



Journalist Fellowship Paper

# Empowerment Journalism: A model for reporting women farmers' constructive struggle

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# Introduction

Over 37% of the rural agricultural workforce in the world comprises women. In low-income countries, this ratio rises to 48%.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO's) [Policy on Gender Equality](#) (2020-2030), about half of the world's small-scale livestock managers and small-scale fishery workers are women.

Women are the backbone of rural economies and make substantial contributions to food security and nutrition while shouldering the responsibilities of their households and communities.

Rural women are often repositories of knowledge on natural resources like land, water, and forests, according to the FAO, and they are often in charge of the management of these resources as farmers, foresters, and fisherfolk, while being primary providers of water, food, and energy at the household and community level.

And yet society and institutions – including the mass media – do not recognise, encourage, support, or facilitate the multiple roles women farmers play in agriculture, rural economy, and sustainable development.

Not surprisingly, women in agriculture find little space in news media coverage. [Who Makes the News](#), the 6th Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) published in 2020, reveals that in 2020 only 2% of the stories on development issues and sustainability had women as a central focus.<sup>2</sup>

In stories about rural economy, agriculture, farming practices, agricultural policy, and land rights, women were a central focus in only 3% of published stories.

Of the subjects portrayed as homemakers in the news, women account for almost seven out of every 10. Only 2% of stories about rural economy, agriculture, farming practices, agricultural policy, and land rights published in 2020 raised the issue of gender equality/inequality.

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<sup>1</sup> FAO Report: FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020-2030. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/3/cb1583en/cb1583en.pdf>, accessed 5. May 2023

<sup>2</sup> GMMP Report: WHO makes the NEWS? Available at: [https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GMMP2020.ENG\\_FINAL20210713.pdf](https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GMMP2020.ENG_FINAL20210713.pdf), accessed 5. May 2023

The GMMP review also found only 1% of stories in 2020 touched on the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) and 0% of stories on climate change and global warming raised issues of gender equality. A final devastating statistic from the report: in 2020, women were seen and had their physical attributes described more than their voices were heard in the news.

How we picture farmers is an image cultivated in the process of socialisation and reinforced by the dominant media: it is predominantly one of men as farmers and women as helpers. This stereotyping makes women farmers' struggle against oppression more challenging.

Prejudice, privilege, power, and authority combine in patriarchy and manifest as oppression in the form of exploitation, violence, marginalisation, deprivation, and subjugation. Women farmers face oppression in all forms.

Millions of women farmers around the world who are innovating climate-smart agriculture experience multi-layer oppression when they question the traditional agricultural practices and paradigms followed by male farmers. These women farmers often empower themselves to fight oppression before they can farm using sustainable practices to combat climate change, poverty, and hunger.

Climate-smart practices used by women are based on the premise of traditional knowledge they have preserved, the knowledge they generate among themselves, and the experiments they conduct in their daily routine in the fields.

Women across countries are evolving local models based on the sustainability of equitable economic and social growth while preserving biodiversity, wildlife, flora, and fauna. Women have been exploring their potential to contribute to the economic, social, and political lives of villages, communities, and families in the fight against climate change.

They have initiated changes in land use patterns, promoted the use of natural fertilisers, and conserved forests, set up small businesses and cottage industries using natural resources, established self-help groups, set up informal training centres, used clean energy, and are participating in decision making and policy framing. The climate resilience and adaptation paradigms led by women are woven around local situations.

# Stories that matter

This paper proposes an Empowerment Journalism model based on the experiences of women farmers in 13 countries.



*Map highlights the U.S., Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Cameroon, Myanmar, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Tanzania, and South Sudan*

Empowerment Journalism highlights the constructive struggle faced by women farmers against the oppressive structures they must overcome to practice climate-smart agriculture and achieve sustainable development.

It reflects on how women farmers build their self-belief system and keep themselves in a self-assertive mind frame in the struggle to gain the power to control their lives and resources whilst giving meaning to their lives.

This model could be used by newsrooms to train reporters covering the empowerment process of women practising climate-smart agriculture. It could also be used by international bodies and women farmers' organisations to train women farmers to narrate their own empowerment stories.

As GMMP states: the value of news is compromised if the opportunity is not provided for more citizens to tell their own stories in their own words.<sup>3</sup> “The failure to represent the diversity of people and opinion present in society not only has implications for public discourse and decision-making, but it also plays a role in eroding trust in news journalism” the report adds.

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2

Storytelling is no longer the sole prerogative of journalists and professional communicators, however. Digitalisation has democratised communication, enabling those neglected by legacy media to bypass the mainstream gatekeepers and create and disseminate their own content.

Picture a grassroots network of women farmers acting as “farm reporters”: trained in a journalistic framework, equipped with the use of digital media technology, and given digital platforms for content dissemination. These women could disrupt the media space and give voice to voiceless women farmers.

That potential presents itself against the backdrop of increasing temperatures, shifting precipitation patterns, more severe and frequent extreme weather events, and the loss of ecosystem services and biodiversity – all of which will undermine agricultural production systems and food systems. This is playing out most severely in agricultural communities in developing countries, according to the FAO, where poverty, hunger, and malnutrition were already the most prevalent.

The climate change challenge is unfolding at a time when annual food production needs to increase by 60 % over the next three decades to cater to the growing population. FAO summarises three major intertwined challenges in the agricultural sector. These are:

1. Productivity must increase to cater to growing demand but in a sustainable way,
2. The sector has to adapt to the impacts of climate change, and
3. It must find ways to reduce/remove greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>4</sup>

Women farmers will be major players in meeting these challenges; many are already contributing to agricultural productivity and the income of agricultural households in sustainable ways.

### **Farmer suicides**

The gravity of agrarian distress can be witnessed in the phenomenon of male farmer suicides. In India, one of the biggest global players in the agriculture sector, the government keeps an official record of farmer suicides. A total of 10,881 people involved in agriculture (comprising 5,318 farmers/cultivators and 5,563 agricultural labourers) committed suicide in India in 2021.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> FAO: Climate Smart Agriculture Sourcebook. Available at <https://www.fao.org/climate-smart-agriculture-sourcebook/concept/module-a1-introducing-csa/a1-overview/en/?type=111>, accessed 6. May 2023

<sup>5</sup> Government of India: National Crime Records Bureau. Available at [https://ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/ADSI-2021/ads2021\\_Chapter-2-Suicides.pdf](https://ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/ADSI-2021/ads2021_Chapter-2-Suicides.pdf), accessed 6. May 2023

Other countries do not keep these statistics, but the phenomenon is not unique to India. Doris Mold from Wisconsin, U.S., a farmer and co-CEO of Annie's Project, a national non-profit working with women in agriculture, said: "Yes, there are farmer suicides in my region and throughout the United States. Men are more likely to be successful in their suicide attempts. There are also likely instances of farm accidents that lead to deaths that were perhaps suicides or at the very least due to unclear thinking because of high levels of stress."

When a farmer loses his farm or is forced to sell their livestock it is very disheartening, Mold explained. For many farmers, their identity is tied up with the farm. When the farm doesn't exist they don't know how they can exist. Mold said she knew of women farmers who had ended their lives too, but not to as high of a degree as men.

Mary Juan, a farmer who lives in Juba, South Sudan, added that many farmers have ended their lives due to agrarian distress in her country. Cathy Estavillo, a farmer and leader who works for Amihan National Federation of Peasant Women in Manila, Philippines, cited an example of a bankrupt farmer who ended his life after he failed to pay back the debt to a money lender. Matiedje Nkenmayi Gislaine, a farmer and entrepreneur from Buea, in the South-west region of Cameroon recalled a suicide in the western region where a farmer borrowed money for tomato production and lost everything to pests.

Veengas, a journalist from Sindh province in Pakistan, summed up the situation in her own and many other countries: "Farmers are in remote areas. There might be farmer suicides, but they are not being reported. If we go deep and investigate, we might know the reality."

Could these tragedies be averted with the acceptance of women farmers as equal players, decision-makers, and breadwinners in the agriculture sector?

### **Feminisation of agriculture**

For the past two decades, while working as a field reporter in India, I have extensively reported on agrarian distress and farmer suicide stories. I have listened to tales of extreme pressure created by crop failures due to droughts and unseasonal rains, a rise in the number of attacks by pests, diseases on crops, government policies that paralyse farmers, and failure to recover production costs in the markets leading to heavy debt.

As the crisis deepens, there is a massive migration of male farmers to cities in search of alternative livelihoods, while women are left behind to cultivate whatever is possible with available resources. This migration from rural to urban can be

witnessed across India. So many women are now engaged in multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs, and labourers, that the government of India now describes it as the “feminisation of the agriculture sector”.<sup>6</sup>

Again, this scenario is not limited to India. Dedek Hendry, a journalist and activist working with coffee farmers in Indonesia, said women are playing a major role in coffee cultivation in Indonesia as men leave villages in search of jobs because of decreasing coffee yields. “Women have the main role in farming, but there is no data. Men find other jobs, then seeding, maintenance, harvest, post-harvest processing is shouldered by women in coffee cultivation,” Hendry said.

Hilda Madeje, from Kongwa district in Tanzania, who is a farmer and chairperson of the Kazania group that comprises 21 women and 19 men, said women are the “engine” running agriculture and related economic activities in her country. While Anna Tazita Samuel, founder and executive director at Women For Change in South Sudan, said women are “breadwinners” for the families in her country.

These women farmers, largely involved in subsistence farming, are cultivating with limited or no resources. Unlike male farmers who are more likely to have control and access to these resources, women face impediments to land ownership, irrigation, pesticides, fertilisers, financing, machinery, technology and training.

### **Women leading climate-smart agriculture**

The feminisation of agriculture translates into the feminisation of climate-smart agriculture in many countries. In drought-prone areas of India, many women farmers have come up with climate-resilient farming methods that use biofertilisers or seed banks containing local water-efficient varieties, they have diversified from single to multiple food crops, increased the number of crop cycles, implemented micro-irrigation systems, and explored agri-allied businesses.

Oge Udegbum, a journalist from Nigeria who writes about women farmers, said many of them might not be exactly aware of what climate change is or its scientific definition, but what they do know is that farming is not the same. She said women farmers had developed their own understanding of climate change and developed adaptation and resilience practices.

Karisha Devlin, co-CEO of Annie’s Project (U.S.) and an agribusiness specialist at the University of Missouri Extension, said women in her region practice cover crops, no-till, buffers, organic agriculture, and lessening the use of pesticides and herbicides. She said women typically are very interested in protecting the land, being sustainable, and leaving a legacy for future generations. Many women think about

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<sup>6</sup> Government of India: Press Information Bureau. Available at <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1518099>, accessed 6. May 2023



climate change and how they might change production practices to be more environment-friendly, she said.

Women farmers in the U.S. have adopted climate-smart agriculture practices including regenerative agriculture, including livestock in farming, grass waterways, cover crops, buffers, integrated pest management, planting of perennial crops, pollinator plots and agroforestry (introducing permanent green cover in vulnerable areas and wildlife areas between fields).

Tshering Choden, a farmer in Bhutan's Takabi Women's Group of turmeric farmers, said: "We grow fruits and vegetables and never use chemicals. We have our own [natural] fertilisers." Her compatriot Tshering Lhaden, a farmer in Tagma village's Nyamley Tshogdey cooperative, where farmers grow Elaichi (cardamom), added: "Chemicals and fertilisers are not good for health. In our village, nobody buys chemicals [for farming]."

In Indonesia, women growing coffee are engaged in inter-cropping and agroforestry, while in Senegal women farmers are leading on crop diversification and the use of renewable energy. In Cameroon, the use of low-cost greenhouses is becoming popular among women farmers, while in Tanzania women are opting for climate-resilient crops.

Chathu Sewwandi, project coordinator, at Vikalpani National Women's Federation in Sri Lanka said that agroecology is a holistic approach. "Women farmers are involved in compost, organic inputs, crop protection methods, small scale markets, and also they become vendors without the middleman," she said. "Women develop their own seeds and share them through their societies."

There are stories around the world of women proving that climate-smart agriculture is one of the important tools to fight climate change and achieve sustainable growth. But the news often only relays stories of economic success, and usually give the credit to funding agencies or government interventions.

### **Beyond success stories**

Success stories are a popular genre in climate change agriculture reporting and general agriculture coverage. These stories are also referred to as "development stories". They are frequently used as part of campaigns by governments, international agencies, and non-governmental organisations. They might be considered "positive news" or feel-good stories: inspiring, motivational, and designed to attract an audience who aren't usually interested in agri-content.

A typical success story about a women farmer might cover the five Ws and one H of journalism: “Who is the farmer? What is her success? When and where she has succeeded? Why has she succeeded, and How she has succeeded?”

Because “success” is the central theme, very few stories will offer nuance about the systemic issues women farmers must face to achieve success. At most, the article might mention, “she overcame all odds to achieve this feat”. And when success-against-all-odds is the most important criterion, a woman farmer who has put up a fight against oppression but not “succeeded” will not feature.

To address the challenges in the agricultural sector, we need to look beyond success stories. The central theme of our stories should be the process of empowerment and constructive struggle against oppression.

No development or success achieved is sustainable if oppressive structures remain intact. Sustainable development is possible only through the participation of empowered participants who can decide what development they want to achieve. The Empowerment Journalism model precisely emphasises this missing element in agriculture reporting.

# The Empowerment Journalism model

There are many heartwarming development stories to be told: women farmers in Tanzania cultivating the traditional “man’s crop” of sunflowers, or Nigerian women developing their fields using environment-friendly methods, or Indian women farmers cultivating drought-tolerant local vegetable varieties. However, when they are reported, these stories often only cover the tip of the iceberg of successful sustainable development.

Let’s look more closely at the example of Indian women farmers in drought-prone areas of Maharashtra state who experimented with local vegetable varieties and turmeric cultivation using organic methods, earning handsome profits. They are now planning to expand into new markets and develop local brands. Some key organisations support their efforts. And the successful cultivation of turmeric and local vegetables has kindled a spark of hope in this distressed zone where male farmers have been ending their lives.

It sounds like perfect material for a successful development story. But the story would be incomplete without explaining the constructive struggle these women had to undertake against oppressive structures to achieve this feat.

Men in their families were unwilling to give even a small piece of land to women to cultivate. They had no access to resources like water, financing, infrastructure, markets, and information. Many families warned the women they should not cultivate certain crops as they would decay if even the shadow of a menstruating woman went near them. They faced strong opposition to their experiment with the new crops because it challenged prevailing male farmers’ beliefs that growing these vegetables would not be sustainable. And when traders offered to buy their produce, it was at price points well below market value, as they knew the women would not have access to the larger marketplaces dominated by male traders.

What these women farmers faced in their journey to empowerment was not mere discrimination, but oppression. The story of their empowerment should therefore reflect their fight against oppression.

The model of Empowerment Journalism I propose uses the [5W1H formula](#) to narrate stories while centring the constructive struggle against oppression in the process of empowerment. In this model, success or failure takes a secondary role, as the primary emphasis is placed on the decision to fight for change. Women farmers around the world exemplify that the act of fighting for change embodies success.

While many different definitions of empowerment exist, the grassroots concept used here is conceptualised and defined based on women farmers’ life experiences

in different countries. My fieldwork covering women farmers in India for the past two decades has immensely informed my concept of empowerment. The grassroots concept is defined thusly:

Empowerment is a process of constructive struggle by self-assertive people against oppression to gain the power to control their lives, and resources and attain sustainable development while giving meaning to their lives.

Based on this definition, the model of Empowerment Journalism can be used to tell the stories of any oppressed group or an individual's constructive struggle for empowerment to achieve sustainable development in their own fields.

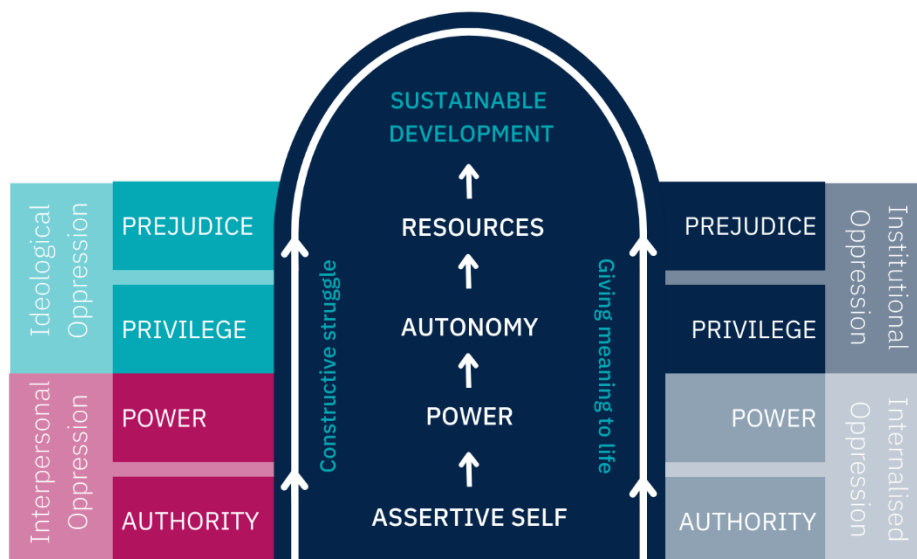
Let's apply Empowerment Journalism to the context of women farmers engaging in climate-smart agriculture:

Empowerment Journalism is reporting the process of constructive struggle by self-assertive women farmers against oppression to gain the power to control their lives (rights, needs, wishes), resources (land, water, livestock, equipment, seeds, fertilisers, finance, training, etc.) and attain sustainable development with climate-smart agriculture practices while giving meaning to their lives.

# Pillars of empowerment journalism

In the process of empowerment defined in the previous section, there are eight conceptual pillars. Comprehending these concepts is essential to the development of an empowerment story, and framing what questions we ask in the 5W1H format.

1. The ABCs of oppression
2. Analysing the assertive self
3. Power dynamics
4. Control over lives
5. Resources
6. Sustainable development
7. Constructive struggle
8. Giving meaning to lives



*Radheshyam Jadhav's Empowerment Journalism model*

## 1. The ABCs of oppression

A critical understanding of the oppressive structures within which women farmers operate is vital in empowerment reporting. Ideological oppression, institutional oppression, interpersonal oppression, and internalised oppression operate independently but also intersect. Oppression can be multiplied by layers of

prejudice, privilege, power, and authority to become more unfair, coercive and cruel, particularly for women of marginalised caste, class, or race groups.

### **Ideological oppression**

The notion that men are superior to women is deeply ingrained in many parts of society, and agriculture is not an exception. Feni Oktaviana and other coffee farmers from Bengkulu province of Indonesia, for example, told me that despite controlling all operations in the field, women are still seen as only helping their father or husband in coffee farming.

Helena Lawi, a gender specialist working with Farm Africa in Tanzania, said cultivation there is gender specific: crops like vegetables and beans may be cultivated by women, but not cotton, coffee, sunflower, or sorghum because these “belong” to men. And yet, when it comes to ownership, even the “women’s crops” are under the ownership of men. “That is the system. [...] Even if that [crop] is produced by women, he decides [what to do with the crop]”, she said.

Sugharan Chana from Sindh province in Pakistan said women there work the farms alongside men, but also shoulder all the responsibilities of household chores, cooking and child-rearing.

The image of men as capable farmers and women as helpers is emphasised in all formal and informal communication in culture.

### **Institutional oppression**

Ideological oppression is then further absorbed by institutions, including government, non-government institutions and the media, and it reflects in their policies, laws and coverage.

In the U.S., Doris Mold said women still find it challenging to engage in leadership roles in the agriculture sector, including state departments of agriculture, management positions in agribusiness, and leadership roles in agricultural colleges.

Karisha Devlin added that farm-related media talk about men and show pictures of men on the farm. Equipment and tools manufactured by companies are designed to be used by men. Farmwork clothing is not always designed for women. For example, men’s work gloves are designed to withstand more rigour and colder temperatures, even though women work in the same cold, on the same tasks.

Women farmers across countries told me that educational institutions, training programmes, and informational and stress management sessions, were also largely designed with men in mind as farmers.

Vital institutions and government agencies provide limited access to women for expansion or capacity building. For example, women in multiple countries told me that banking institutions are not willing to provide loans to women farmers. Chathu Sewwandi from Sri Lanka said the lack of formal financing creates major issues for farmers there. Because women don't have land ownership, they cannot leverage it for financing at banks. Instead, microfinance agents approach women and offer loans with mega-interest rates – sometimes [in excess of 100% per annum](#).

### **Interpersonal oppression**

Women farmers recount dealing with misogynistic interactions at every step of public life. Madhuri Khadse, a farmer from India, said single women face major problems when they call male labourers to work on their farms. “These men don't listen to women farmers, even if she is the owner of the farm. They say that why they need to listen to the women when they know everything about their work and agriculture,” she said. Tanzania's Lawi said most men there don't allow women to go to the market to sell produce. “Men don't trust women,” she said.

In the U.S., Devlin told me she is often dismissed and overlooked because she is a woman. “Men automatically assume that I don't know anything about agriculture despite my two degrees in agriculture and experience,” she said.

### **Internalised oppression**

When ideological, institutional and interpersonal oppression are accepted as the norm in society, it can have a major psychological impact on women who internalise the messaging and adopt a submissive or passive self mode.

It damages their self-concept, the mental picture one holds about herself. Women farmers have told me they did not feel worthy of the title of “farmer”, even when they oversaw all the farming.

This is internalised oppression, which results in diminished confidence and forces women farmers to surrender to their situations, forcing them to continue a cycle of trauma.

Consider the story of Shobha Tayade, a farmer from India. After her farmer husband committed suicide following crop failure, she put in every possible effort to overcome the odds. Her in-laws refused to give her a piece of land to

cultivate, and her relatives shunned her and blamed her for her husband's death. The family and villagers repeatedly told her that a widow's life is worthless. She was left all alone in her battle to save her children from starvation. She continued to work hard but faced oppression at every step. She was pushed to the brink and contemplated ending her life as the feeling of worthlessness took root.

Fighting that feeling of worthlessness was the biggest battle of her life, she said. It took her more courage and effort to fight internal oppression and start the building her assertive self than it did to farm.

Empowerment Journalism stories pay attention to all types of oppression women farmers face. The focus of stories is the constructive struggles against oppression and the means and mechanisms women develop to fight it.

## **2. Analysing the assertive self**

The premise of an individual or group's resolve to fight oppression is the assertive self. Okoligbo Samantha Ejima from Osun in Nigeria was ridiculed when she decided to be a farmer after completing a higher national diploma in computer science. Ejima was determined to prove that a woman could farm in a sustainable way. "I faced a lot when I started farming. But I didn't give up on my dreams. I made myself important," she told me. "My motivation came from the inside; it came from a passion for what I wanted to do. It was very frustrating for me when I started. There was no money and no help. There are no easy ways [to achieve your goals]."

As it was with Ejima, self-assertion is the beginning of the empowerment journey for most women farmers. The American Psychological Association defines self-assertion as "the act of putting forward one's opinions or of taking actions that express one's needs, rights, or wishes".<sup>7</sup>

A journalist working on empowerment stories needs clarity on the psychological concept of self-belief systems. In each individual, there exists a passive self, submissive self, aggressive self, and assertive self. One of the major factors while comprehending the empowerment narrative is to analyse how these women farmers strengthened their assertive selves while facing oppression.

A person can be passive in her beliefs and remain stagnant without reacting or responding to what is happening around her. There are others who surrender to the oppressive structures and accept oppression and internalise it. There are some who react from an aggressive mode and become self-destructive.

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<sup>7</sup> American Psychological Association: APA Dictionary of Psychology. Available at <https://dictionary.apa.org/self-assertion>, accessed 6. May 2023



When the assertive self is engaged, a person responds to oppression in a composed manner. A self-assertive person may vacillate on all tracks of self-belief systems before settling on the assertive track. In time, the assertive self will come to dominate her self-belief system.<sup>8</sup> Narrating this internal journey in stories is vital in communicating women farmers' constructive struggle within.

Aasiya Gaye DIOP from Dakar, Sénégal, is a farmer who started an initiative for agriculture investment and to modernise agriculture. "You should have confidence," she said. "If you don't do it, no one will do it."

Most of the women farmers I spoke to had similar stories. This facet of the Empowerment Journalism model is so vital because no battle against oppression is possible without self-assertion.

### **3. Power dynamics**

Empowerment Journalism deals with the concept of power from a woman farmer's perspective: power to resist oppression through constructive struggle, power to gain control over their own lives and resources, power to define and achieve sustainable development, and power to give meaning to their lives.

Oppressive structures tend to work in tandem to maintain the existing balance of power where possible. Dominant power structures not only control the lives and resources of the women farmers but also define and decide development for them. That's why Empowerment Journalism must critically analyse oppressive power structures and track the journey of women farmers to gain power.

Power is often legitimised by positions of authority in institutions. Many women farmers told me how demoralised they were by power struggles encountered via the bureaucracy of government or private institutions. But the oppression women face at the hands of those holding legitimate power is not limited to formal institutions. Informal institutions in society offer legitimate power to members of society and families to oppress women farmers, too.

Society also uses its power to reward those who surrender to oppressive patriarchal structures. And it uses coercive power to punish women if they challenge the existing structures of oppression. A common tool of limiting power is to control access to information and knowledge, thereby impeding women farmers from reaching their potential. Society might discourage them from joining formal education, participating in training on new technology, or learning about agriculture innovation.

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<sup>8</sup> Idea from: Karta Shetkari Initiative by Sahyadri Farms, Nashik and Institute for Psychological Health (IPH), Thane (India).

Anna Tazita Samuel from South Sudan said women speaking about their demands or needs does not go down well with society there. “If you talk about commercial agriculture which involves money they will call you spoiled people,” she said.

Empowerment Journalism asks how women farmers resist oppressive power structures while gaining power for themselves.

#### **4. Control over lives**

When Tanzania’s Lawi and her team wanted to work with women farmers, they had to talk to men to request permission for women to participate. Initially, men would accompany women to the training and introduction sessions.

In 2004, Chinasa Asonye was an accountant in Lagos, Nigeria. At the time she was married with four children. One day her husband, who was a soldier, came to her office and demanded the management relieve her immediately so that she could stay home and take care of the children. Her friend introduced her to fish farming, a job she could undertake while looking after her children.

Rafiya Jamil from Sindh province in Pakistan said she and other women farmers have to take their children along with them on farms. There is no drinking water, a lack of toilets, and no sanitary napkins.

In all three examples, it is men who have decided what is permissible for women. In the process of empowerment, women fight for their rights, needs, and wishes so that they can control their own lives. The empowerment story narrates their struggle to achieve this stage in the process of empowerment.

#### **5. Resources**

Men control and have access to almost all resources in agriculture; they are decision-makers.

In drought-prone areas of Maharashtra state in India, men were interested in cash crops because they had resources, and women wanted to try organic crops because they had limited or no resources.

“Many men deserted farming and moved to cities when there was not enough water due to drought, and fertilisers and pesticides were expensive due to shortages in the market. But women came forward to cultivate using traditional methods so that they could feed their families and take excess produce to the market,” said Vikas Kamble, who works with Swayam Shikshan Prayog in India.

In Tanzania, women cultivate crops in the remaining space left after men plant their crops. Men are not willing to give any dedicated space to women to cultivate.

Land is a crucial factor in decision-making; it is linked to power. Women still account for less than 15 % of agricultural landholders in the world.<sup>9</sup>

In some Asian and African countries, multinational companies are making deals with governments for land holding and women fear they will be deprived of access as a result. Merchandised farming like this poses a major threat to the livelihood of women farmers and their families for whom agriculture is the only source of survival. Restriction or removal of access limits women to small-scale farming.

Empowerment Journalism asks what happens when women get access to and control over resources.

## **6. Sustainable development**

The UN has defined “sustainable development” as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Empowerment Journalism facilitates sustainable development by advocating for an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient future.

The UN says a harmonisation of economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection is required to achieve sustainable development. “Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development,” according to the [Sustainable Development Agenda](#).<sup>10</sup>

Empowerment Journalism facilitates that agenda by promoting sustainable, inclusive, and equitable economic growth. It supports creating greater opportunities for women, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion, and promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.

Women in climate-smart agriculture envision sustainable development as the essential reconstruction of power structures to achieve qualitative and quantitative advancement in socio-economic-political structures. When sustainable development evolves from the grassroots, as in the case of women farming, it is

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<sup>9</sup> FAO: FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020-2030. Available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb1583en/cb1583en.pdf>, accessed 6. May 2023

<sup>10</sup> United Nations: Sustainable Development Agenda. Available at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>, accessed 6. May 2023.

participatory in nature. Empowerment Journalism takes a bottom-up approach to sustainable development and highlights these models.

## **7. Constructive struggle**

The constructive struggle is the path oppressed women farmers take to achieve empowerment. The constructive struggle is a strategy and coping mechanism evolved by women while fighting oppressive structures.

This strategy and coping mechanism includes:

- a) achieving increasing self-efficacy during the struggle,
- b) developing a cognitive state that can critically assess the way oppressive structures function,
- c) developing mechanisms and means to fight oppressive structures,
- d) executing strategies to fight oppression, and
- e) the reconstitution of power structures to achieve sustainable development with dignity.

The empowerment story analyses all stages in the constructive struggle and it is reflected in the narrative of how women farmers deal with oppression at every stage of empowerment. Struggle in the process of empowerment is constructive because it is reformist and aims to create inclusive and sustainable development.

Daw Aye Khaing, a livestock-rearing farmer from Chauk Township of Myanmar, said constructive struggle and empowerment doesn't take place in isolation from society. Active participation, collaboration, and collective work are required for improving social inclusion and integration in the community.

## **8. Giving meaning to lives**

In the face of a wave of farmer suicides in India, many of their widows stand firm to fight agrarian distress, change the way farming is done, pay their husband's debt, educate their children, and handle life's challenges with grit and determination.

In Cameroon, a young farmer is building a system where every smallholder can live comfortably doing agriculture. In Bhutan, turmeric farmers are resisting all temptations to use pesticides and fertilisers to grow the crop and want to protect their land and environment.

In Indonesia, coffee farmers are conserving their forests and engaging in agroforestry even as they are considered encroachers by government agencies. In Nigeria, women farmers are finding ways to keep going with sustainable agricultural practices without any support. In Myanmar, women farmers are putting every effort into cultivating and feeding their children amid a civil war.

Along with constructive struggle, the process of empowerment is also about giving meaning to life.

Agricultural distress and climate change are not just about technology, policies, and scientific discourse. It is also about human beings, families, emotions, and the meaning they want to give to their lives.

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor E. Frankl said that striving to find meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in human beings; one needs to strive and struggle for a worthwhile goal. Frankl talks about a potential unique to humans: transforming tragedy into triumph and predicament into human achievement. "We must not forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation," he wrote.<sup>11</sup>

The essence of the empowerment story is to understand what meaning women farmers give to their own lives and the lives of their communities when fighting oppression and working towards sustainable development.

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<sup>11</sup> Frankl, V. (2004) *Man's Search For Meaning*, pp. 104,110,116. Rider, Great Britain.

# Empowerment story maps

## Empowerment story map 1: Questions to ask

These empowerment story maps will help storytellers collect the maximum information required to narrate and shape an Empowerment Journalism story.

### Empowerment Story Map 1.1

Components	Who?	What?	When?
Oppression	Who is oppressing the subject?	What are the tools used to oppress the subject? What tools does the subject use to fight oppression?	When does the subject realise oppression and when do they start resisting it?
Assertive self	Who motivates or inspires self-assertiveness in the subject?	What does it mean to be self-assertive? What are the challenges to remaining self-assertive?	When does the subject start the journey of self-assertiveness?
Power	Who holds the power in agriculture sector?	What is the power structure? What are the sources of the power?	When does the subject challenge existing power structures?
Control over lives	Who controls lives of the subject?	What mechanisms are used to control the lives of the subject?	When will the subject start gaining control over their own lives?
Control over resources	Who controls resources in agriculture?	What are these resources?	When does the struggle for the control of resources start?
Sustainable development	Who benefits because of sustainable development?	What does sustainable development look like?	When will it be achieved?
Constructive struggle	Who motivates this struggle?	What does constructive struggle mean for this subject?	When does constructive struggle start?
Giving meaning to lives	Who defines the meaning of life for the subject?	What meaning does the subject want to give their lives?	When will a meaningful life be realised?

## Empowerment Story Map 1.2

Components	Where?	Why?	How?
Oppression	Where does oppression take place: ideological, institutional, interpersonal, internalised?	Why does oppression take place? Why does the subject decide to resist it?	How do oppressive structures operate?
Assertive self	Where does internal motivation come from?	Why is self-assertion an important step in this empowerment?	How will self-assertion help to combat oppression or promote the practice of climate-smart agriculture?
Power	Where does power come from?	Why does power matter in this empowerment of the subject?	How is power used to oppress the subject? How can the subject gain power?
Control over lives	Where does the control over lives begin and end? (Tyrrany.)	Why does control over their own lives matter?	How will better control empower the subject?
Control over resources	Where are these resources? (Natural/man made)	Why does control of resources matter?	How will control of resources empowers the subject in climate-smart agriculture?
Sustainable development	Where does the concept come from?	Why it is vital?	How will it have an impact on people and environment?
Constructive struggle	Where does their grit to fight constructive struggle come from?	Why does constructive struggle matter?	How will it impact on sustainable development?
Giving meaning to lives	Where does the subject find meaning in life?	Why is giving meaning to life necessary?	How will giving meaning to life change the life of the subject?

These maps also help to identify the subject and empowerment theme of the story. Covering all of these bases will certainly generate answers to most of the questions under the eight pillars that form the premise of an empowerment story.

It will be the individual storyteller's choice which information they want to include in their story and in what form.

### Empowerment story map 2: Themes to explore

Empowerment Journalism also provides the framework to report the psychological, economic, social, cultural and political empowerment process.

In stories about climate-smart agriculture practices innovated by women farmers, any of these empowerment themes could be covered.

This second story map should help journalists identify what themes and sub-themes they want to explore.

## Empowerment Story Map 2

<b>Psychological Empowerment</b>	<b>Economic Empowerment</b>	<b>Social Empowerment</b>	<b>Cultural Empowerment</b>	<b>Political Empowerment</b>
Self-assertiveness	Access to/control over resources	Gaining power	Challenging stereotypes	Grassroots struggles
Self-efficacy	Financing	Control over lives	Redefining the role in family and society	Political participation and representation
Consciousness	Inclusive growth	Resilience and resisting oppression	Cultivating new norms	Inclusive decision-making
Confidence	Training and skills	Sustainable development	Gaining control over knowledge systems	Contribution to climate policy
Control over situation	Technology	Gender equity	Protecting indigenous climate action practices	Role in governance
Giving meaning to lives	Green economy, markets	Empowerment at individual, relational and collective levels	Grassroots climate resilience models	Reconstruction of power structures



# Why we need Empowerment Journalism

There is an urgent need to act on climate change in agriculture. Developing sustainable agriculture requires climate-smart agriculture, with women farmers leading the way.

The Empowerment Journalism model is critical in the process to facilitate both women farmers' empowerment and participation in climate action.

## **Empowerment Journalism is climate action**

The UNFCCC secretariat (UN Climate Change) has listed [five “compelling” reasons](#) why women are essential for climate action.<sup>12</sup> The prime objectives of Empowerment Journalism are in consonance with this reasoning. And Empowerment Journalism advocates for and strengthens these reasons by bringing women farmers to the centre of reporting climate action in agriculture.

### **1. Climate action requires 100% of the population**

Women comprise half of the world's population and the lives of the majority of rural women revolve around agriculture. The contribution women make to agriculture is significant and climate action in agriculture is impossible without the participation of women farmers. Empowerment stories highlight how the inclusion of women farmers will boost climate action in agriculture and benefit the overall climate action mission.

### **2. Empowering women means better climate solutions**

Empowerment Journalism conceptualises empowerment from a women farmers' perspective. The core of Empowerment Journalism is to narrate the empowerment process of women farmers. Stories of self-assertive women farmers gaining the power to control their lives and resources will have a positive impact on the overall women empowerment discourse in media and society. The Empowerment Journalism model advocates that better climate solutions in agriculture are possible when women are empowered.

### **3. Women are key to building climate resilience in communities**

Empowered women farmers are playing a major role in resilience and capacity-building in their communities. Many of these women have led their communities in planning disaster response and resilience strategies. Empowerment journalism identifies and highlights these efforts by women farmers and brings forward these models of climate resilience in

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations Climate Change: Five Reasons why Climate Action Needs Women. Available at <https://unfccc.int/news/five-reasons-why-climate-action-needs-women>, accessed 6. May 2023

communities. Stories about grassroots models and theories of resilience will contribute to the ongoing research on building climate resilience.

#### **4. Climate change affects us all, but not equally**

Women farmers are the most vulnerable to climate change impacts. In many countries, like South Sudan, the impact of climate change on agriculture and women farmers is devastating. Massive flooding displaces women who are exposed to gender-based violence as they traverse unsafe areas looking for shelter. Climate change multiplies food insecurity and women are finding it hard to provide food for their families. Following any natural disaster, women must compromise their needs and shoulder an additional workload. In droughts, women have to walk extra miles to fetch water, the rate of girls dropping out of school multiplies, and early child marriages ruin the lives of girls. Empowerment Journalism helps society to understand vulnerability of women farmers to climate change.

#### **5. Countries recognise the importance of gender in climate planning**

The grassroots empowerment process could be facilitated by government agencies but there is a gap between policymakers and women farmers. Empowerment Journalism works to bridge this gap. Highlighting empowerment stories of women will help the governments to shape their policies and facilitate the constructive struggle of women farmers. Empowerment journalism advocates for integration of gender in agricultural and climate action plans at local, national, and international levels.

### **Empowerment Journalism connects and empowers the audience**

#### **1. Differentiates news for a competitive edge**

News media play a role in providing reliable information about climate change to the masses. Empowerment Journalism brings forward stories of women farmers who are combating climate change on the ground. At a time when much on-the-ground reporting has taken a backseat to stories generated without leaving the studio or newsroom, Empowerment Journalism creates a differentiating edge that may build audience interest and trust.

#### **2. Addresses climate news avoidance**

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's report, [\*How We Follow Climate Change: Climate News Use and Attitudes in Eight Countries\*](#), grapples with selective climate news avoidance. The most frequently mentioned reasons for selective avoidance of climate change news and information are

related to exhaustion (e.g. “worn out”, “too much”), limited value (“nothing new”, “nothing I can do”), and anxiety (“a negative effect on my mood”).<sup>13</sup>

Empowerment Journalism addresses all three reasons for climate news avoidance. Empowerment stories are not regular climate stories, but stories that are hardly reported in the news media. These stories bring a flavour of grassroots to climate news. These stories connect everyone: impact on the lives of farmers will have a direct impact on the food on our plates. These stories go beyond the jargon, statements, policies, and routine climate news and narration. These are stories of hope.

### **3. Empowers the audience**

According to the Reuters Institute report, those who consume climate change news more frequently are more likely to agree that they find it empowering in some way – either because it helps them know what to do in response, prompts them to consume more information, or gives them more accurate information.<sup>14</sup>

Along with narrating how women farmers are building resilience and adaptation to climate change, Empowerment Journalism weaves the narrative of constructive struggle into the story. The most important element of empowerment stories is that these stories will motivate, inspire and empower the audience.

### **Empowerment Journalism shapes the climate change narrative from a gender perspective across beats**

Empowerment stories about women farmers in climate-smart agriculture are not just about agriculture. These stories crisscross many journalistic beats. Stories about trade, markets, infrastructure, investments, and so on could all be covered as empowerment stories.

To take India as an example: women farmers establishing their own market chains could be covered as empowerment stories in the business section; the use of renewable energy by women farmers could be science and technology stories; the health benefits of climate-smart produce could be covered in the health section. Sociocultural development could be part of development economics stories. Politics and policy stories could be narrated from women farmers’ perspectives based on their experiences.

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<sup>13</sup> Ejaz, W. Mukherjee, M. Fletcher, R. and Nielsen, R. How We Follow Climate Change: Climate News Use and Attitudes in Eight Countries. Available at [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-11/Ejaz\\_et\\_al\\_How\\_We\\_Follow\\_Climate\\_Change.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-11/Ejaz_et_al_How_We_Follow_Climate_Change.pdf), accessed on 6. May 2023.

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 13

### **Empowerment Journalism facilitates the SDGs**

The UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. This agenda includes the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals include no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, gender equality, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequality, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water and life on land.<sup>15</sup>

Empowerment Journalism stories about women in climate-smart agriculture are directly connected to the majority of the SDGs. And these stories facilitate the process to achieve these goals and make the SDG campaign participatory by connecting audiences to the stories of women farmers.

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<sup>15</sup> United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals. Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.html>, accessed on 6. May 2023

## Conclusion

In 2021, as many as 828 million people were affected by hunger. That was an increase of about 46 million since 2020. The gender gap in food insecurity continued to rise in 2021 with 31.9 % of women in the world moderately or severely food insecure, compared to 27.6% of men.<sup>16</sup>

Climate change is severely affecting agriculture production and disrupting our food supply.

Nearly 670 million people (8% of the world population) will still be facing hunger in 2030 – even if a global economic recovery is taken into consideration, according to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report.

In the wake of climate change, alarm bells are already ringing loud and clear in the agriculture sector and situation will worsen if the empowerment process of women farmers is not facilitated.

Empowerment Journalism hopes not only to address a gap in the media coverage of these vital issues. It can also facilitate new ways for women farmers to network and learn from each other's experiences. Empowerment stories help to theorise the life experiences and experiments of women farmers in climate-smart agriculture.

Empowerment Journalism will also give intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for all those who are involved in the process of constructive struggle against oppression and facilitate restructuring of power structures at individual, relational and collective levels.

Organising and building a strong community to support the struggle is key in empowerment process and Empowerment Journalism acknowledges, encourages and facilitates community building efforts.

Dr. B R Ambedkar, father of the Indian Constitution, advised India's oppressed masses to educate, agitate (read: struggle constructively) and organise to reconstruct power structures and achieve sustainable development.<sup>17</sup> These are the three major tools in the hands of the oppressed to overcome oppression.

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<sup>16</sup> FAO: UN Report: Global hunger numbers rose to as many as 828 million in 2021. Available at <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/un-report-global-hunger-SOFI-2022-FAO/en>, accessed on 7. May 2023

<sup>17</sup> Narke, H., Kasare, M., Kamble, N., Godghate, A. (Eds.). (2020). Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, p. 276. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India.

For the people suffering oppression because of caste, class, race, or gender, constructive struggle is the only way to fight oppressive structures.

Empowerment Journalism plays the role of a partner in the constructive struggle of the oppressed.