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Rights, Justice, Action for India's Women Farmers

Context

- International Women's Day, observed on March 8, highlights the global demand for **equal rights, justice**, and meaningful action for women and girls.
- The significance of the day in 2026 is reinforced by its recognition as the **International Year of the Woman Farmer**, drawing attention to the crucial yet under-recognised role of women in agriculture.
- In India, women contribute extensively to **agri-food systems**, yet they remain largely excluded from legal recognition, land ownership, and access to institutional support.
- The disconnect between progressive laws and everyday realities reveals deep **structural inequalities** that affect women farmers' economic security, health, and nutritional well-being.

The Invisibility of Women Farmers

- Most agricultural land and property continue to be registered in men's names due to **patrilineal inheritance, social norms**, and administrative barriers.

- Women who manage day-to-day farming operations, purchasing inputs, supervising labour, and maintaining cultivation, often do so without formal recognition as farmers.
- The absence of legal ownership has significant consequences. Many agricultural programmes require documentation linked to land ownership, which excludes women from institutional credit, crop insurance, irrigation schemes, extension services, and climate-resilient technologies.
- Such eligibility conditions create systemic barriers that reinforce women's marginalisation in agriculture.
- Consequently, their labour remains **undervalued**, and their central role in rural food production remains largely invisible.

The Feminisation of Agriculture and Its Challenges

- The increasing **migration** of men from rural areas has led to the **feminisation of agriculture**, with women assuming greater responsibility for cultivation, risk management, and household food provisioning.
- While this transition could potentially enhance women's agency, it often results in greater workloads without corresponding access to resources.
- Women farmers frequently balance productive work in the fields with reproductive responsibilities such as childcare, cooking, and household management.
- The lack of **drudgery-reduction technologies** and an adequate care ecosystem, intensifies this burden, creating severe time poverty.

Nutrition, Health, and Intergenerational Consequences

- Maternal undernutrition and anaemia contribute to **low birth weight, stunting**, and impaired child development.
- Rural diets often remain heavily cereal-centric, lacking sufficient pulses, fruits, vegetables, and animal-source foods necessary for balanced nutrition.
- India has introduced an extensive **right-to-food framework** through the **National Food Security Act**, which guarantees subsidised cereals, supplementary nutrition for pregnant and lactating women, and **maternity entitlements**.
- Some states have expanded programmes to include millets and fortified foods.
- However, improvements in women's nutritional outcomes remain uneven, and anaemia rates continue to raise concern.

The Gap Between Entitlements and Reality

- Welfare schemes often remain focused on cereal distribution rather than diverse and nutrient-dense foods.
- Frontline workers, responsible for delivering welfare programmes, are frequently overburdened, which affects the quality-of-service delivery and community awareness.
- At the same time, increasing **digitalisation of welfare systems** has introduced new barriers for women lacking digital literacy, documentation, or reliable connectivity.
- As a result, many women farmers struggle to fully claim and benefit from their legal entitlements to food and social protection.

Key Priorities for Empowering Women Farmers

- **First**, improving the **visibility of women farmers** in law, policy, and **gender-disaggregated data** is essential.
 - Recognising a farmer based on agricultural activities rather than land ownership ensures inclusion of landless cultivators, sharecroppers, agricultural labourers, and tribal gatherers.
- **Second**, strengthening women's **land rights** and access to productive resources such as water, credit, and common lands is critical.
 - Measures such as joint spousal titles, enforcement of inheritance laws, and gender-sensitive land registration processes can enhance women's economic security and decision-making power.
- **Third**, aligning **food systems** and **social safety nets** with **nutritional objectives** is essential.
 - Public procurement policies should support the cultivation of **nutri-cereals**, pulses, fruits, and vegetables by small-scale women farmers and distribute them through public distribution systems, Anganwadis, and school meal programmes.
- **Fourth**, women farmers must gain equitable **access to agricultural technologies** and extension services.
 - Labour-saving tools can reduce physical strain and time poverty, while improved access to training, market information, and sustainable farming practices strengthens women's agency, productivity, and resilience.

Women as Drivers of Sustainable Agriculture

- When women farmers gain access to knowledge, resources, and institutional support, they often become leaders in **climate-resilient agriculture**, biodiversity conservation, and nutrition-sensitive farming.
- Their participation enhances **household food security**, strengthens community resilience, and promotes sustainable agricultural practices.
- Empowering women farmers is therefore not only a matter of **gender justice** but also a crucial strategy for building resilient food systems and sustainable rural development.

Conclusion

- Achieving the goals of **Rights, Justice, Action** requires more than symbolic recognition of women's contributions.
- Recognising women as farmers, securing their **land rights**, ensuring access to **productive resources**, and enabling them to fully claim their **right to food and nutrition** are essential steps toward an equitable and sustainable future.
- Strengthening women's position in agriculture will promote equity, improve **nutrition outcomes**, and build a more **resilient India** where those who feed the nation can also achieve dignity, recognition, and well-being.

Rights, Justice, Action for India's Women Farmers FAQs

Q1. Why are women farmers often invisible in agricultural systems?

Ans. Women farmers remain invisible because land ownership, legal recognition, and agricultural records are

usually registered in men's names.

Q2. What is meant by the feminisation of agriculture?

Ans. The feminisation of agriculture refers to the increasing responsibility of women in farming due to male migration from rural areas.

Q3. How does lack of land ownership affect women farmers?

Ans. The lack of land titles prevents women farmers from accessing credit, insurance, irrigation schemes, and agricultural services.

Q4. Why is women's nutrition a major concern in rural areas?

Ans. Women's nutrition is a concern because many suffer from anaemia, micronutrient deficiencies, and poor diets, which also affect child health.

Q5. What measures can empower women farmers?

Ans. Women farmers can be empowered through secure land rights, access to resources, improved technologies, and gender-inclusive agricultural policies.

Source: **The Hindu**

Balancing Innovation with Women's Digital Safety

Context

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming modern societies by reshaping communication, innovation, and governance.
- In India, conversations around AI intensified following the India AI Impact Summit 2026 held in February.
- While AI offers immense potential for technological growth and economic development, it also raises serious ethical concerns, particularly regarding women's safety in digital spaces.
- On the occasion of International Women's Day 2026, it becomes essential to address the growing risks posed by **AI misuse**, **online harassment**, and **digital violence**.

Rising Digital Threats Against Women

- With the expansion of internet access, women increasingly face **online harassment**, **cyberbullying**, **doxxing**, and **digital humiliation**.
- Studies estimate that between 16% and 58% of women have experienced some form of online abuse.
- These incidents demonstrate that **gender-based violence** is no longer confined to physical spaces but has expanded into the digital ecosystem.
- In the physical world, individuals may adopt certain precautions to enhance safety, although such measures are not always effective.
- However, in digital spaces, protection becomes far more difficult due to the **anonymity of perpetrators**, rapid content circulation, and limited platform accountability.

The Rise of Deepfakes and AI-Driven Abuse

- Deepfakes involve the use of AI to create **manipulated images, fabricated videos, or synthetic audio** that falsely portray individuals saying or doing things they never did.
- These technologies have been increasingly used to create **non-consensual sexualised content**, disproportionately targeting women.
- Controversies involving the AI chatbot Grok AI developed by xAI illustrate the potential misuse of such tools.
- Reports indicate that AI systems can be exploited to generate **sexualised deepfakes**, leading to severe **psychological harm, social stigma, and privacy violations**.
- In societies already struggling with **gender inequality** and **violence against women**, such misuse of technology deepens existing vulnerabilities.

Significant Challenge in Addressing AI-Related Harms: Gender Gap in AI Development

- Research by UN Women shows that many deepfake tools, largely designed by male developers, rarely target images of men, reflecting potential **algorithmic bias** and **design imbalance**.
- Data from the United Nations Development Programme indicates that women constitute only about 22% of AI professionals, with fewer than 14% occupying senior roles.
- This lack of **gender diversity** limits the range of perspectives influencing technological design and policy.
- Greater inclusion of women in AI research, innovation ecosystems, and technology leadership can significantly improve the development of safer digital tools.
- Diverse teams are more likely to identify ethical risks, strengthen **content moderation systems**, and design technologies that promote **inclusive digital environments**.
- Integrating women's experiences into technological design can reshape the **ethical foundations of AI** and ensure that innovation benefits society more equitably.

Effective Measures to Prevent the Misuse of AI

- **Strengthening Legal and Regulatory Frameworks**
 - Strong cyber laws, timely investigations, and firm platform responsibility are necessary to protect individuals from digital harm.
 - In India, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has introduced guidelines requiring online intermediaries to remove deepfake content within three hours of receiving a takedown notice.
 - Although debates continue regarding **implementation challenges** and **oversight mechanisms**, such policies represent important steps toward **digital governance** and **legal accountability**.
 - Strengthening regulatory frameworks can help curb AI misuse, ensure faster responses to harmful content, and protect victims from irreversible reputational damage.
- **Promoting Digital Safety Education**
 - A large proportion of internet users today are children and young adults, often referred to as digital natives because of their constant interaction with technology.

- Since nearly one-third of internet users belong to this group, integrating **digital safety education** into school curricula is crucial.
- Students should be educated about online consent, cyber ethics, AI misuse, and responsible technology use.
- Awareness programmes can help young users recognise risks such as deepfake manipulation, online exploitation, and cyber harassment.
- Building a culture of **responsible digital behaviour** from an early age can significantly reduce future misuse of AI technologies.

Conclusion

- Artificial Intelligence will continue to influence economic growth, governance, and everyday life. Resisting technological change is neither realistic nor sustainable.
- However, ensuring that AI development aligns with **ethical responsibility, gender equality, and digital safety** is essential.
- Protecting women in digital spaces requires a comprehensive approach that includes ethical AI design, greater female participation in technology, robust legal frameworks, and widespread digital education.
- As the world observes International Women's Day, prioritising women's digital safety becomes a critical step toward building a **secure, inclusive, and responsible digital future**.

Balancing Innovation with Women's Digital Safety FAQs

Q1. What is ethical AI?

Ans. Ethical AI refers to the responsible and fair development and use of artificial intelligence that prevents misuse, protects digital rights, and promotes safety and accountability.

Q2. Why are women more vulnerable to online abuse?

Ans. Women are more vulnerable because online anonymity, weak platform regulation, and gender-based discrimination enable perpetrators to target them without immediate consequences.

Q3. What are deepfakes and how do they affect women?

Ans. Deepfakes are AI-generated manipulated images, videos, or audio, and they often harm women by creating non-consensual sexualised content that damages their privacy and reputation.

Q4. How does the gender gap in AI development affect digital safety?

Ans. The lack of women in AI development limits diverse perspectives, which can lead to algorithmic bias and technologies that fail to adequately protect women from digital abuse.

Q5. How can digital safety be improved in the age of AI?

Ans. Digital safety can be improved through ethical AI design, stronger cyber laws, better content moderation, and widespread digital literacy education.

Source: **The Hindu**