

Press Release

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Women farmers take centre stage at the Government of Maharashtra - MSSRF stakeholder consultation

"I work as a sugarcane cutter and also cultivate my small, rain-dependent land. But I am neither recognised as a farmer nor as a farm labourer. Because of this, I am unable to access many government schemes," said Dwarkatai Waghmare from Beed.

"Since the 7/12 land extract is not in my name, I face several difficulties in cultivating my land. Many women face this problem. Women can do much more, but we need recognition and opportunity," said Vaishali Ghuge from Tuljapur, Dharashiv.

Women farmers from across Maharashtra took centre stage at a stakeholder consultation organised by the Government of Maharashtra's Department of Agriculture and the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) on January 23 in Mumbai, where they spoke about their everyday struggles within the agri-food system. Participants highlighted how the lack of formal recognition as farmers and the absence of land titles in their names severely limit women's access to credit, institutional loans, water, and a wide range of government schemes.

The consultation was chaired by Vikas Rastogi, Additional Chief Secretary, Agriculture Department, Government of Maharashtra, and Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Chairperson, MSSRF. It brought together civil society organisations working with women in agriculture, researchers, and officials from departments of Animal Husbandry, Cooperatives, the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission, and the Integrated Child Development Services scheme, among others.

"Women contribute immensely to agriculture in Maharashtra, yet their work remains largely unrecognised," said Mr. Rastogi during the consultation.

"During the 100th birth centenary of Prof. M.S. Swaminathan last year, the Government of Maharashtra declared his birthday as Sustainable Agriculture Day. We have had a series of discussions on the role of women farmers and the need to promote climate-resilient and nutritionally diverse crops since then and have also signed an MoU with MSSRF to strengthen sustainable agriculture, nutrition security, and gender justice across the state," he added.

A draft policy paper on Women Farmers' Entitlements, jointly prepared by Vidhi Legal Centre and MSSRF, was presented at the consultation, followed by discussions on grassroots challenges and possible policy and programmatic solutions. Key recommendations in the paper

include adopting the National Policy for Farmers (2007) definition of a farmer based on work performed, issuing farmer identity cards to women, and creating a comprehensive database of women farmers.

“Maharashtra’s Chief Minister has been extremely supportive and encouraging of efforts to strengthen the role of women in agriculture,” said Dr Soumya Swaminathan. “The state has a long legacy of working towards women’s empowerment, including in agriculture. However, as women continue to struggle for recognition as farmers, their access to credit, institutional loans, water, and government schemes remains severely constrained. Climate change is further intensifying these challenges, creating a double burden for women farmers who are already navigating systemic barriers.”

Dr. Swaminathan also referred to Prof. M.S. Swaminathan’s concept of *Biohappiness*, which focusses on well-being through harmony between ecological sustainability, human health, and social equity. “These conversations are critical to advancing *Biohappiness* through strengthening the role of women farmers, identifying climate-resilient and nutritionally diverse opportunity crops, and other enabling interventions in agricultural systems,” she said.

The consultation also included comments and observations from N. Ramaswami, Secretary, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries; Pravin Darade, Principal Secretary, Cooperation and Marketing; Suraj Mandhare, Commissioner (Agriculture), Maharashtra; Parimal Singh, Project Director, Nanaji Deshmukh Krushi Sanjivani Prakalp; Varsha Ladda, Director General, Maharashtra Council of Agricultural Education and Research; Kailas Pagare, Commissioner, Integrated Child Development Services; Nilesh Sagar, Chief Executive Officer, Umed–State Rural Livelihoods Mission; Makarand Kulkarni, Joint Secretary, Law and Judiciary Department, and Seema Kulkarni of the Mahila Kisan Adhikari Manch (MAKAAM).

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