

Agri-Tourism: A Potential Livelihood Approach for Empowering Farm Women

Ankita Sahu¹, Laxmipriya Sahoo², Arpita Mohapatra³ and Tania Seth⁴

ICAR-Central Institute for Women in Agriculture, Bhubaneswar-751003

Corresponding author*

Ankita Sahu

Email

ankita.sahu@icar.gov.in

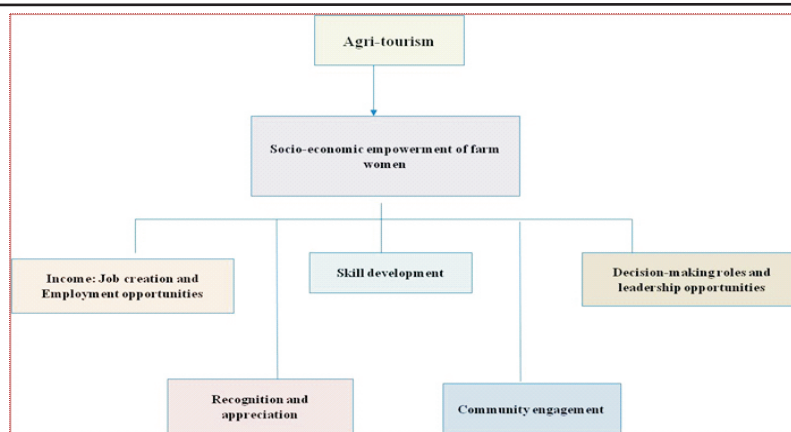


FIGURE 1. Role of Agri-tourism in improving socio-economic dimensions of farm women

KEYWORDS : Agri-tourism, Diversification, Employment opportunities, Rural masses

SUMMARY

Agri-tourism, also referred to as agricultural or farm tourism, is a specialized branch of the tourism industry. It entails venturing into agricultural areas, farms, or rural landscapes to actively partake in farming-related activities and immerse oneself in rural life. This niche sector provides visitors with the unique opportunity to directly engage in agricultural practices, embrace rural customs, and relish the countryside's charm (Sznajder et al., 2009). In contemporary times, agri-tourism is gaining prominence as a promising means of livelihood for rural communities (Tiraieyari and Hamzah, 2012). This burgeoning trend not only enriches travelers' experiences but also revitalizes rural economies.

INTERODUCTION

Agri-tourism, also known as agricultural tourism or farm tourism, represents a form of tourism that involves visiting agricultural areas, farms, or rural regions to experience and engage in activities related to farming, agriculture, and rural life. It is a niche sector within the broader tourism industry that offers visitors an opportunity to gain firsthand experiences of agricultural activities, rural traditions, and the countryside (Sznajder et al., 2009). Now-a-days, the concept of agri-tourism is emerging as a potential source of livelihood for rural masses (Tiraieyari and Hamzah, 2012). It offers a scope for diversification of rural economies by offering rural communities an opportunity to diversify their income sources beyond traditional agriculture (Mohapatra, 2013). By providing tourism-related services, such as farm tours, accommodations, or selling local products, rural communities can generate additional revenue. This diversification reduces the dependence on agriculture alone and creates a more resilient and sustainable local economy.

Agri-tourism can be particularly beneficial for farm women and rural youths in several ways (Priyanka and Kumar, 2016). The initiatives of agri-tourism often require variety of services and skills, such as hospitality, tour guiding, event management, and culinary expertise. The development of agri-tourism enterprises generates employment opportunities for local residents, including rural youth and

women. It can lead to the creation of direct jobs, such as tour guides or farm stay managers, as well as indirect employment in sectors like transportation, handicrafts, and food production. Agri-tourism also encourages the preservation and promotion of rural heritage, cultural traditions, and local knowledge (Anthopoulou and Melissourgou, 2012). Visitors are attracted to authentic rural experiences, such as farm visits, traditional crafts, or agricultural practices. This creates a demand for the preservation of cultural heritage and motivates rural communities to continue practicing and showcasing their traditions. As a result, the socio-cultural fabric of rural areas is preserved and popularized.

The development of agri-tourism, however requires the improvement of local infrastructure, including roads, transportation facilities, accommodation options, and recreational spaces (Gopal et al., 2008). The demand generated by agri-tourism can incentivize investments in infrastructure development, benefiting not only the tourism sector but also the entire community (Saha et al., 2021). Improved infrastructure can enhance the quality of life for rural residents and attract further investment in other sectors. Agri-tourism provides a platform for rural communities to engage with visitors and build relationships (Chatterjee and Prasad, 2019). Through interactions with tourists, rural residents can share their stories, traditions, and way of life, fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding. This engagement promotes social cohesion within the community and

encourages a sense of pride and collective identity. Presently, the concept of agri-tourism is advocated in many states to promote the cultural diversity of the region, in addition to fostering the socio-economic development of the rural masses (Gartner, 2004).

Socio-economic empowerment of farm women through Agri-tourism

Agri-tourism benefits the entire rural community and particularly to farm women, it provides an opportunity to generate additional income by diversifying their revenue streams (McGehee et al., 2007). Through agri-tourism activities, farm women can monetize their agricultural resources and cultural wealth, which can contribute to their economic empowerment, financial independence and improve the overall economic well-being (Liu et al., 2017). With agri-tourism, farm women can leverage their existing skills and knowledge related to farming, cooking, handicrafts, and rural traditions. They can actively participate in agri-tourism activities, such as hosting visitors, organizing workshops, exhibitions, fairs, rural games or demonstrations, and preparing delicious farm-fresh traditional meals (Karabati et al., 2009). This utilization of their skills not only

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adds value to the agri-tourism process but also enhances their self-confidence and personal development (Gil Arroyo *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, farm women also get a platform to showcase their agricultural practices, indigenous technical knowledge, and cultural heritage. Visitors often appreciate the authenticity and uniqueness of rural experiences offered by farm women and enjoys the hospitality offered in the rural atmosphere. This recognition and appreciation enables the farm women's self-esteem, foster a sense of pride in their work, and promote the preservation of local traditions and farming methods (Savage *et al.*, 2022). Through agri-tourism, farm women also get an opportunity to engage with the local community and build social connections. By hosting visitors and participating in local events or farmers' markets, farm women are enabled to build network with other farmers, artisans, and tourism stakeholders. This community engagement fosters a sense of belonging, provides a support system, and opens doors for collaboration and knowledge exchange among farm women (Martini *et al.*, 2020). The improvement in various dimensions of income, skill-development, participation and social coherence results in strengthening decision-making roles and leadership opportunities among farm women, leading to their empowerment (Halim *et al.*, 2020). In addition, they are able to develop their managerial skills and can take charge of planning and managing agri-tourism activities, marketing their farm enterprises, and making strategic business decisions. This empowerment contributes to breaking gender stereotypes, promoting gender equality in rural areas, and encouraging women to take on leadership roles in their communities (Dadvar-Khani, 2021). Overall, agri-tourism offers farm women pathways to enhance their livelihoods, utilize their skills, gain recognition, build networks, and contribute to rural development. It can be a transformative opportunity that not only provides economic benefits but also empowers farm women to be active contributors and decision-makers in the agricultural and tourism sectors.

The following activities are undertaken under Agri-tourism. The activities can vary depending on the location, local resources, and cultural context. Some common activities include:

(a) Farm visits and tours Visitors can tour working farms, observe agricultural practices, and learn about various crops, livestock, and farming techniques (Petroman and Cornelia, 2010).

(b) Farm stays Visitors can stay on a farm or rural property, often in accommodation facilities provided by the

farm owners, and participates in daily farming activities (Mahaliyanaarachchi, 2015).

(c) Harvesting and agricultural activities Visitors can engage in activities such as fruit picking, vegetable harvesting, milking cows, herding livestock, or participating in planting and cultivation (Srisomyong, 2010).

(d) Farmers' markets and farm shops Visitors can explore and purchase locally grown produce, artisanal products, and handicrafts directly from farmers and rural artisans.

(e) Agri-education and workshops Visitors can participate in workshops, seminars, and educational programs related to agriculture, sustainable farming practices, cooking, or traditional crafts (Nelson and Pade, 2005).

(f) Food and wine tourism Agri-tourism often includes opportunities to savor farm-fresh meals, taste local wines or beverages produced on farms, and experience farm-to-table culinary experiences (Calabrò and Vieri, 2016).

(g) Rural games Rural games can be a valuable addition to agri-tourism experiences, enhancing visitor engagement and providing a unique recreational element. These games can be designed to showcase rural skills, traditional sports, and local cultural activities (Mohapatra, 2013).

Challenges in Agri-tourism

While agri-tourism extends several benefits, however there are several challenges for success of agri-tourism ventures in rural areas (Karthik and Gajanand, 2017; Priyanka and Kumar, 2016)

(a) Infrastructure and Accessibility Many rural areas lack adequate infrastructure, including roads, transportation facilities, and accommodation options. Limited accessibility can hinder the growth of agri-tourism by making it difficult for visitors to reach and explore rural destinations (Gopal *et al.*, 2008).

(b) Seasonality and Weather Dependency Agri-tourism experiences are often tied to seasonal agricultural activities, which can lead to fluctuations in visitor numbers throughout the year. Weather conditions, such as heavy rains or droughts, can also

impact agricultural operations and consequently affect the availability and quality of agri-tourism experiences (van Zyl and van der Merwe, 2021).

(c) Marketing and Promotion Effective marketing and promotion are essential to create awareness and attract visitors to rural destinations. However, rural areas often face challenges in marketing their agri-tourism offerings due to limited resources, lack of expertise, and limited access to digital platforms (Blacka *et al.*, 2009).

(d) Training and Capacity Building Agri-tourism requires specific skills and knowledge related to hospitality, customer service, marketing, and event management. Rural residents, particularly farmers, may need training and capacity-building programs to enhance their skills in these areas.

(e) Regulatory and Policy Frameworks In some cases, agri-tourism activities may face regulatory challenges related to zoning, permits, health and safety regulations, or compliance with agricultural practices. The lack of clear and supportive policy frameworks can create barriers and inhibit the growth of agri-tourism ventures (Pal and Murdia, 2017).

(f) Balancing Agriculture and Tourism Agri-tourism should strike a balance between agricultural production and tourism activities. The increasing demand for tourism experiences may put pressure on agricultural resources and impact farming operations. Managing the interaction between agriculture and tourism is essential to ensure the sustainability of both sectors and minimize potential conflicts.

(g) Community Engagement and Collaboration The success of agri-tourism relies on the active involvement and support of local communities. Engaging and collaborating with rural communities is crucial to ensure their participation, build trust, and address any concerns or conflicts that may arise. Effective community engagement strategies, such as stakeholder consultations and community-based planning, can help foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for agri-tourism development.

CONCLUSION

Agri-tourism serves as a catalyst for socio-economic development in rural areas by diversifying local economies, creating employment opportunities, preserving

cultural heritage, developing infrastructure, fostering capacity building, promoting community engagement, and supporting environmental sustainability. It can transform rural communities into vibrant, inclusive, and economically viable destinations while preserving their unique identities and traditions. Promotion and sustenance of such agri-ventures requires collaborative efforts by all stakeholders including community mobilization and group coherence for making such approaches socio-economically viable for the farming community.

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