ISSN: 3048-6580

AgroPedia
e - Publication for Agriculture Popular Articles
Volume: 03, Issue: 11 (November, 2026)
Available online at: **https://www.agropedia.co.in**

Unlocking Women's Potential in Agrifood Systems through Value Addition and Entrepreneurship

Mandeep Digra[1], **Mamoni Das**[2] and **Moloya Gogoi***

[1]*PhD Scholar, Department of Food and Nutrition, College of Community Science, AAU, Jorhat*
[2]*Professor, Department of Food and Nutrition, College of Community Science, AAU, Jorhat*
**Associate Professor, Department of Food and Nutrition, College of Community Science, AAU, Jorhat*

**Corresponding author - moloya.gogoi@aau.ac.in*

Introduction

Women make a significant contribution to agrifood systems in a range of activities both on the farm and beyond, in post- harvest operations, processing and marketing. However, their involvement does not always equate to equal access to resources, income or decision making. Studies on agriculture value chains reveal that there are gender disparities in access to value chain productive inputs, market opportunities, and control over value chain benefits (Quisumbing *et al*., 2021). Opportunities for women to participate in activities other than the primary agricultural production can be identified in food processing and value addition activities through the provision of opportunities for processing, packaging, marketing and small-scale enterprise development. In India, there is a significant employment potential in post farmgate food businesses, especially among women. Gupta *et al*. (2023) estimated that about 9.6 million women in India were engaged in post-farmgate food businesses and one-fourth of food businesses were women owned. On average, however, there are continuing gender differences in enterprise size with women's businesses being smaller than men's businesses.

Value Addition as an Opportunity for Women's Entrepreneurship

Value addition is the process of transforming agricultural products to more valuable and convenient products. Skills in processing, preservation, packaging and marketing can facilitate technical and entrepreneurial development and create new economic activities along the agriculture value chain that can offer new livelihood opportunities for women. A study done on food processing women entrepreneurs in food processing industries in India has revealed that food processing is an interesting field for the women entrepreneurship in the Indian food processing industries and among the factors that affect them in food processing industries, skills, resources, markets and institutional support have been identified (D'Silva & Bhat, 2022). But by itself, value chain participation is not enough to guarantee equitable economic returns. In the recent past, a systematic review on women's involvement in agriculture in India revealed that there were

various factors affecting women's economic involvement including access to credit, training, productive resources, market and decision making (Thabah *et al*., 2026). Thus, food processing interventions must engage women in food processing and enhance their access to resources, food processing skills and markets and provide opportunities to meaningfully engage in enterprise-related decisions.

Women's Participation in Agrifood Value Chains

However, women participate in various stages of agrifood value chains, with participation in some stages and opportunities having different characteristics, and with different benefits for women compared to men. Women are often engaged in post production operations such as processing and comparatively less involved in marketing and earning potential and productive assets. Pyburn *et al*. (2023) emphasized that women's participation in agrifood value chains should be assessed beyond their involvement in individual activities, with attention to the benefits derived from participation and the power relations influencing access to resources and decision-making.

Likewise, Prithika *et al*. (2024) emphasized the significance of women's agency, access to resources and benefits distribution when evaluating women's empowerment in agricultural value chains. Therefore, women's involvement in the entire material procurement, processing, quality control, packaging, marketing and income management process in food processing intervention is important.

Role of Self-Help Groups in Food Processing

Women can participate in livelihood and enterprise activities collectively through the medium of Self-Help Groups. Collective organisation can contribute to the access to information, knowledge, financial services and economic participation opportunities. Findings from rural India suggest that women's participation in SHGs has the potential to enhance access to information but not all types of information and can be a factor in women's empowerment in making some agricultural decisions (Raghunathan *et al*., 2019). Collective strategies can be helpful in food processing in areas of raw material procurement, equipment, production, packaging and marketing. These arrangements can be especially beneficial to women who have few resources on their own. Yet, women's participation in SHG does not necessarily resolve all the constraints on women's participation in economic activities as financial constraints, market access, household responsibilities and existing gender norms could still affect women's engagement with economic activities.

Capacity Building and Skill Development

Capacity building is an important sector of food processing as technical knowledge can impact product quality, safety and enterprise sustainability, and as it relates to women. Training can give women information about processing techniques, hygiene, food safety, product standardization, packaging, storage. Study conducted with women engaged in food processing sector in India has shown that training and training on entrepreneurship

development is relevant for the enhancement of knowledge in relation to livelihood related activities (Goel *et al*., 2018). But the technical skills alone might not be enough to create a viable business. Additionally, training must provide the opportunity for women to know about costing, pricing and conducting basic enterprise management so they can be more effective in various steps of the value chain.

Gender Responsive Approach to Food Processing

A gender responsive food processing approach should not just be a greater involvement of women in food processing, or an additional burden on their shoulders. Rather it should examine whether women are able to access appropriate technology, finance, markets, training and opportunities to be involved in decision making. Studies of the agricultural value chains indicate a connection between participation and empowerment, but they are not equivalents. Women can be active in an economy but have minimal control over productive resources, income or decisions (Quisumbing *et al*., 2021; Prithika *et al*., 2024). Thus, gender-sensitive food-processing interventions should ensure that women are involved in decisions on the product, processing technology, quality control, pricing, marketing and enterprise development or financial management. This could be a way to move women from the role of provider of processing labour to that of entrepreneur and decision maker.

Challenges in Women-Centred Food Processing

Even though women have access to the opportunities provided by food processing, they might be constrained by financial, technological, market, infrastructure or business information. Data from the post-farmgate food sector in India shows that food businesses owned by women operate on a smaller scale than those owned by men, suggesting that women have less access to resources and economic opportunities to run their businesses (Gupta *et al*., 2023). Time constraints can also affect women's participation as they are often expected to engage in income-generating activities and also in household and care work. This means that interventions that add to the processing workload but fail to provide access to appropriate technologies, resources and decision-making opportunities can actually lead to a greater workload with an equivalent or zero economic return for women. It is important, therefore, to discuss these constraints, in order to ensure that food processing plays a significant role in the economic empowerment of women.

From Food Processing to Women's Enterprise Development

There is a possibility to bring the indigenous knowledge along with the development of enterprises together through food processing. Value addition, product development, standardization, packaging and marketing can be an effective tool to create value for agricultural commodities for improving their market potential. In India, there is research that suggests the empowerment of women's entrepreneurship, skill development and improving their livelihoods through Smart Training and Institution building in food processing. (Bora & Deka, 2021) Studies in Assam show that women are engaged in food processing and in small business activities (Thakuria, 2022). Food processing enterprise development needs technical knowledge, resources, market potential

and entrepreneurial skills for women (Khan & Singh, 2023). Value addition would benefit women to change their food processing activity to product development, enterprise development and marketing.

Conclusion

Agrifood value chains offer opportunities for women's engagement in food processing and value addition, skill development, and entrepreneurship and income generation. But women empowerment is not limited to processing activities only! Evidence highlights resource access, skills, markets, agency/decision making. All of which should be incorporated into a gender-responsive approach, that combines appropriate technology, finance, collective organisation, market access and enterprise management with technical food-processing skills. This can help women shift their role from food value chain activities to value creation, from participating to becoming entrepreneurs and decision makers in food value chains.

References

Bora, M., & Deka, M. B. (2021). Impact of food processing and preservation training on knowledge, attitude, practice and level of empowerment of rural women. *Indian Research Journal of Extension Education, 21*(4), 99–105.

D'Silva, R. J., & Bhat, G. S. (2022). A systematic review on women entrepreneurship in food processing sector. *International Journal of Case Studies in Business, IT and Education, 6*(2), 15–49. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6963752.

Goel, R., Singla, R., & Singh, J. (2018). Women empowerment through food processing-A case study. *Journal of Agricultural Extension Management, 19*(1), 113–120.

Gupta, M., Kishore, A., Roy, D., & Saroj, S. (2023). Post-farmgate food businesses of India: The enterprises, the entrepreneurs, and the employees. *Global Food Security, 36*, 100665. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2022.100665.

Khan, A., & Singh, A. K. (2023). The relevance of food processing industry in women empowerment: A case study of Prayagraj district in India. *Asian Review of Social Sciences, 12*(1), 15–18. https://doi.org/10.51983/arss-2023.12.1.3315.

Pyburn, R., Slavchevska, V., &Kruijssen, F. (2023). Gender dynamics in agrifood value chains: Advances in research and practice over the last decade. *Global Food Security, 39*, 100721. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2023.100721.

Prithika, C., Anjugam, M., & Sivasankari, B. (2024). Deciphering the crux of women's empowerment in agricultural value chains: A scoping review. *Outlook on Agriculture, 53*(4), 302–319. https://doi.org/10.1177/00307270241267787.

Quisumbing, A. R., Heckert, J., Faas, S., Ramani, G. V., Raghunathan, K., Malapit, H. J., & the pro-WEAI for Market Inclusion Study Team. (2021). Women's empowerment and gender equality in agricultural value chains: Evidence from four countries in Asia and Africa. *Food Security, 13*, 1101–1124. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-021-01193-5.

Raghunathan, K., Kannan, S., & Quisumbing, A. R. (2019). Can women's self-help groups

improve access to information, decision-making, and agricultural practices? The Indian case. *Agricultural Economics, 50*(5), 567–580. https://doi.org/10.1111/agec.12510.

Thabah, A. K., Bey, S., Basumatary, P., Waikhom, A. C., Nath, A., Sileshi, G. W., Das, A. K., & Nath, A. J. (2026). Women's contributions, opportunities, and challenges in Indian agriculture: A systematic review. *CABI Agriculture and Bioscience, 7*, 29. https://doi.org/10.1079/ab.2026.0029.

Thakuria, K. (2022). A critical study of women participation in food processing in relation to their small scale industry in Assam. *International Journal of Food and Nutritional Sciences, 11*(11), 4475–4480.