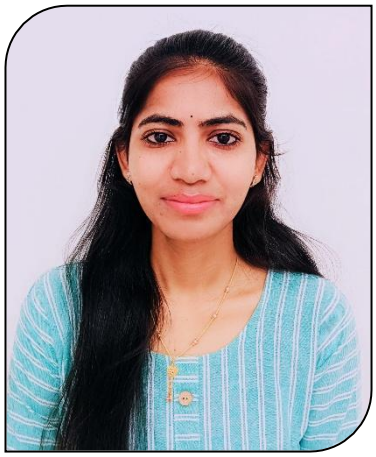
www.journalworlds.com
AGRI JOURNAL WORLD
VOL. 5 ISSUE 3 JULY-SEPTEMBER, 2025

PRIVATIZING EXTENSION SERVICES: IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER EQUITY IN AGRICULTURE

Nagireddy Chandi Priya

Teaching Associate, College of Horticulture, Chinalataripi, Dr. YSR Horticultural University, Andhra Pradesh

**Corresponding author email: priya135nagireddy@gmail.com*



ABSTRACT

The shift from public to private agricultural extension services is transforming farmers' access to knowledge, technology, and advice. While privatization enhances efficiency and innovation, it raises serious gender equity concerns. Women, vital yet often overlooked in agriculture, face barriers in accessing information and resources. Market-driven models may marginalize them due to costs, mobility limits, digital gaps, and male-dominated structures. Yet, opportunities exist through digital inclusion, women-led models, and gender-responsive partnerships. This article explores global evidence and offers policy recommendations to ensure privatized extension systems advance, not hinder, gender equity in agriculture..

KEYWORDS: Agricultural extension, Digital divide, Gender equity, Privatization, Women farmers

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural extension services have historically been a cornerstone of rural development, bridging the gap between research institutions and farming communities. These services facilitate technology adoption, productivity improvement, and decision-making. Traditionally provided by public institutions, extension services are increasingly being privatized due to fiscal pressures, inefficiencies, and the demand for modern, customized solutions (Anderson and Feder, 2007). However, this transition raises fundamental questions about inclusion, especially for rural women, who form a critical part of the agricultural workforce yet remain marginalized in access to land, finance, training, and services (FAO, 2011). This paper explores the implications of privatizing extension services for gender equity in agriculture, with a focus on both structural challenges and emerging opportunities.

WOMEN'S ROLE IN AGRICULTURE: AN OVERLOOKED MAJORITY

In developing countries, women account for 40-60 percent of the agricultural labor force. In India, women's share is estimated at nearly 60 percent (Government of India, 2018). They are involved in sowing, weeding, harvesting, and post-harvest processing. Despite this, they own less than 13 percent of agricultural land and face limited access to credit, markets, and extension services (World Bank et al., 2009). Extension systems have often failed to account for gender-specific constraints, delivering services through male agents or focusing on crops traditionally managed by men (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011).

THE SHIFT TOWARD PRIVATIZATION

Privatization in extension services refers to the involvement of non-state actors, including agribusinesses, digital service providers, and NGO's - in providing advisory and support services, often on a fee-for-service basis. This model, while offering customization and innovation, tends to prioritize commercial viability. This can systematically disadvantage women, who may lack the purchasing power, land ownership, or technological access required to engage with such services (Rivera & Qamar, 2003; World Bank *et al.,* 2009).

Table 1. Comparative reach of Public Vs Private Extension Services

Type of Extension	Target Group	Inclusion of Women (%)
Public Extension	Smallholder Farmers	42
Private Extension	Commercial Farmers	18
PPP Models	Mixed	35

GENDERED IMPLICATIONS OF PRIVATIZATION

Privatized extension services can deepen existing gender gaps in agriculture. Key gender constraints includes:

1) **Affordability:** Women often lack control over financial resources, limiting their ability to pay for extension services (World Bank *et al.,* 2009).
2) **Technology access barriers:** Digital platforms dominate privatized extension, but many women face barriers to mobile phone ownership and digital literacy (Global System for Mobile communication Association, 2020).

- **Mobility Constraints:** Cultural norms and household responsibilities restrict women's mobility, making it harder to access field-based services (Meinzen-Dick *et al.,* 2011).

- Market orientation of private services favors larger scale or commercial clients, male-owned farms, excluding subsistence-level women farmers.

INCLUSIVE MODELS AND INNOVATIONS

There are emerging models of inclusive extension that integrate gender-responsive features:

- **Female Extension Agents:** Hiring women increases access for female farmers (Christoplos, 2010).
- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** These arrangements can subsidize services for marginalized groups while maintaining innovation.
- **Digital Innovations:** Voice-based and vernacular content platforms (e.g., Digital Green) cater to women's unique needs (Gandhi *et al.*, 2009).
- **Women-Led Service Models:** Promoting women agri-entrepreneurs enhances local leadership and access.

CASE STUDIES

- ✓ **e-Choupal (India):** A digital platform that enhanced access to information but initially failed to engage women due to digital and social gaps (Kumar, 2004).
- ✓ **Digital Green:** Uses community-based video to teach farming techniques, particularly effective for women in India and Ethiopia (Gandhi *et al.*, 2009).
- ✓ **M-Shamba (Kenya):** A mobile platform delivering advice through SMS and voice, increasing inclusion among women and smallholders (GSMA, 2020).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Develop gender-sensitive extension policies that require disaggregated data collection and inclusive targeting (Meinzen-Dick *et al.*, 2011).
- ✓ Invest in women's digital skills and capacity-building.
- ✓ Create incentive structures for private actors to reach marginalized women.
- ✓ Engage women in planning and monitoring extension programs.

CONCLUSION

Privatizing extension services introduces innovation and efficiency into agricultural advisory systems. However, without deliberate efforts to incorporate gender equity, it may reinforce existing disparities.

Proactive gender-inclusive planning is essential to ensure women benefit from and contribute to these evolving systems.

REFERENCES

Anderson, J. R., and Feder, G. (2007). Agricultural extension. *Handbook of agricultural economics*, 3:2343-2378.

Christoplos, I. (2010). Mobilizing the potential of rural and agricultural extension. https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/i1444e

Food and Agriculture Organization. (2011). *The state of food and agriculture 2010–2011: Women in agriculture - Closing the gender gap for development*. https://www.fao.org/3/i2050e/i2050e.pdf

Gandhi, R., Veeraraghavan, R., Toyama, K., and Ramprasad, V. (2009). Digital Green: Participatory video and mediated instruction for agricultural extension. *Information Technologies & International Development, 5*(**1**): 1–15.

Government of India. (2018). *Agricultural statistics at a glance*. Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare.

GSMA. (2020). *The mobile gender gap report 2020*. https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/resources/the-mobile-gender-gap-report-2020/

Kumar, S. (2004). e-Choupals: A study on the financial sustainability of village internet centers in rural India. *Information Technologies and International Development, 2*(**4**): 45–73.

Meinzen-Dick, R., Quisumbing, A., Behrman, J., Biermayr-Jenzano, P., Wilde, V., Noordeloos, M., Ragasa, C., and Beintema, N. (2011). *Engendering agricultural research, development, and extension*. International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

Rivera, W. M and Qamar, M. K. (2003). Agricultural extension, rural development and the food security challenge (pp. ix+-82). Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

How to cite:

Nagireddy Chandi Priya. (2025). Privatizing extension services: implications for gender equity in agriculture. Leaves and Dew Publication, New Delhi 110059. *Agri Journal World* 5 (2): 77-80.

**********XXXXX**********