enhancing their financial autonomy. Consequently, decision-making power has improved regarding livestock and household income, though men retain control over crop selection and marketing.

Despite these advances, economic parity remains distant. A stark wage gap persists, with women earning ₹250–₹350 compared to men's ₹500–₹600 for similar durations. This is driven by the cultural misconception that women's work is "light," despite ergonomic evidence to the contrary. Critically, women own less than 14% of operational land. Without land titles (Pattadar Passbooks), they are excluded from institutional crop loans and must rely on limited microfinance options.

To bridge these gaps, the study recommends four key policy interventions: promoting Joint Pattadar Passbooks (joint land titling) to ensure credit access; subsidizing gender-friendly farm mechanization to reduce physical drudgery; strengthening the Loan Eligibility Card (LEC) system for landless women; and forming women-led Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) to bypass middlemen and secure better market prices.

Agriculture remains the primary source of livelihood in the YSR District (Kadapa) of Andhra Pradesh, with women constituting a significant portion of the workforce. 66% of women in the district live in rural areas, which directly correlate to the high participation of women in agriculture and allied sectors (Prasanna, P. L., & Mohapatra, B. P. (2020).

Despite the "feminization of agriculture" caused by male migration and shifting occupational patterns, the contributions of farm women often remain invisible or undervalued. This study synthesizes recent findings to assess the extent of women's participation in crop production (specifically groundnut and paddy) and livestock management, their decision-making authority, and the socio-economic constraints they face.

This Abstract gives a detailed report on the 10-year status analysis, providing granular data on the specific roles, economic shifts, and structural changes affecting women in agriculture in YSR (Kadapa) District from 2014 to 2024.

Crop-Specific Roles

The most significant trend of the decade is the Feminization of Agriculture. Due to recurring droughts in the Rayalaseema region, male farmers frequently migrated to urban centers (Bengaluru, Chennai) or the Gulf for construction work. This left women as the de facto farm managers, though often without the title.

In the vast rainfed tracts of Kadapa (e.g., Pulivendula, Jammalamadugu), women perform 90% of the labor. Their role is in Sowing(Dropping seeds behind the plough), Weeding(Manual removal of weeds which requires bending for 6–8 hours/day) and Harvesting (Stripping pods from the roots which requires labor-intensive).

Paddy is extensively grown in irrigated belts of KC Canal areas. An exclusively female domain major role is observed in transplanting. Near Railway Kodur belt, women have moved into post-harvest handling (grading and packing), which offers slightly higher wages than field labor.

The Livestock Revolution

While crop cultivation remained risky due to rainfall variability, the allied sector saw massive growth driven by women. With the support of the YSR Cheyutha scheme (financial assistance of ₹18,750/year for 4 years), thousands of women invested in purchasing buffaloes. Women moved from being "unpaid family workers" cleaning sheds to "owners" of the animal (Government of Andhra Pradesh, 2023). Integration with the Amul-Andhra Pradesh partnership has started to ensure women receive payments directly into their bank accounts, bypassing male intermediaries. In drier mandals, women-led sheep rearing has become a primary drought-proofing strategy.

Economic Status: Wages and Land

Despite the increased workload, economic parity remains distant. Swarna Pragathi and Anitha (2020) identify a significant "dual burden" on these women, who manage domestic chores alongside farm labor without receiving proportionate remuneration; typically, female agricultural wages in the Rayalaseema region are 30-40% lower than those of their male counterparts for similar durations of work.

The Wage Gap Estimates (2023-24) shows that Male Laborer get ₹500 – ₹600 per day for Ploughing/Sprayingwere as Female Laborer ₹250 – ₹350 per day for Weeding/Sowing work. The reason

given by the men depicted a Cultural perception that women's work (weeding) is "light," despite it being physically exhausting (District Handbook of Statistics. 2022).
If we look at Land Ownership, women own less than 14% of operational holdings. Without land titles (Pattadar Passbooks), women cannot access crop loans (Scale of Finance) from banks. Hence they are forced to rely on Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) or SHG loans, which have smaller limits.

Decision-Making Authority

A comparative look at how decision-making power gives a positive outlook. We observe a shifted over the decade in purchase of livestock, credit utilization and farm income usage. But in crop selection it's still in control of Men and the market links are also controlled by them (Reddy, P. S., & Rao, B. S. 2020).

Health Implications & Drudgery in Agriculture (YSR District)

The "feminization of agriculture" in Kadapa has a physical cost. Field studies in YSR District identify three specific activities as "severely high drudgery" for women. They are Weeding (Groundnut & Vegetable Crops), Transplanting (Paddy), and Groundnut Stripping/Picking (Prasanna, P. L., & Mohapatra, B. P. 2020).
Prolonged squatting or bending at the waist (stooping) for 6–8 hours daily during weeding compresses the spine and restricts blood flow to the legs (AICRP 2019, ICAR-CIWA 2020). This is classified as "Very Heavy" work due to the static load on muscles. Bending forward while moving backward in muddy, wet soil during transplanting paddy causes fungal infections of the skin (dermatitis) and severe lower back strain. Sitting on the ground and manually stripping groundnut pods from the root system using the thumb and fingers Causes blisters, cuts, and "Repetitive Strain Injury" (RSI) to the fingers and wrists.
Farm mechanization or agricultural tools and machinery are largely designed for men (who are generally taller and have greater upper-body strength), women suffer from disproportionate physical strain, leading to chronic health issues (Laxmi Prasanna, P., & Ravi Goud, E, 2022).
The physical toll is compounded by the "Double Burden." (Swarna Pragathi, M., & Anitha, M. 2020) Unlike male farmers, women's work does not end in the field. During morning they need to Fetching water (walking long distances in drought-prone villages), cooking, cleaning. During day time they work at farm full time (8 AM – 5 PM), evening livestock care and house hold chores. This is leading to chronic fatigue and nutritional anemia, as women often eat last and least.

Policy Recommendations

To address the systemic disparities identified in this study, the following policy interventions are recommended for the empowerment of farm women in YSR District:
Promotion of Joint Land Titling (Joint Pattadar Passbooks): The primary barrier to credit access is the lack of land titles. Policy frameworks must aggressively promote Joint Pattadar Passbooks for husbands and wives. This would legally recognize women as co-owners, enabling them to access institutional credit (crop loans) and government benefits like Rythu Bharosa directly. This intervention directly counters the exclusion highlighted by the Agriculture Census (2015-16).
Gender-Friendly Farm Mechanization: Given the high prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders among women due to manual weeding and groundnut picking (Prasanna & Mohapatra, 2020), there is an urgent

need to subsidize drudgery-reducing tools. The Department of Agriculture should distribute gender-friendly equipment—such as wheel hoes, groundnut decorticators, and lightweight knapsack sprayers—specifically designed for female ergonomics.

Institutionalizing the "Loan Eligibility Card" (LEC) for Tenant Women: Since 81% of the female workforces are laborers or tenant farmers without land, the state must strengthen the Loan Eligibility Card (LEC) system. This allows landless women cultivators to access bank finance without requiring a land mortgage, breaking the cycle of dependence on high-interest private moneylenders.

Strengthening Women-Led FPOs (Farmer Producer Organizations): To improve decision-making power in marketing, existing Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Kadapa should be federated into women-led Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). As noted by Reddy & Rao (2020), collective marketing increases bargaining power. These FPOs can aggregate produce (like groundnuts and bengal gram) to bypass middlemen, ensuring women control the financial proceeds of their labor.

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