

Role of Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana in Empowering Rural Agrarian Women

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Abstract

In India, a large proportion of the population engages in agricultural practices. According to the agricultural census 2015-16, female operational land holding is 13.96% which is highest under the marginal category (72%) followed by the small (17%) and semi-medium (8.1%). This shows that more than 95% of female operational land holdings are less than 4 hectares of land. The *Mahila Kisan Shashaktikarna Pariyojana* (MKSP) was introduced in 2011 as an independent livelihood initiative targeting agrarian women under *Deendayal Antyodaya Yojna – National Rural Livelihood Mission* (DAY-NRLM). This paper explores the role of MKSP in enhancing the participation and productivity of women in agriculture. It examines the various components of the program, including capacity building, access to resources, and market linkages. The paper also analyzes the impact of MKSP on women's livelihoods, their decision-making power within households, and their overall empowerment. The research provides an overview of MKSP and its potential in promoting gender equality and sustainable agriculture in rural India. The methodology involves collecting primary data by Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with case studies and secondary data from the government reports and existing papers on women's role in agriculture and rural development examined to contextualise MKSP within the broader empowerment of rural agrarian women. The universe for the research is the Mandsaur district of Madhya Pradesh.

Keywords: Mahila Kisan Shashaktikarna Pariyojana (MKSP), Rural Development, Livelihood, Women empowerment, Agrarian Women

Introduction

Agriculture in India is not merely an occupation but a way of life for millions, especially in rural areas. Rural women form the most productive workforce in the economy of the majority of developing nations including India. (MKSP: *Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana*, n.d.). Although women have actively participated in agricultural activities, they often lack formal recognition and access to resources, limiting their productivity and economic contributions. Female farmers often engage in marginal and small-scale landholdings, so their financial security remains precarious. Gender inequality is built in our society due to patriarchy so in all spheres of our lives, including agriculture (Uma & Sinhamahapatra, 2021). A strong patriarchal society with deep-rooted socio-cultural values continues to affect the progress of women's empowerment in the country (Singla, 2018).

The women contribute right around multiple times a greater amount of their profit than the men on the prosperity of the family, including family wellbeing, youngster wellbeing, training, and sustenance. However, they have less access than men to farming-related resources, data sources, and administrations. (Balamurugan & Sujalvelu, 2021). The importance of training to farm women is progressively realized all over the world. It is observed that farm women play a significant role in agriculture and allied activities. (Bhati et al., 2021). Women's work in agriculture as farmers all alone account, as unpaid labourers on family, and as paid or unpaid workers on different farmers and rural ventures (Balamurugan & Sujalvelu, 2021).

In India, about 74 per cent of the entire female workforce is engaged in agricultural operations. In crop production, from soil preparation to post-harvest activities, rural women play key roles by working with full passion. It is estimated that women are responsible for 70 per cent of actual farm work. Traditionally seed cleaning, seed grading, sowing, planting, weeding, thinning, gap filling, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, feeding cattle and looking after animals and poultry birds are the main jobs for women doing work on farms (Tyagi, 2022). Rural women also carried out different farm activities along with livestock and other associated activities like cleaning animal sheds, collection of farm yard manure, fodder collection, watering, preparation of dung cakes, milking, milk processing and preparation of ghee etc. (Patra et al., 2018).

Literature Review

The United Nations (UN) (2017) “*MKSP handbook*” provides a comprehensive overview of the program aimed at empowering women in agriculture. The context highlights the significant role of women in India's agricultural sector, despite their limited access to resources and support. MKSP, launched as part of the Deendayal Antodaya Yojana-NRLM, seeks to improve the status of women farmers by enhancing their opportunities and ensuring their inclusion in the agricultural system. It also includes several success stories of women farmers who have benefited from MKSP interventions, such as improved crop yields, increased income, and enhanced food security and highlights the transformative impact of MKSP on women farmers and outlines the strategies and expected outcomes of the program.

Sharma et al., (2016) research report “*Mainstreaming Gender and Empowering Women in Agriculture in the Thar Region of India*” highlights the significant contributions of women to agriculture and the need for gender-responsive approaches to ensure their empowerment and participation in decision-making processes. It covers various aspects, including the global, national, and local scenarios of women's roles in agriculture, key challenges faced by women in the Thar region, and gender-responsive strategies implemented by International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS). The report emphasizes the importance of capacity building, sustainable agricultural practices, and economic and social impact on women farmers. It concludes with recommendations for continued support, gender sensitization, and better market linkages for women farmers, underscoring the transformative impact of gender-responsive interventions on women farmers in the Thar region and the importance of continued support and innovation for sustainable development.

Patel & Sethi (2021) article “*Rural Women: Key to New India’s Agrarian Revolution*” elaborates on the concept of gender mainstreaming in agriculture, highlight the importance of gender mainstreaming in agriculture, which involves providing rural women with access to resources, education, skill development, and healthcare facilities. The article also mentions the MKSP scheme, which focuses on skill development and capacity building for rural women farmers. The article underscores the need for continued efforts to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of rural women, which are essential for achieving sustainable development goals by 2030.

Firdaus & Rizvi (2023) article “*Women's Empowerment Outcome: Experiences from DAY-NRLM-BRLP in Gaya*” discusses the limited personal autonomy, low influence on household decision-making, and poor access to credit and markets that these women experience. The study also explores the effectiveness of DAY-NRLM in providing income-generating assets, such as bank credit and government subsidies, and its role in promoting self-employment and entrepreneurship among Muslim women. The article concludes with policy suggestions to improve the effectiveness of DAY-NRLM, including the need for detailed surveys to identify local business opportunities, better alignment of training programs with the interests of women, and enhanced support from implementing agencies like Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), and Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC).

Singh et al., (2017) report “*Independent Assessment of Design, Strategies, and Impacts of DAY-NRLM*” evaluates that MKSP focuses on empowering women in agriculture by enhancing their participation, productivity, and access to resources through the Self-Help Group (SHG) model. The assessment highlights the need for enhanced training programs, improved convergence with other schemes, and strategies to scale up and diversify livelihoods for marginalized communities. Overall, the findings demonstrate the transformative potential of these initiatives while emphasizing the importance of addressing existing limitations for long-term impact.

Banerjee & Kumar (2017) report on *Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) - An Assessment Report of Shroffs Foundation Trusts's Engagement with MKSP* highlights the program's impact on women farmers, focusing on empowerment, capacity building, and sustainable agricultural practices. The report also discusses the economic and social impact of the program, noting increased agricultural income, better food security, and improved social status of women in the community. Challenges such as water scarcity and the need for continued support and funding are also addressed. The report concludes with recommendations for continued support, gender sensitization, and better market linkages for women farmers. Overall, the report underscores the transformative impact of MKSP on women farmers in Gujarat and the importance of sustained support and innovation for sustainable development.

Project Implementing Agency (PIA) Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) (2015) report “*Enhancing Farm Livelihoods of Women SHGs in Mahakaushal Region of Madhya Pradesh*” emphasises the core components of DAY-NRLM, which include social mobilization, financial inclusion, sustainable livelihoods, and convergence and entitlements. It highlights the importance of building strong community institutions and providing necessary support to ensure the success of these initiatives. Overall, the document

underscores the mission's commitment to reducing poverty and promoting inclusive development in rural India.

Rashida & Mercykutty (2020) research article “*MKSP Scheme: An Effective Approach for Uplifting 'Kudumbashree' Farm Women in Kerala*” examines the scheme's effectiveness across five dimensions: socio-economic development, agricultural input supply, institutional support, knowledge and capacity building, and empowerment. It also highlights that empowerment and socio-economic development were the most impactful dimensions, with increased access to agricultural inputs, self-employment opportunities, and enhanced knowledge in organic farming and natural resource management. Women farmers reported increased income and productivity due to the scheme's support. However, challenges like limited input supply and inadequate market interventions were noted, particularly for banana farmers compared to vegetable farmers.

Ghimire & Haloi (2017) study “*Role of MKSP in Socio-economic Development of the Rural Agricultural Women of Assam*” highlights the integration of capacity-building programs, such as training in sustainable agricultural practices, soil and water conservation, and Integrated Pest Management. It also emphasizes the promotion of non-farm income opportunities for women lacking assets like land or livestock. Community Resource Persons (CRPs) play a critical role in the program, acting as knowledge facilitators and catalysts for change within their communities. The initiative addresses socio-political issues and empowers women farmers through training on rights, governance, and financial management (Ghimire & Haloi, 2017).

Bage et al., (2019) paper “*Study on the Impact of Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) in empowering the Tribal Women of M.Rampur Block of Kalahandi District*” highlights significant gaps in women's access to resources such as land, credit, and modern farming techniques. Tribal women, predominantly engaged in labor-intensive and unpaid agricultural work, benefit from MKSP's focus on capacity-building initiatives such as training in soil health, organic farming, and sustainable agriculture practices. However, issues like low literacy levels, poor economic autonomy, and traditional societal constraints continue to hinder their full empowerment.

Research Methodology

This is based on the descriptive research design, in which the Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) are used for collecting primary data with the help of a semi-structured questionnaire. The universe for the primary data collection is the Mandasaur district of Madhya Pradesh. The sample was selected through the non-probability sampling sub-types purposive sampling and convenient sampling. In purposive sampling the identification of beneficiaries through secondary data collected from the Department of DAY-NRLM which comes under the Janpad Panchayat office at the Tehsil level in the three-tier system Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). In selecting villages, convenient sampling was used under three villages of Garoth Tehsil i.e., Barkheda Loya, Banjari and Basgoan. These three villages have different numbers of beneficiaries, so there are disproportionate respondents from each village. Secondary data was collected through various research papers, government reports and project reports of various organisations from different states. There were 87 respondents who interviewed for the study.

Area and People

Mandsaur district located in the northwest corner of Madhya Pradesh, shares borders with Rajasthan. The district has an agricultural economy, with soybean being the primary crop alongside wheat, maize, and gram. The net sown area in 2009-2010 was reported at 175,600 hectares, and irrigation relies heavily on wells, covering 144,114 hectares. As per the 2011 census, the population of Mandsaur district is 1,339,832, the sex ratio is 966 and the literacy rate is 72.75% (*Demography | District Administration Mandsaur, Government of Madhya Pradesh | India, 2011*).

The district comprises five Community Development (C.D.) blocks: Bhanpura, Malhargarh, Garoth, Mandsaur, and Sitamau, with 933 villages and 440 gram panchayats. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes represent significant demographic groups, with varying population concentrations across the district's villages. The population of three villages of Garoth tehsil, scheduled caste (SC) in Banjari is 11-20% and in Barkheda Loya and Basgoan are 21-30% and scheduled tribe (ST) in Banjari and Basgoan are Nil and in Barkheda loya less than 5% (*Census | District Administration Mandsaur, Government of Madhya Pradesh | India, 2011*).

Overview of Scheme

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) is the flagship program of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) for promoting poverty reduction through building strong institutions for the poor, particularly women, and enabling these institutions to access a range of financial services and livelihoods. DAY-NRLM adopts a demand-driven approach, enabling the States to formulate their own State-specific poverty reduction action plans. The blocks and districts in which all the components of DAY-NRLM would be implemented, either through the State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLM) or partner institutions or Non-government Organisation (NGO)s, would be the intensive blocks and districts, whereas the remaining would be non-intensive blocks and districts. National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) is a restructured version of restructuring Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY). NRLM was renamed as DAY-NRLM (Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission) w.e.f. March 29, 2016 (*Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission, 2016*).

DAY-NRLM has a significant initiative aimed at reducing poverty by empowering rural poor households. By covering 7 crore rural poor households across 600 districts, 6000 blocks, 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats, and 6 lakh villages, NRLM aims to create self-managed Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and federated institutions.

The mission focuses on enhancing the capabilities of the poor by providing them with information, knowledge, skills, tools, finance, and opportunities for collectivization. This approach helps them participate more effectively in the growing economy of the country. It also aims to facilitate increased access to rights, entitlements, and public services for the poor, while promoting diversified risk and better social indicators of empowerment. The mission's core values include the inclusion of the poorest, transparency, accountability, community self-reliance, and self-dependence.

Under DAY-NRLM, various sub-schemes like Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP), Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP), National Rural Economic Transformation Project (NRETP), Deendayal Upadhyay Gramin Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETI) are being implemented for enhancing the income on sustainable basis of the rural poor (*Rural Development Schemes Through Self-Help Groups*, 2024). DAY-NRLM aims at eliminating rural poverty by enhancing self-employment and skilled-wage employment opportunities to the rural poor, in a phased manner. Towards this objective, the Mission seeks to strengthen and diversify the livelihood assets of the poor, and improve their incomes and quality of life. (Singh et al., 2017).

Start-Up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) is implemented by DAY-NRLM, Ministry of Rural Development, as a sub-scheme since 2016. With an objective to support the rural poor come out of poverty, supporting them setup enterprises and provide support till the enterprises stabilize, SVEP focusses on providing self-employment opportunities with financial assistance and training in business management and soft skills while creating local community cadres for promotion of enterprises (*Start-Up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) Is Propelling Enterprises in Rural Areas and Building Rural Entrepreneurs | Ministry of Rural Development | Government of India*, 2020).

National Rural Economic Transformation Project (NRETP) under the DAY-NRLM through loan assistance (IBRD Credit) from World Bank. The technical assistance provided by NRETP and the higher-level interventions facilitated by the project will enhance the livelihoods promotion and access to finance and scale-up initiatives on digital finance and livelihood interventions. Innovative projects will be undertaken under NRETP to pilot alternate channels of financial inclusion, creating value chains around rural products, introduce innovative models in livelihoods promotion and access to finance and scale-up initiatives on digital finance and livelihoods interventions (*National Rural Economic Transformation Project under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)*, 2019).

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) is a skill training and placement program of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD). The program focuses on the rural poor youth and its emphasis on sustainable employment through the prominence and incentives given to post-placement tracking, retention, and career progression. DDU-GKY is designed to provide high-quality skill training opportunities to the rural poor, and also to establish a larger ecosystem that supports trained candidates to secure a better future. DDU-GKY aims to skill rural youth who are poor and provide them with jobs having regular monthly wages at or above the minimum wage (*Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana*, 2014).

Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETI) are district-level Rural Self Employment Training Institutes managed by the banks and funded by Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD). Rural Self Employment Training Institutes provide free of cost skill training and credit assistance to rural unemployed youth in the age group of 18-45 years. RSETIs provide mentorship with the purpose of promoting self-employment among rural poor in order to enhance their livelihood opportunities and mitigate hardships (*Rural Self Employment Training Institutes | Ministry of Rural Development | Government of India*, 2023).

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) sub-component of (DAY-NRLM) to address these challenges and enhance women's roles in agriculture in 2011. The primary objective of the MKSP is to empower women in agriculture by making systematic investments to enhance their participation and productivity, as also create and sustain agriculture-based livelihoods of rural women. By establishing efficient local resource-based agriculture, wherein women in agriculture gain more control over the production resources and manage the support systems, the project seeks to enable them to gain better access to the inputs and services provided by the government and other agencies. Once the production capacities of women in agriculture improve, food security ensues for their families and communities. It aims at bringing at least one woman member from each identified rural poor household under the self-help group (SHG) network in a time-bound manner. The primary objective is to empower women by making systematic investments to enhance their participation and productivity in agriculture and allied activities to create sustainable livelihood opportunities (Pooja et al., 2021). The initiative focuses on enabling women to gain control over agricultural resources and improving their access to inputs and services, contributing to food security for their families and communities. The MKSP has been instrumental in increasing the visibility of women in allied activities as an interest group where women SHG members are trained in allied sectors.

Finding and Discussion

In the scheduled interview the question about awareness about the MKSP scheme to the beneficiary. For this question more than 95% of respondents said that they were not aware of the MKSP, they heard about livelihood mission only. But, when they asked about the activities all the beneficiaries said that they are part of Self Help Groups (SHGs) which fall under the MKSP.

Table 1: Number of Mahila Kisan under the Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

S.No.	Village	Number of Mahila Kisan	SHG
1	Barkheda Loya	10	Dostana
2	Basgoan	10	Jai Maa Kali
3	Banjari	11	Jay Maa Sherawali SHG
		10	Jay Maa Durga SHG
		11	Jay Ambe
		10	Durga SHG
		13	Dhudhakheri Mataji Swayam Sahayata Samuh
		12	Balaji Swayam Sahayata Samuh

Source: Secondary Data from the department of DAY-NRLM under Janpad Panchayat

The above table shows that three villages have 8 SHGs and there are 87 mahila kisan who registered under these SHGs.

At the education level, 51.11% of respondents said that they never got any education. But, they know the counting which is essential for financial-related matters. The rest 49.89% got an

education including primary and middle education. None of the respondents said that they get secondary education or more.

Landholding-related questions were asked in scheduled interviews 24.13% of respondents said that they own land in their name which was also verified through the website (*Madhya Pradesh*, 2024). In this, all the respondents who are land owners said that they all fall under the Marginal and Small farmer (0-2 hectares).

Table 2: Improvement in various dimensions

S.No.	Items	Yes (%)	No (%)	Can't Say (%)
1	Income	31.03	22.98	45.99
2	Education Level	62.06	21.83	16.11
3	Access to Market	27.5	71.26	1.24
4	Access to financial resources such as loans, government subsidies	8.04	19.54	72.42
5	Training and Resources	0	8.04	91.96

The first item, improvement in income-related questions answered by the respondents said that wholesome authority-related financial matters lie with the male member of the family. So, there is no improvement in their income, but it improves the financial conditions of the family overall at some level. MKSP provides them the other source of income other than agriculture as well as daily wage labour.

Second item, improvement in education level, respondents said that no improvement in their education, but they are more concerned about their child's education. They want their children also get a good education and get a good job (Sarkari Naukari).

In the third item, role in decision making most of the women in all three villages said that all the decisions related to household matters were taken by the male person or who is head of the family. But, in Banjari village there are 27.5% respondents belong to Banjara community, these respondents said that when in the absence of male¹, the senior female member of the family take all decision². In the presence of male members, all the decisions related to family matters are taken by males only.

In the fourth item, most of the respondents said that they did not know about the loans and government subsidies. But, when asked about the bank account open under Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), under this scheme most of the respondents now have bank accounts. This helps them to join the banking system.

¹ When a male member of the family goes to Kamra (migrating from one place to another to sell various products, especially woollen blankets).

² Respondents said that males usually went to Kamra, so they prefer the girl child because only the girl child stays with them and helps in the household and other activities.

In the fifth item, training and resources under the schemes, then all the beneficiaries as well as the person who provided the secondary data said that there are no training programs.

Challenges with NRLM-MKSP

In the recent news article, the Aadhaar linking of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) under the State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MPSRLM) revealed major discrepancies in beneficiary records. Of the previously recorded 5.04 lakh SHGs, around 40,000 groups and nearly 6 lakh women members were found to be inactive or untraceable post-verification. The state government attributed this to the fact that these women were no longer participating in group activities. This revelation has raised concerns about the misallocation of funds, as the government had been allocating approximately ₹115 crore annually to support these groups. Payment to SHGs is typically disbursed in three stages—initial capital, revolving fund, and community investment fund—via direct benefit transfers. The verification process has now been strengthened, and only Aadhaar-linked, active SHGs and members will be eligible for benefits. As a result, the verified numbers have dropped to 4.16 lakh SHGs and 49.12 lakh women. Between 2020 and 2025, the mission received over ₹2,600 crore in budgetary support, of which a significant portion has already been spent (*When Aadhaar Was Linked, 40 Thousand Groups and 6 Lakh Women Disappeared*, 2025).

In a notable case highlighting governance challenges within the Madhya Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MPSRLM), a block manager in Chhindwara district was caught red-handed accepting a bribe (रिश्तत लेते रंगेहाथ पकड़ाया आजीविका मिशन का अधिकारी, 2025). These are a couple of examples in related to the NRLM- MKSP faced challenges in implementation of schemes.

Conclusion

The research highlights the potential and challenges of the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) in empowering rural agrarian women in the Mandsaur district, Madhya Pradesh. While the scheme demonstrates intent to enhance women's participation and productivity in agriculture, the findings suggest gaps in awareness, training, and resource accessibility that limit its impact.

Key observations reveal that a majority of beneficiaries are unaware of the MKSP as a distinct initiative, although they participate in activities through Self-Help Groups (SHGs). This underscores the need for improved communication and targeted awareness campaigns about the program's benefits. Additionally, the absence of training programs indicates a missed opportunity to enhance the skills and capabilities of women farmers, which could significantly improve agricultural productivity and household income.

The socioeconomic dimensions of the study reveal that education remains a critical barrier, with over half of the respondents having received no formal education. However, the women expressed aspirations for their children's education, indicating a generational shift in attitudes toward learning. Limited land ownership, restricted access to financial resources, and the patriarchal household structure further constrain women's autonomy and decision-making power.

The above case of linking Aadhaar also underscores the need for robust beneficiary monitoring systems in public welfare programs to ensure transparency, accountability, and effective utilisation of funds.

Despite these challenges, MKSP has contributed to marginal improvements in household income and financial inclusion, particularly through increased participation in the banking system via initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY). The study highlights the potential of MKSP to be a transformative program if its implementation is strengthened through localized training, enhanced resource provision, and systematic capacity building.

In conclusion, the MKSP has laid a foundation for empowering rural women in agriculture but requires strategic interventions to maximize its impact. A focused approach that combines awareness generation, capacity building, and gender-sensitive policy implementation can pave the way for achieving greater gender equity, improved livelihoods, and sustainable rural development. Future efforts must also address deep-rooted sociocultural norms that inhibit women's empowerment in agrarian settings.

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