

# *A Shift in Earning Trend: 21st Century Earning Trend of the Women from Agricultural families*

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## ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to work on the women in agriculture, as an innovative earning group compelled to involve in skilled agricultural profession due to the sudden breakdown of the COVID 19 in 2020-2021. The field survey in the present study is carried out based on the field survey on the village women in North Bengal agricultural families with the aim to indicate the changes brought into their life and living during the post-COVID 19 incidence. During the post COVID period the women community are compelled to absorb as skilled work force together with the male professionals. The women in the agricultural families are traditionally absorbed in non- professional second category workers. They are absorbed mainly from the preparation of field to other ancillary work. The outbreak of COVID 19 came as a blow to the women farmers group depending solely on agriculture in the management of their families. The occurrence of COVID 19 has enabled the women community to involve in fine tuning their agricultural skill for the management of family livelihood alongside the other self help program to make them Atmanirbhar (self reliant) through their self help skills. However their self help skill worked as a boost up to the women community. Their enormous urge for survival have helped them to become self confident in the management of the family burden during the post COVID 19 era. The present study is based on field survey to the villages of Sub-Himalayan region of North Bengal. The present information provides a positive message to the society that under such a threatening (COVID 19) situation, the women in the agricultural families could pick up the self survival skill for their own protection as well as the protection of their families. The present paper aims to showcase how women agricultural occupation group have converted them to skilled agricultural worker while the other female professions could not work due to COVID 19 and also through the adoption of agricultural policy under the five point agricultural program under Atmanirbhar Bharat

**Key words:** Agricultural technology Atmanirbhar Bharat, COVID 19 effect. Self Reliant, Women in Agriculture.

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## INTRODUCTION

21<sup>ST</sup> Century global economy has been highly affected by an artificial policy imposition which was never predicted before 2019 by the policy makers of the country. The sudden breakdown of the pandemic COVID 2019 came as a setback to the world economic scenario. The most affected group included the agricultural families of third world nations. The family earning trend was lopsided at the non-formal sectors. The traditional policy strategies in the developing world faced with a sudden breakdown of traditional modalities of earning like need based socio-economic earning suitable and affordable to the Indian economic surroundings. The twofold policy initiative adopted at this outset are :1) the up- lift ment of rural economy which had suffered drastically during the Pandemic era 2)creating employment opportunities for those who had been working outside the state but returned back due to the non availability of employment opportunities under COVID 19.

The present paper aims to refer to the impact of such an abrupt change in the eco-agricultural culture in India especially West Bengal due to COVID 19. The Government of the country is compelled to bring a comprehensive policy planning as per the needs of the time (COVID 19). Since the traditional policy strategies could not be accommodated with the sophisticated digitalized mode. This became inevitable during the post pandemic era. The most affected group include those who hail from the weaker economic families. The Government policies have the refore been devised to continue with an alternative mode which needs to be a cheaper mode of artificial policy stances followed by financial as well as instrumental backup to the economically weaker families. As the

policy initiative, at this level demanded special training, the same was planned out at the Governmental level. Since the community came up to be a part of the skill development program of the Prime Minister of India to replace the traditional unsophisticated labour communities, a more sophisticated earners, has been witnessed a high demand during the pandemic as well as in the post pandemic era, the occupational shift became inevitable for those educated and skilled communities, the lack of trained manpower in the developing regions of the developing countries suffered a setback.. The worst sufferer was the unskilled women communities involved in the agricultural occupation. Considering this as important employment constraints for the family survival, women communities have acquired the skill. The researcher in the present study made an effort to narrate, how the women absorbed in agricultural occupation during the pandemic era have been converted into skilled workers as a mode of their survival.

The women labour forces during the post COVID era may be divided into three broad categories based on their socio-economic status 1, Economically solvent group based on landed property but not interested to be exposed to the modern mode of training through their involvement in traditional income generating techniques both from agricultural as well as from non-agricultural occupation .2 Middle range women communities partially trained in skilled technique but not up to the mark, hence they are also unable to adjust with the new development mode but trying hard to adopt modern agricultural technique as a mode of their survival and 3. Those thriving on Government support system. Considering the need for a three staged policy support needs, the present paper through field survey tries to showcase the impact of the COVID 19 on their occupation ( Though some women were coming up with the artificial knowledge base such as the use of drum seeded for field preparation and seedling, the mode adopted by the rural women in our country could meet up the demand partially Hence majority of them lost their income due to the lack of mobility and due to the lack of demand from the employer but due to the absence of supply chain among the rural communities the field production suffered a setback. To overcome the situational effect, Atmanirbhar agricultural program of the Government of India was adopted to support the lower income agricultural families during the Post COVID era..

The overall aim of the paper is to expose the policy initiative of the Government of India to support the socio-economically weaker group of women from the rural communities through a standardized planning and development mode, which are urgently in demand during the post pandemic era. Since a large regiment of women communities are involved in the agricultural occupation, the present paper aims to study the impact of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Covid 19 on the women communities involved in agriculture and in the self-help program as a source of occupation in rural Bengal ..

Indian socio-economic structure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, though gained eminence through the adoption of mixed economic policies where the agricultural techniques adopted by the farmers resulted in the significant increase in production followed a mixed method of modern technology combined with traditional agriculture. The overall aim is to narrate the demands of the academics involved in the field for the adoption of innovative technology making way for the development of a sustainable agro- economic policies in West Bengal. The most impressive aspect of the policy include the acceptance part of it. Not only the innovators but also the beneficiaries are keen to accommodate with the changed structure of the modern agro based culture different from the stereotypical rural economic structure existing so far in West Bengal (where women were treated as a base line agricultural workers and not the decision makers in the field of production). The scenario has changed with COVID 19 many women turned out to be the decision makers in the field of agricultural production. A women producer commented 'we go to the field provided our husband does not discriminate us as a woman professional'. Presently, I became a producer and working in the field together with my husband. I take insect spray in my back and spar insecticide in the field. We wear our husband's shirt while go for plucking Lady finger from the field. I join hands with my husband while using drum seeder for ploughing the field. This year, I have used thresher for trashing paddy seeds. Earlier our husbands did not allow us to go to the field. We had been made to understand that we are unable to handle those machineries, but now we realised that for us it is not at all a tough job but many women firm labourers were paid low labour value with the excuse of our incapability in handling sophisticated machineries used by the husband in the production.

Thus the present paper while focusing on the modern cultural phenomenon leading to the involvement of the women in the agricultural field. The present paper while focusing on the involvement of women in the post - modern agricultural innovation in India and the involvement of women in the field of agricultural technology is though new to Indian culture because the women's involvement in the use of sophisticated scientific method of production became an important breakthrough to the modern history of agriculture in India .and the women's involvement in the field became new to the present day society, because the use of modern technology was transferred to the male farmers as a result wide gap existed in between the labour value of men and women and it was a prevalent practice in India, but the involvement of women in the application of the modern technology has encouraged the self-help group women to become enthusiastic about learning the agricultural technological usage by the women as it accrued more incentive to the women and increases family earning. As a result the women

communities involved in agricultural production are presently showing interest to the adoption of the modern technology and to demand equality status between men and women. Encouraged by the social institutional policies propagating untrained women in the unsophisticated agricultural occupation but the hardship accrued by them to learn modern technology based agricultural production placed the women of Bengal pushed her to the position of equality with the men. The tactics of the involvement of women and to deprive her from the mainstream society by ignoring their entry to the agricultural workers but the female agricultural workers are intentionally ignored in introducing the technology the women were deprived of labour value on this plea, however interestingly the initiative of the women in the field are unavoidable and their irresistible enthusiasm encouraged the women to involve in innovative agricultural practices by their own initiative and as per their skill, knowledge base in the field of agriculture. Private Institutions though made significant differences in the modalities of training, persuasion and policy implementation with their varieties of training tactics, the women of West Bengal became keen to show their capabilities in the field. Since the weak and the capable persons are ready to take up challenges in the new innovative agricultural field to perceive excellence, the overall mode of institutional operations, the women in agriculture have been able to establish their efficiency both in traditional as well as in the modern concept of agricultural occupation. The Government Research Institutions are as such started involving more and more women in the modern agricultural activities. Presently, a three stage agricultural innovation structure has been adopted in India to cater to the needs of all classes of the society through the threefold model based on 1. Traditional model, 2. Mixed model that involves the combination of technology oriented middle level administration through the collaboration of industries based on the quality of the institutions offering moderate technological practices that accommodate the both the system together and 3.

The sophisticated scientific practices aimed to accommodate the modern model that aims to satisfy the dominant ego of the sophisticated family culture among the rural well established families. (Tissue culture laboratories act as a means to adopt ultra modern technology in the agricultural field). Due to the absence of innovative techniques among the women, the pandemic situation i.e. COVID 19, came as a blow to them. Their expertise in the field activities compelled them to stop visiting the field. Hence the enormous loss associated with the families where women are the head ultimately compelled them to learn the modern technique of agriculture in reality. The present paper aims to narrate the impact of modern policy initiative on the rural economy in India by focusing on the drawbacks of the agro economic policies in West Bengal. However the main aim of the 21<sup>st</sup> century academic policies leading to the sudden outcome of the unexpected situation due to the outbreak of COVID 19. The discussion in the present article is made looking to the politico economic effect of pandemic situation in India. Hence the main focus of the study is directed towards the effect of the agro based women's occupation. The effect of Indian agricultural policies during the pandemic era and the impact of the same on the women communities in West Bengal agricultural field became the main area of the study. However, the same attitude is present in the three tier family structure present in the country.

Since the evaluation of the pandemic impact in the Agricultural occupation in West Bengal revolves round the study of its impact on the agricultural families, the main focus of the present study is the determination of the policy strategies of the agricultural occupation in modern India. However, it needs to be looked up from the policy implementation as well as from the policy adoption point of view. Keeping in mind, the policy implementation issues, the present paper focuses on the implementation of the policy of Atmanirvar Bharat on the women communities in India. Thus it became an important source of earning to the women group who have been fighting for their sustainability by depending on their own self help skill. Considering the proactive community development role of the village women, the researcher aimed to propose to supervise and learn about the effect of COVID 19 on these vibrant multipurpose economic management group during the COVID 19 era.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Though based on the primary data on the life and living on the women community in the field of agricultural occupation, the present research aims to focus of the occupation as well as the living condition of the women community of the Darjeeling district under the state of West Bengal. The primary sources of information has been complemented by the secondary data to correlate the secondary source like census data or the other print media or Governmental records. The Department of agriculture of North Bengal district has been recorded as the authentic source of information, to correlate the primary source of information with the information collected by the researcher from the field survey. The aim is to correlate i) the status of the agricultural occupation in the State Information bureau ii) to correlate with the print and digitalized media as well as the academic publications to authenticate the recorded information with the primary data collection in the reality scenario. iii) since the aim of the paper is to analyse the post COVID situation of the women, the collection of primary data is made possible from the field survey in the villages of sub-Himalayan region falling under Darjeeling district of Siliguri subdivision in West Bengal. The of the rural villages thrive on agriculture the main source of earning. Though rice production is the important source of earning to the villagers, interestingly the women are mainly involved in the production of seasonal vegetables either in their own land or on the lease lands taken by the Self Help group

,family agricultural lands are mainly used by those women group who are the soul earners in the family . During the Post COVID period women are also found to be involved in other source of earning like preparing and selling of puffed rice , selling cow milk and the other ancillary works offered to them by the Department of Agriculture . The activities involving the Department included distribution of seeds among the village farmers, supervision of the field and providing time to time inputs to the farmers. The women group are expected to stay in close connection with the extension officers in agriculture and all the women group are to go for time to time training regarding the stage wise supervision of the production techniques. Interesting the women farmers of the locality have their own farmers` club Radha farer`s Club is an all women club entrusted with the responsibility like a)selection of farmers from the villages in need of support ,b) distribution of seeds, c) Supervision of the seedling d) advise on the application of fertilizer ,d) reporting the inconvenience of the farmer as and when required. All these activities are done by the women group as per their convenience.

In most cases seed are collected and stored in one of the houses of the women group so that the distribution of seeds are performed consecutively with the household work. Visit to the farmer`s field is conducted after the lunch hour and in the form of leisure time visit. As a result all these activities are carried out in a casual fashion . As a result the activities of the women do not hamper their household work . Since the activities accrue income to the families, discontent in the families are almost absent. Since the COVID 19 had affected their income from School dress making and in preparing mid day meal in the School ,the involvement of the women in the activities became an alternative source of income to the families . Women self- help group though suffered a setback from 2016 November i.e. with demonetization could somehow be regained by the strong community feeling among the women group a,as a result they could some how managed to involve in alternative source of earning in the post COVID period existing in them helped them to an alternative survival Thus the whole idea behind this community activities was though aimed to enable the women to become self reliant nd independent the post COVID 19 policies have enabled the wqomen to find out alternative mode of survival . The women by their own effort became the soul earners of their families and as such became the soul decision maker of the families and also in the locality.

The surveyed villages during the COVID 19 period included Tarbandha village, Karibari Village and Nakshalbari Village, Pani Tanki Village of Darjeeling subdivision of Siliguri District ,located in the Bordering areas of Nepal ,The strategic position of the villages in most cases also encouraged the women to involve in the production of hand made products for selling them in the Nepalese families .There are many self Help group women communities who are involved in exporting the finished decorative products made by the women group. Thus it became an important source of earning to the women group who ha been fighting for their sustainability by depending on their own self help skill. Considering the proactive community development role of the village women the researcher aimed to propose the village community to supervise and learn about the effect of COVID 19 on these vibrant multipurpose economic management group during the COVID 19 era.

### **Aim of the Paper;**

The present study include the evaluation of the impact of five-fold Atmanirvar Bharat policies of the Government of India and the impact of the implementation of the five -fold Atmanirbhar Bharat Policies adopted by the Government of India . Since West Bengal is one of the leading states of India in the agricultural field , evaluation of the policy initiative will reflect on this policy aims to focus on the impact of the policy on the agricultural women communities in West Bengal . The aim of the study aims to study and correlate the policy stances and its effect on the women communities on the rural agricultural families in West Bengal . Since the women are the main subject of study under the present innovative research, the researcher made an effort to study impact of the atmanirbhar Bharat`s policy on the agricultural occupation on the women earner families of West Bengal more specifically under the pandemic situation .Considering the same as the motto of the field survey, the present study took the initiative for the field survey in the rural agricultural families of Darjeeling District of West Bengal The main aim of the study is concentrated to focus on the women`s initiative to overcome the hurdles faced by them in maintaining their occupation as the agricultural community during the pandemic situation and to find out the impact of the same in their style of living

### **Geographical Location of the Villages in the Present Study:**

The focused area of the present study include the rural women communities marked as the agro-producers in sub Himalayan villages in Tarbanda under Phansidewa sub-district and also the villages falling under Kharibari Block of Siliguri subdivision in Darjeeling District (See Map ) . Since the agricultural economy of the areas are mainly taken care of the women community in the villages, the present study aims to look to the issue of COVID 19 Issue from the women`s perspective . The strategic positions of the villages and their closeness to the international border have enabled the village women to determine their socio-economic situation accordingly. The village communities interacted under the present study involved exclusively the women who are the land owners and are involved in agriculture and other associated with the other agricultural occupation. The research survey in 2021 had indicated



that the women in the surveyed villages were economically better off position<sup>1</sup>. The main source of earning of the village community was from selling seasonal agro products like vegetables, maize, rice and potato. The main attraction of the business to the producers is the Nepal market, located in the bordering area of Siliguri sub division. The village community thus produces all types of vegetables for all seasons and also potato rice and maize on seasonal basis. The strategic importance of the villages have enabled the women community to involve in the determined economic activities successfully. The currency value of Nepal is much lower as compared to India ( Taka 100 in Nepal is equivalent to Rs60/- in India ) as a result produced vegetables sold out to Nepalese market could fetch enormous profits to the producers. Under the present research the researcher preferred to interact with the same women group to observe their position during the post COVID period on their earning<sup>2</sup>.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Interaction was mainly done with the all women farmer's Club of Tarbandha Village of Panshidewa and Nakshal Bari Block named 'Radha Farmer's Club', 'Annapurna All Women Farmer's Club', 'Moheswari All Women Farmer's Club', 'Lakshmi All Women Farmer's Club' working under the supervision of the Department of Agricultural and sponsored by NABARD. The women group in the Farmer's Club acted as a liaison between the community and the Government for distribution of seeds and overall supervision of the scientific mode of production and distribution on behalf of the Government thus the active participation of the women group in policy decision of the Government accrued some benefits to them too. The Kharibari village women group marked as reputed women farmer group is not only for the production of vegetables alone, the self help activities of the village women in a way enabled them to involve in other source of earning along with the agro farming. The women group have also occupied an important position due to their community activities. They are not only involved in agro business, their involvement in the community activities which are common to the locality placed them in an important position in the locality. Their most important source of income is accrued from homemade skilled products and their income generation is made possible through their skilled work became a source of extra income to the women community. Besides this the social welfare activities of the women group of the villages in Kharibari and Phansidewa block are also noteworthy ( Women actively participate in the locality security service. They stand against teasing and abusing women by the community boys, abuse of husbands or family members is strongly stopped by them as and when they are informed ) the women group of the villages are interrogated to observe their attitude towards COVID 19 on the economy of these village women communities where the women based economy played a pivotal role in the villages.

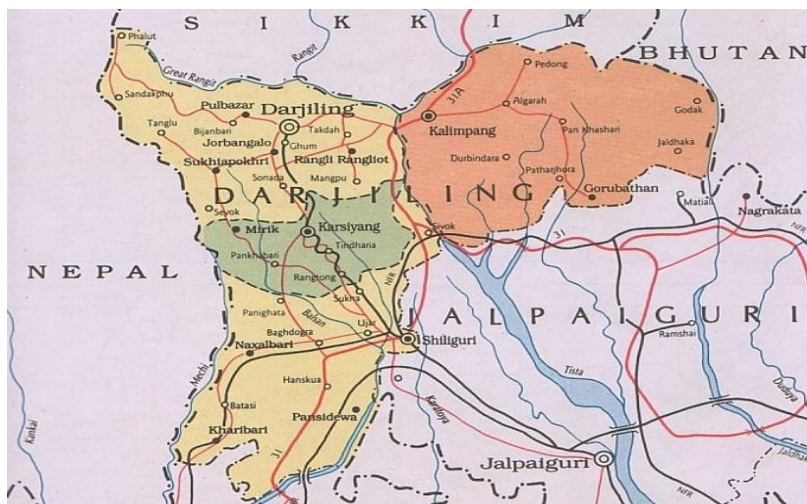
In the words of the leader of Women Farmer's Club (Radha), 'initially there was much eagerness on the part of the middlemen to invest money in delivering seeds and other ancillary products needed for improved production of potato, and maize and other winter vegetables but during the post COVID era, the product disposal met in a horrible state. The Potato produced in the field could not be disposed off. They were ultimately disposed off at a through away prices straight away from the field at an exceedingly low price. Taking the opportunity of undisposed products, the Nepalese market also refused to pay the prices at market rate. The fear of returning back of the produced goods compelled them to sale the products at a price dictated by the owner in Nepal.

The other effect of COVID 19 as indicated by the Farmers of Radha Farmer's Club may be explained accordingly: 1. The family males absorbed in other skilled work other than farming were affected heavily due to COVID 19 made the daily survival difficult for the family. This becomes a costly affair for the farmers' daily living. 2. Rabi crop was affected due to the COVID 19 outbreak. Hence the intensive farming which was initiated earlier or the responsibility of seed delivery was taken up under the Government seed distribution plan. Due to COVID 19, the financial support or the material support through seed delivery suffered a setback, though the impact of the same was not so severe in the Kharif rice harvesting period, because the middle men during the Post COVID, but the effect of COVID came as a direct hit to them because the middle men refused to buy the produced goods due to the lack of supply. The women group who had been depending on the middlemen for the sale of their products suffered a setback. 3. They were compelled to sale the products to the local market in through away price. 4. The male farmers had to go to Nepal market to dispose off their products by incurring loss, (because the crisis in Indian market encouraged the Nepali consumers to involve in bargain). 5. The Nepalese consumers not only tried to negotiate in price, they were also encouraged to demand increased value for their currency from the market. 6. The buyers while taking the opportunity of COVID situation, the seller became the looser in the market. 7. The poor farmers to avoid hoarding preferred selling all products in the price dictated by the buyer. Thus in both the way, the lockdown had defeated the very purpose of the business. Hence the transaction policy came up as a direct hit to the poor farmers without whom the supply of food products is impossible. As an indirect effect of Lockdown the source of income of both men and women absorbed in non formal occupation had been badly affected. The Radha Farmer's Club, the only recognized Ladies Farmer's Club located in Tarbanda village in Siliguri

Subdivision has failed to receive support from the Government by delivering seeds for Boro rice production even in this year as an everlasting impact of COVID. The families solely depend upon agriculture as the source of earning, suffered severely. Some of the families stopped delivery of vegetables and potato in the market and thereby incurred an indirect loss by not involving in any transaction (which was a matter of compulsion to them). The agricultural production of the areas, with countless financial loss due to the overall development of pressure politics in the retail market and also due to pressure tactics used by the buyers on the sellers have affected their economy. 8. One very important information gathered by the researcher from the field survey that demonetization not only affected the non-formal agricultural producers, the everlasting effect of it on agro based non formal ancillary sectors like sale of puffed rice, milk and other milk products, eggs and rice as home based production suffered loss due to the absence of takers. 9. The other sectors suffered a setback are the self help group due to the persistent failure of the market economy. For example, as per the unwritten understanding, the preparation of mid-day meal in the Schools were originally entrusted to different self help group of the locality on rotational basis has been stopped due to lock down. Thus COVID 19 had affected the occupation of many self help group thriving on the cooking of mid day meal as well as in stitching School Dresses

### Adverse Effect of COVID 19

COVID 19 came as a direct hit to the women community because the middle men in refused to buy the produced goods due to the lack of supply chain. The women group who had been depending on the middlemen for the sale of their products suffered a setback. 3. They were compelled to sale the products to the local market in through away price. 4. The male farmers had to go to Nepal market to dispose off their products by incurring loss, (because the crisis in Indian market encouraged the Nepali consumers to involve in bargain) the women failed to do that. 5. The Nepalese consumers not only tried to negotiate in price, they were also encouraged to demand increased value for their currency from the market. 6. The buyers while taking the opportunity of demonetization or cash crunch the seller became the looser. 7. The poor farmers to avoid hoarding preferred selling all products in the price dictated by the buyer. Thus in both the way, the hurried decision of the Government on demonetization has defeated the vary purpose of such a crucial step and on the contrary, the policy came up as a direct hit to the poor farmers without whom the supply of food products is impossible. As an indirect effect of demonetization the source of income of both men and women absorbed in non formal occupation had been badly affected by demonetization. The Radha Farmer's Club, the only recognized Ladies Farmer's Club located in Tarbanda village in Siliguri Subdivision has failed to receive support from the Government by delivering seeds for Boro rice production even in this year as an everlasting impact of demonetization. The families solely depend upon agriculture as the source of earning, suffered severely. Some of the families stopped delivery of vegetables and potato in the market and thereby incurred an indirect loss by not involving in any transaction (which was a matter of compulsion to them). The demonetization affected the agricultural production of the areas, with countless financial loss due to the overall development of pressure politics in the retail market and also due to pressure tactics used by the buyers on the sellers thrive on the supply of vegetables as per the consumers' demand. 8. One very important information gathered by the researcher from the field survey that COVID 19 not only affected the non-formal agricultural producers, the everlasting effect of it on agro based non formal ancillary sectors like sale of puffed rice, milk and other milk products, eggs and rice as home based production suffered loss due to the absence of takers. 9. The other sectors suffered a setback are the self help group due to the persistent failure of the market economy. For example, as per the unwritten understanding, the preparation of mid-day meal in the Schools were originally entrusted to different self help group of the locality on rotational basis, Due to demonetization, the existing group involved in the activity refuse to withdraw from the constant source of their earning with the other group. Thus COVID 19 indirectly hampered the community integration existing within the locality and thereby hampered the community ties which were an asset to the villages



### **Concluding Remarks**

The workers and employers all over the world are struggling had to adapt to the pandemic's challenges. But it is critical that they have been able to continue with their situation and manage to arrange their living under such a stagnant condition. According to Dolly Burman, one of the leading members of the Radha Farmer's Club commented, 'During Lockdown, we could not go to the market to sell our products, neither the middleman who used to come to us for the collection of vegetables, our income source was doomed, but we have to go to the field for the production of whatever we could, whole of 20-21 winter was a barren season to us, but our initiative could not stop me, little amount we could collect from the sale of our milk and puffed rice, but the hardship in life has taught us to pick up our means of survival. We could produce rice in the field, but we worked alone, there were scarcity of labour forces, the management of field sparing insecticide, managing our irrigation everything was done by us, but the scarcity has taught us to stay united and work together. All members of the Radha Farmer's club joined hands together and worked together, we worked for seed distribution, we visited the farmer's field supported the farmers by offering them the technology know how that time to time we had learnt earlier from the Government Officers who had been working with the improved production motto. We survived that is our success'

UN Women's flagship report demonstrates through evidence, new data and analysis how women and girls are faring across the world under 2030 sustainable development goal, the report demonstrates some gaps in the implementation of policies in the reality scenario. They have proved that the women are still staggering behind in claiming equality position in the society, The report shows out of 89 countries being surveyed under SDG program the women and the girl account for 330 million poor (UN on SDG). However the hidden agenda of poverty among India's rural women are expected to be met up by themselves by their own initiative. Hence the support from the Government of West Bengal to the women community has enabled them some how to survive under hand to mouth subsistence during the pandemic era. However, the continuous Government support to the Government effort

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