Social Constraints in Women Participation for Agriculture Development in the Shiwalik Hills, Haryana, India

Pratima Singh

The Shiwalik hill region in Haryana, India, is characterised by rainfed agriculture. The government has constructed earthen dams in this region to provide irrigation. Survey data from 50 villages with 582 households where such dams were constructed showed that proportion of irrigated area increased from 9% to 81%, wheat yields improved by 34%, and milk yields increased by 227% – the most spectacular achievement. This success story demonstrates the importance of women’s participation in village development, as traditionally, women in these villages handle the rearing of livestock and milk production and were thus responsible for the increase in production. However, women’s participation in decision making in agriculture is constrained by social customs in the male dominated society. The author studied the level of women’s participation in decision making in the area. Women faced problems in participating in the meetings of the hill resources management society (HRMS) constituted in each village to deal with irrigation issues. The results showed that about 85% of women could not attend meetings as they were either not informed or the time or place of the meeting was inconvenient for them. Of the 15% who attended, 3% only sat in the meetings for part of the time and 12% remained throughout the meeting. Of these who stayed, about 93% took no part in the discussion. These women felt their views had no value and their attendance was only to fulfil the minimum quorum requirement. Capacity building measures can substantially enhance women’s participation in decision making and rural development.