

INDIAN JOURNAL OF NATURAL SCIENCES (IJONS)
BIMONTHLY INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL (PRINT)

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Published by

TAMILNADU SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ORGANISATION



Regd.Off. : NO 46-141, MEENAKSHIPURAM RD, NEAR POST OFFICE,ARIMALAM 622
201,PUDUKKOTTAI, TAMIL NADU, INDIA

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Journal Name	INDIAN JOURNAL OF NATURAL SCIENCES (IJONS)
Frequency	Bi-monthly (Feb, Apr, Jun, Aug, Oct, Dec)
ISSN	0976 – 0997 (Print)
Publisher	TamilNadu Scientific Research Organisation , Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu, India
Chief Editor	Dr.S.Vijikumar
Copy right	TamilNadu Scientific Research Organisation (TNSRO) Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu, India.
Starting Year	2010
Subject	Multi Disciplinary Science Subjects
Review Process	Double Blind Review Process
Language	English
Publication Format	Print
Access	 OPEN ACCESS
License	 Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0
Phone Nos:	04322- 458193, 04322 –261088 (10.00 A.M to 05.00 P.M)
Email	ijons@tnsroindia.org.in & ijonstnsro@gmail.com
Website	https://www.tnsroindia.org.in/
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Admin. Office Address	Plot No 39, Mura Bhavan, Koodal Nagar, Rajagopalapuram Post, Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu, India.

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(BI-MONTHLY - PRINT)

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Indian Journal of Natural Sciences (IJONS)
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Volume XVII (17)		APR 2026
CODEN: IJONS (95) (2026)	ISSUE 95	ISSN: 0976 - 0997

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Editorial



The declaration of 2026 as the **International Year of the Woman Farmer (IYWF)** by the United Nations marks a historic recognition of women as the backbone of global agrifood systems under the theme “Empowered women, transforming agrifood systems.” This global observance seeks to correct a long-standing invisibility: while women constitute nearly 40–43% of the global agricultural labour force and in many developing regions produce up to 50–80% of food, their contributions remain undervalued, underpaid and under-recorded. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) highlights those empowering women farmers—through equal access to land, credit, technology and education—could increase agricultural productivity by 20–30% and significantly reduce global hunger. In the contemporary global food economy, where nearly 28% of the population still faces moderate or severe food insecurity, women farmers are not merely participants but crucial agents of resilience, sustainability and nutritional security.

In India, the story of women farmers reflects both extraordinary contribution and structural inequality. Agriculture has undergone a visible “feminization,” with women forming over 42% of the agricultural workforce and, in some estimates, contributing over 60% of total agricultural labour participation. Around 80% of rural women are engaged in agriculture, managing farms, livestock, fisheries and allied sectors, especially as male migration increases. Yet this dedication contrasts sharply with ownership realities: barely 8–14% of women own agricultural land, revealing a deep gender gap in access to productive assets. This “80–8 gap” symbolizes the paradox of Indian agriculture—women do the work but lack recognition, decision-making power and institutional support.

Women farmers play a decisive role in quality food production and agro-economy by ensuring crop diversity, seed preservation, nutrition-sensitive agriculture and household food security. They are central to family farming systems, often integrating crop cultivation with livestock, kitchen gardens and local food traditions, thereby sustaining rural livelihoods and community nutrition. At the grassroots level, women-led self-help groups and cooperatives strengthen community food production systems, local markets and value chains, making agriculture more inclusive and resilient. Their contribution extends to agricultural research and innovation, particularly in indigenous knowledge systems, organic farming, millet revival and sustainable practices that enhance soil health and biodiversity.

Importantly, women farmers are emerging as key actors in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Evidence shows that women-led farming initiatives promote climate-resilient crops, water conservation, agroforestry and low-input sustainable agriculture, thereby strengthening ecological balance and food security. Their intimate knowledge of local ecosystems enables them to adapt quickly to climate variability, making them indispensable to future agrifood transformations.

However, despite their indispensable role, women farmers continue to face systemic challenges: limited access to land rights, credit, insurance, technology, extension services and market linkages; wage disparities; heavy unpaid labour burdens; and exclusion from policy-making and institutional frameworks. These constraints not only undermine gender justice but also restrict the full potential of global agriculture.

Thus, the International Year of the Woman Farmer (2026) is not merely symbolic—it is a call for structural transformation. Because agriculture cannot be complete without women. Recognizing and empowering women farmers is essential for building equitable, sustainable and climate-resilient agrifood systems. When women progress, agriculture advances; and when agriculture prospers, society as a whole flourishes—this is certain. As the theme suggests, when women are empowered, they do not just cultivate crops—they transform economies, communities and the very future of food security worldwide.

Let us honor women farmers!

Let us protect and preserve our proud agriculture!

S. Vijikumar
Editor in Chief
IJONS

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