

Sustainable Food Production and Food Security among Tribal Women of Balangir District: Challenges and Opportunities

Ms. Debahuti Puta, Ms. Jayanti Majhi

Ph.D Research Scholar Department of Home Science

KISS Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar

Abstract

This study explores the role of tribal women of Balangir district in sustainable food production and food security, focusing on the challenges they face and the opportunities available for improving their contributions to food systems. Tribal women are integral to the agricultural practices within their communities, yet they encounter significant barriers, including limited access to capital, markets, and modern agricultural technologies. The relationship between food security and sustainable food production among tribal women is examined in this study using secondary data from many sources. Through their traditional knowledge and practices connected to sustainable food production, the findings show that tribal women are essential in ensuring food security for their families and communities. Sustainable agricultural methods, including organic farming and agroforestry, are important for improving food security in tribal groups, according to data from agencies like the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the Indian Institute of Rural Development. To guarantee food security for their family and communities, indigenous women must overcome considerable obstacles in gaining access to markets, resources, and decision-making authority, according to the research. Food insecurity, malnutrition, and poverty disproportionately impact tribal women, according to an examination of secondary data from sources including the District Level Household Survey (DLHS) and the National Family Health Survey (NFHS). The necessity of policies and initiatives that empower and assist tribal women in their endeavours to advance sustainable food production and food security is highlighted by this study. We can encourage more sustainable and equitable food systems by acknowledging and appreciating indigenous women's traditional knowledge and customs.

Key words: tribal women, food security, sustainable food production, communities

Introduction

Sustainable food production and food security are key to ensuring that communities have enough food to live healthy lives. This is especially important for vulnerable groups, such as tribal women, who face unique challenges. These women often have limited access to resources, and their traditional knowledge about farming is not always used to its full potential. Food security, which means having

enough food that is available, accessible, and used in a way that doesn't harm the environment, is particularly important in tribal areas, where farming is a main source of livelihood. Sustainable food production and food security are essential for ensuring that communities can access enough nutritious food to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. This becomes even more critical when we look at vulnerable groups, such as tribal women, who face a set of unique and complex challenges. These women, often living in rural and remote areas, typically have limited access to resources like land, financial support, and modern agricultural tools. Despite their hard work in food production, they are often excluded from decision-making processes, which reduces their ability to improve their conditions. Moreover, tribal women possess valuable traditional knowledge about farming, natural resource management, and sustainable agricultural practices. This knowledge, passed down through generations, can play a crucial role in improving food production in an environmentally sustainable way. However, it is often underutilized or not integrated into modern agricultural systems, leaving many women's skills and experiences untapped.

Food security, which ensures that food is not only available but also accessible and used in a way that supports long-term environmental health, is especially important in tribal regions. In these areas, farming is typically the main source of income and sustenance, making food security closely tied to economic stability. However, challenges such as climate change, poor infrastructure, lack of education, and gender inequalities often make it difficult for these communities to maintain consistent access to food. Ensuring food security in tribal regions goes beyond just growing food. It involves creating systems that allow for sustainable farming methods, improving access to resources, and enhancing the role of tribal women in food production. Empowering these women with the right tools, support, and education will not only improve their livelihoods but also contribute to the overall well-being of their communities. Their involvement in food production, when fully recognized and supported, has the potential to help create a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable food system.

Tribal Women of Balangir district and Their Role in Sustainable Food Production

In the Balangir district, tribal women are essential to both household food security and sustainable food production. They take part in practically every aspect of agriculture, such as preparing the soil, choosing seeds, planting them, pulling weeds, harvesting them, and storing them after harvest. Environmentally sustainable farming is supported by their traditional understanding of native seeds, crop rotation, soil fertility, and seasonal variations. They contribute to family nutrition and food diversity by managing small animals, maintaining kitchen gardens, and gathering forest foods in addition to fieldwork. They do, however, confront obstacles such as restricted land ownership, poor financing availability, irrigation, contemporary equipment, and agricultural education. Their ability to make decisions is further reduced by low literacy and social constraints. The region's sustainability and food security may be enhanced by expanding access to resources and combining traditional knowledge with better farming methods.

Challenges Faced by Tribal Women in Food Security

Limited Access to Land and Resources: Women have little access to fertile land and the resources needed for successful farming in many tribal areas due to the male-dominated nature of land ownership and management.

Barriers: Traditional gender norms may impose limitations on tribal women, limiting their participation in home and communal decision-making. Their access to technology, financing, and training that may increase their food security is impacted by this gender gap.

Stress: Unpredictable rainfall, droughts, and environmental degradation are only a few of the effects of climate change that tribal areas are particularly susceptible to. These changes worsen food poverty by disproportionately affecting women, who historically oversee food production.

Inadequate Services and Infrastructure: Tribal groups' options for food security are further restricted by a lack of suitable roads, marketplaces, and storage facilities, as well as restricted access to healthcare and education.

Opportunities for Empowering Tribal Women in Food Security

Indigenous Knowledge: Tribal women have important traditional knowledge about managing natural resources, sustainable agricultural methods, and regional food preservation techniques. Using this information can result in farming methods that are more ecologically conscious and sustainable.

Training and Education: To guarantee food security for their families and communities may be greatly enhanced by offering them training in contemporary farming methods, sustainable agricultural practices, and financial literacy.

Policy Reforms: Improving food security may be greatly aided by empowering indigenous women via laws that guarantee their access to resources, land, and decision-making authority.

Community-Led Initiatives: Food security may be achieved by assisting community-based groups and cooperatives run by indigenous women. This will boost access to resources, training, and market possibilities.

In conclusion, there are many obstacles that tribal women must overcome in order to produce and ensure food in a sustainable manner, but there are also plenty of chances to strengthen their position in agricultural development. Tribal women may help create more sustainable food systems that benefit both their communities and the environment by removing the obstacles they experience and providing them with the necessary resources and information.

Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by tribal women in sustainable food production and food security, with a focus on identifying strategies to enhance their participation, empowerment, and well-being in the context of sustainable food systems.

Objectives

- To assess the current status of sustainable food production and food security among tribal women in the study area.
- To identify the challenges faced by tribal women in accessing and controlling resources, markets, and decision-making processes related to sustainable food production and food security.
- To explore the opportunities and potential strategies for enhancing the participation and empowerment of tribal women in sustainable food production and food security.

Methodology

Authentic information collected straight from the sources for a particular study goal is known as primary data. It is unprocessed data gathered directly from sources. Ex: Surveys, interviews. Data that has been gathered by someone other than the user is referred to as secondary data. Ex: Books, journals, and government censuses. The current section of the text was written using secondary sources. Based on secondary data, this study is descriptive.

To assess the current status of sustainable food production and food security among tribal women in the study area.

This goal is to determine if the existing food production practices of tribal women in the research region are sustainable over the long run. It looks at crop varieties, land ownership trends, irrigation accessibility, the usage of conventional and environmentally friendly farming methods, and the accessibility of agricultural resources. Additionally, it evaluates the state of food security by examining the quantity, accessibility, and quality of food consumed in tribal families. This involves assessing nutritional status, dietary diversity, and reliance on commercial or governmental assistance programs like PDS and ICDS. Through an analysis of these factors, the study finds gaps and strengths that affect indigenous women's nutritional well-being and sustainable livelihoods.

To identify the challenges faced by tribal women in accessing and controlling resources, markets, and decision-making processes related to sustainable food production and food security.

This goal is to comprehend the obstacles that tribal women face when trying to manage and take advantage of opportunities and resources associated with food security and sustainable food production. It looks at things like restricted access to irrigation, seeds, fertilisers, loans, and

agricultural extension services, as well as limited land ownership. It also looks at the social and cultural barriers that prevent them from being involved in household-level food distribution and agricultural decisions. The study examines the effects of limited negotiating power, poor transportation, and market distance on their capacity to sell produce and make money. It also tackles the under-representation of women in agricultural cooperatives and local decision-making organisations. Finding these obstacles makes it easier to see the gaps that have a direct impact on their autonomy, means of subsistence, and nutritional health.

To explore the opportunities and potential strategies for enhancing the participation and empowerment of tribal women in sustainable food production and food security.

Finding workable solutions to boost tribal women's empowerment and active participation in sustainable food production and family food security is the goal of this purpose. It focusses on investigating options including capacity-building initiatives, access to training for skill development, promotion of traditional and climate-resilient farming practices, and assistance through cooperatives and self- help organisations. In order to bolster economic independence, the research also takes into account expanding access to credit, agricultural inputs, and government programs like MGNREGA, Mission Shakti, and PDS. Women's income and decision- making power may be increased by strengthening local food processing facilities, market connections, and value addition. Empowerment is further supported by promoting women's involvement in community organisations and policy formulation. Together, these tactics seek to enhance nutritional outcomes and livelihood sustainability.

Conclusion

Sustainable food production and food security among tribal women in Balangir area are still strongly correlated with socioeconomic circumstances, environmental limitations, and institutional support systems, according to the research based on secondary data. Inadequate access to land, irrigation, loans, markets, and decision- making platforms frequently limits the involvement of indigenous women, despite their important role in agricultural and household nutrition management. Productivity and food supply are further impacted by enduring problems including poor income, unpredictable weather, and reliance on conventional technologies. But the region also offers prospects through local self-help group projects, government welfare programs, women's collectives, and the development of climate-resilient crops. Women's empowerment, sustainable production methods, and improved food and nutritional security may all be achieved by bolstering training, resource access, and policy assistance.

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