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## Challenges faced by women farmers during the COVID-19, pandemic

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound and far-reaching effects on global agriculture, disrupting supply chains, markets, and livelihoods. Women constitute a significant portion of the agricultural workforce worldwide, and their contributions are fundamental to food security and rural economies. However, they face unique challenges that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The research uncovers a multitude of hurdles encompassing economic, social, and health dimensions. Economically, women farmers experienced reduced access to markets, financial resources, and agricultural inputs. Socially, they encountered increased care giving responsibilities, limited mobility, and a surge in gender-based violence. Furthermore, the pandemic's health implications had dire consequences on the well-being of women in agriculture. Despite these formidable challenges, women farmers exhibited remarkable resilience and adaptability. They employed various coping mechanisms, such as diversification of income sources and participation in community support networks, to navigate the crisis. This study also evaluates the effectiveness of governmental and non-governmental support initiatives in addressing the specific needs of women in agriculture.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, women farmers, gender disparities, agriculture, resilience

### Introduction

Agriculture, as the backbone of global food security and a cornerstone of rural economies, has always been a sector shaped by both opportunity and adversity. The COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented global health crisis, emerged as a sudden and formidable test for the world's agricultural systems. As nations grappled with lockdowns, supply chain disruptions, and economic uncertainties, the resilience and adaptability of their agricultural sectors came to the forefront. However, within the vast expanse of global agriculture, a distinct and often-overlooked demographic group faced unique and compounded challenges during this crisis – women farmers. Women have long been the silent heroines of agriculture, contributing significantly to food production and rural economies. Yet, they have remained disproportionately marginalized and underrepresented in discussions on agricultural policy and crisis management. The COVID-19 pandemic magnified this imbalance, thrusting women farmers into the spotlight as they grappled with multifaceted challenges that threatened their livelihoods and well-being. A critical exploration of the challenges faced by women farmers during the COVID-19 pandemic. It delves into the economic, social, and health-related obstacles that emerged as distinct impediments to their agricultural pursuits. From disrupted market access and diminished income sources to increased care giving responsibilities and heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence, women in agriculture found themselves navigating a complex and often intersecting web of challenges.

As the pandemic unfolded, women farmers demonstrated remarkable resilience and resourcefulness. They harnessed their local knowledge and community ties to adapt to the changing landscape of agriculture. Diversifying income sources, participating in local food networks, and leveraging digital technologies became strategies employed by women to navigate these tumultuous times.

This research not only aims to shed light on the struggles of women farmers but also to recognize their strengths and resilience. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, empirical data, and case studies, this study seeks to present a comprehensive picture of the challenges faced by women farmers during the pandemic and the strategies they employed to confront them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fault lines within global agriculture and the gender disparities that persist within the sector. It has underscored the urgent need for gender-responsive policies and support mechanisms to address the unique vulnerabilities faced by women farmers during times of crisis. By elevating their voices and experiences, this research contributes to a more equitable and sustainable agricultural landscape, not just in times of crisis, but for the future of food security and rural development. We embark on a journey to unravel the multifaceted challenges and resilience of women farmers during the COVID-19 pandemic,

emphasizing the crucial role of gender equity in building more resilient and sustainable agricultural systems.

**Objectives**

- To analyze the challenges faced by women farmers throughout the Covid-19 period.

**Methodology**

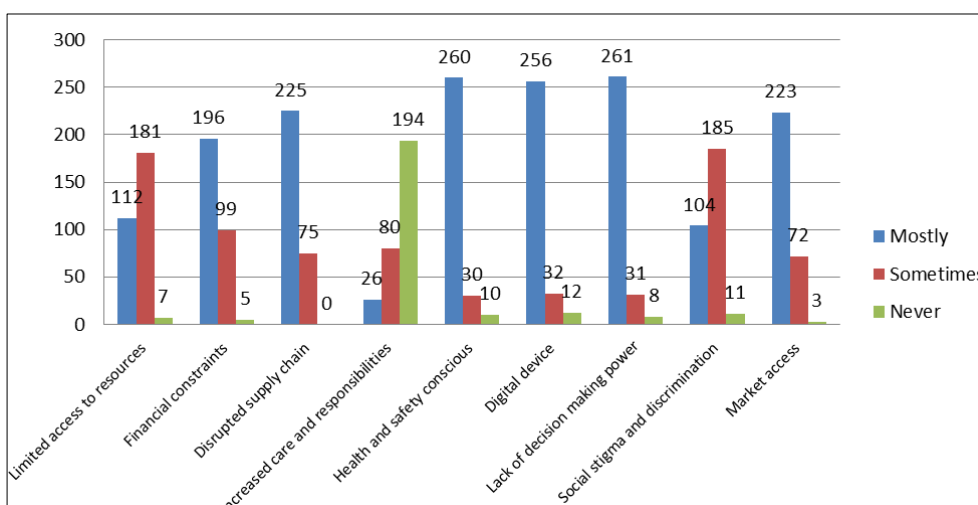
The research was carried out in the Kanpur district of Uttar Pradesh, which was specifically chosen for the purpose of the study. From a total of 10 blocks in the district, two were chosen at random: Kalyanpur and Chaubepur. A total sample size of 300 women farmers from the landless, marginal, and small farmer's categories was recruited using systematic random sampling from the specified block to perform the current inquiry. Age, caste, education, income, role, knowledge, performance, and so forth were investigated as dependent and independent factors. Percentage was used as a statistical technique.

**Table 1:** Challenges faced by women farmers during Covid-19 with weighted mean and rank

S. No.	Challenges faced during the pandemic	Percentage			Weighted Mean	Rank
		Mostly	Sometime	Never		
1.	Limited access to resources	37.33	60.33	2.33	39.17	7
2.	Financial constraints	65.33	33.00	1.67	43.94	6
3.	Disrupted supply chain	75.00	25.00	0.00	45.83	4
4.	Increased care and responsibilities	8.67	26.67	64.67	24.00	9
5.	Health and safety conscious	86.67	10.00	3.33	47.22	2
6.	Digital device	85.33	10.67	4.00	46.89	3
7.	Lack of decision making power	87.00	10.33	2.67	47.39	1
8.	Social stigma and discrimination	34.67	61.67	3.67	38.50	8
9.	Market access	74.33	24.00	1.00	45.33	5
	Average	61.62	29.08	9.30		

Women farmers were asked to identify the challenges during covid-19 lockdown. A cursory look of table 1 reveals that the factor “lack of decision making power” was ranked first with weighted mean 47.39 followed by “health and safety conscious” with weighted score 47.22 and ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, “digital device” was ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> with weighted score 46.89 followed by “disrupted supply chain” with weighted score 45.83 and ranked 4<sup>th</sup>, “market access” was ranked 5<sup>th</sup> with weighted

score 45.33. Similarly “financial constraints” was ranked 6<sup>th</sup> with weighted mean score 43.94 followed by “limited access to resources” with weighted mean score 39.17 and ranked 7<sup>th</sup>, “Social stigma and discrimination” was ranked 8<sup>th</sup> with weighted mean score 38.50 followed by “Increased care and responsibilities” with weighted mean score 24 and ranked 9<sup>th</sup> respectively.



**Fig 1:** challenges faced during the pandemic

**Conclusion**

In the crucible of the COVID-19 pandemic, women farmers have been exposed to a unique set of challenges that have underscored both their indispensable role in agriculture and

the disparities they face. Economic disruptions, reduced market access, and increased care giving responsibilities have strained their livelihoods and well-being. Furthermore, the pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities, leaving women

more susceptible to violence and exploitation. However, women farmers have also showcased remarkable resilience, leveraging diversified income sources, local food networks, and digital technologies to adapt to these adversities. This adaptability highlights their invaluable contributions to agricultural sustainability and food security. As we emerge from this crisis, it is imperative to recognize and address the persistent gender disparities in agriculture. Gender-sensitive policies and support mechanisms are crucial for ensuring the continued empowerment of women farmers and fostering a more resilient and equitable agricultural sector. The lessons learned during this pandemic underscore the need for sustained efforts to prioritize and uplift the vital role of women in agriculture, not just in times of crisis, but in the future of sustainable food production.

### Recommendation

- Develop and implement gender-sensitive agricultural policies that recognize and address the unique needs of women farmers.
- Ensure equitable access to land, resources, and credit for women in agriculture.
- Promote financial literacy programs to enhance women's financial management skills.
- Facilitate access to markets and value chains by supporting women's participation in farmer cooperatives and producer groups.
- Promote digital literacy among women farmers to enable them to leverage technology for market information, financial services, and agricultural extension.
- Strengthen agricultural extension services targeting women farmers to enhance their knowledge and skills.
- Raise awareness about health and hygiene practices, especially during health crises like pandemics.
- Encourage the active participation of women in decision-making processes at the community and household levels.
- Support initiatives that enhance the resilience of women farmers, such as crop diversification, climate-smart agriculture, and income-generating activities.

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