

**SPEECH OF SHRI SHARAD PAWAR, HON'BLE UNION MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE & FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES DURING THE VALEDICTORY FUNCTION OF GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE ON 15<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2012 AT NEW DELHI**

Her Excellency, the President of India, Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil Ji, Dr Devisingh Shekhawat ji, Minister of State for Agriculture and Food Processing Industries, Dr Charan Das Mahant, Professor M.S. Swaminathan, Member of Parliament, Dr S. Ayyappan, Secretary, DG, ICAR, Dr R.S. Paroda, Executive Secretary, APAARI, delegates from India and abroad, ladies and gentlemen,

2. Agriculture has always been very close to the Her Excellency the President of India. Over the last few years she has taken keen initiative in the Agriculture Sector and it is indeed our privilege to have her here for the Valedictory function. We all look forward to hearing from her.

3. When I talk about the role of women in agriculture, my memory takes me back to my childhood in Maharashtra, since when I have seen the silent contribution made by the female members of the house in the agriculture field. I have deliberately used the word 'silent' as despite getting engaged in most tedious and back-breaking tasks in agriculture, her contribution has been hardly acknowledged or quantified. In fact, in the Indian context, one just can't imagine agriculture and allied sectors like animal husbandry without the contribution of women. I would like to congratulate Indian Council of Agriculture Research and Asia Pacific Association of Agriculture Research Institutes for organizing this global conference and also to various national and international organizations for supporting this conference. It shows their deep concern for espousing the cause of women farmers and also giving full attention to the associated gender issues.

4. The Ministry of Agriculture has exclusive programs for gender mainstreaming, in addition to other programs that aim at the farming community at large without any gender discrimination. One of the goals in strengthening farming community at large is to include all human and gender dimensions in the public policies and programs. I am proud to say that we did some pioneering work by establishing a Research Institute for Women in Agriculture in 1996, under ICAR at Bhubaneswar. This has enabled us with high level policy initiatives in this sector. Further, the Gender Resource Centre of the Ministry of Agriculture established in 2005-06 is the focal point for convergence of all issues related to women in agriculture and provides support for training, capacity building, research, impact on programs and activities related to women. The International Cooperation arrangements under the Ministry of Agriculture foster mutually beneficial partnership with other countries of the world and India and contribute to the World Food Program. The Country Program 2008-2012 is under operation which aims at reducing hunger and nutrition of women and children.

5. A gender analysis of the data collected by various agencies confirms the increasing participation of women in agriculture. The studies have also indicated major contribution of women in various farm activities like transplanting and harvesting, post harvest activities like threshing, drying etc and livestock management. However, despite their integral role in agriculture it is indeed disheartening to note that only 11 per cent women have access to land holdings, that too, mostly as small and marginal farmers. This is true not only in India but is a common feature in many of the developing countries. In my opinion, assertive interventions by the various Governments are required to ensure that

more and more women get access to the land holdings. Way back in 1994, in Maharashtra, during my tenure as Chief Minister we took an historic decision and gave succession rights to the girl child. Now with greater awareness and increased sensitivity of the issue, more and more government schemes are tailored in a way to ensure larger participation and empowerment of the rural women. Currently there are number of schemes, being implemented by Ministry of Agriculture wherein there is a provision for women- specific activities. These include Gramin Bhandaran Yojana, the mega schemes like Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), National Food Security Mission (NFSM), National Horticulture Mission (NHM) and Integrated Scheme of Oilseed, Pulses, Oil Palm and Maize, which caters to the technological needs of farm women.

6. As far as research on gender issues is concerned, the ICAR has already integrated the women component within the National Agricultural Research System. The Agricultural Universities and the Krishi Vigyan Kendras under the NARS are actively engaged in gender mainstreaming in education and frontline extension programmes which will provide a great potential for widening the arena for women in agriculture. The research efforts at the ICAR Institutes have focused on relieving women's drudgery in agriculture by providing time and labour saving tools. Vocational trainings are also being conducted, to impart skills to undertake different vocations. In extension activities the women is now the centre point and activities are being planned keeping her in view. I am sure these efforts will change the way agriculture is practiced in India.

7. I suggest the ICAR to undertake steps towards implementing the outcomes of this conference 2012 and to collaborate with the partners of this conference in empowering women for inclusive growth in agriculture by addressing the issues of access to resources, drudgery reduction, food and nutritional security, climate related risks and market linkages in a holistic manner. A Gender in Agriculture Platform for Gender in Agriculture Partnership (GAP 4 GAP) is required to be set up with hubs in different countries to work in this direction. The ICAR should take lead and address gender concerns through such a platform. The lack of knowledge resources, lack of communication, and linkages with other agencies are causes of large gaps in adoption of new technologies in crop production, dairy management, and post harvest management. To provide critical skills and technologies we must organize more and more women farmers clubs. Another issue, I would also like to flag is leveraging the potential of the Information Technology to increase the meaningful contribution of the women in the agriculture leading to a holistic development of agriculture sector.

8. I am happy to note that the first ever Conference of such a magnitude has developed a framework for enabling inclusive growth in agriculture. My congratulations to all delegates and the organizers.

Thank you.