



# Strengthening Women in Wheat in India: *Technical Guidance Note*

**CIMMYT**

A resource for scientists and research teams



**GENNOVATE**

ENABLING GENDER EQUALITY  
IN AGRICULTURAL AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL INNOVATION

# STRENGTHENING WOMEN IN WHEAT FARMING IN INDIA: Old challenges, new realities, new opportunities



Training on mechanized threshing. Photo: CSISA.

In parts of rural India, particularly those experiencing male outmigration, norms are shifting to accommodate open recognition of women as farmers and managers of wheat and as adopters of associated technologies including zero tillers, combine harvesters, and improved varieties of wheat. These change processes are uneven. They vary across and within regions, and manifest themselves in different and subtle ways.<sup>1</sup> Caste plays a significant role in the degree to which women and men are targeted, and are able to engage, in new technologies and practices. In some locations, middle-

in many locations scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) women and their families – despite having some land and a strong desire to participate – continue to languish in poverty, ignored by the rural advisory services (RAS) and village heads due to their low caste and socioeconomic status. There are important exceptions. Some communities are overcoming gender and caste barriers, allowing poor men and women to invest in technologies and change their lives. Transformational support factors include progressive village heads, shopkeepers selling inputs, agricultural cooperatives,

opportunities allow middle-income and low-income people to invest in time-saving innovations and have time left over to diversify their incomes and improve their economic status.

This resource provides guidance for scientists, researchers, and RAS in wheat-based systems on how to better target women in all communities and how to improve inclusion for everyone. To do this it builds on 12 case studies conducted across India's wheat belt under the CGIAR Research Program on WHEAT as part of GENNOVATE, a large-scale collaborative research



# Key Messages

- Caste and gender interact in complex ways.
  - Scheduled caste/tribe and some OBC– strongly engaged in fieldwork (own account/hired)
  - Other OBC and upper caste – rarely involved in fieldwork.

**BUT**

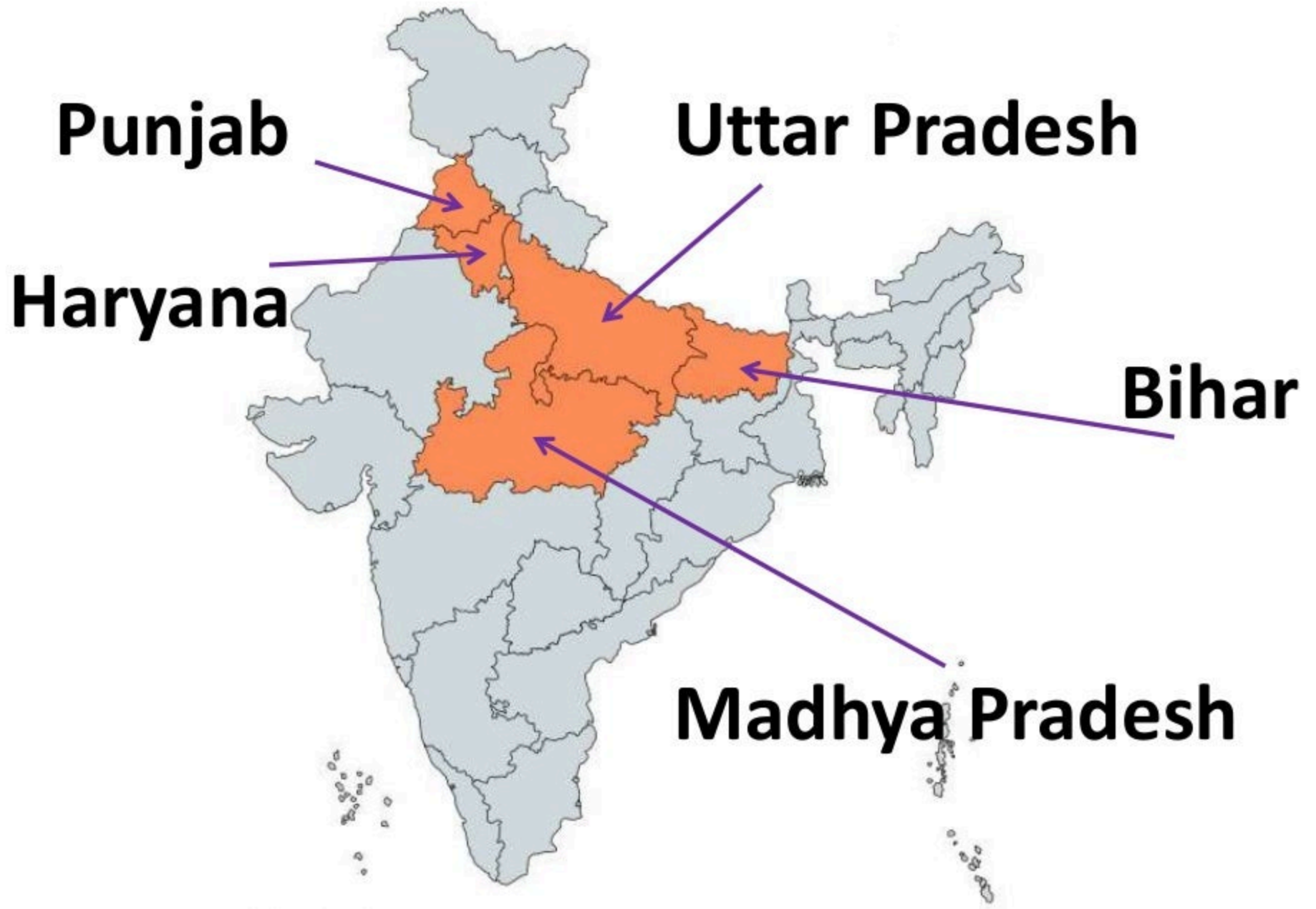
- Caste and gender identities are not (entirely) deterministic. Women use their agency!
- Women - in male-present and male-absent HH - across castes are developing strategies to increase their participation in decision-making in wheat.

**Wheat is feminizing!**

# Great Supporters are VITAL!



- Essential to facilitating women's agency, but very rare.
- RAS, village heads, research agencies, shopkeepers all pivotal.
- Rarely target scheduled castes/ tribes, poor OBC and low/high caste women to access innovations.
- When they target these people, real potential is unleashed.



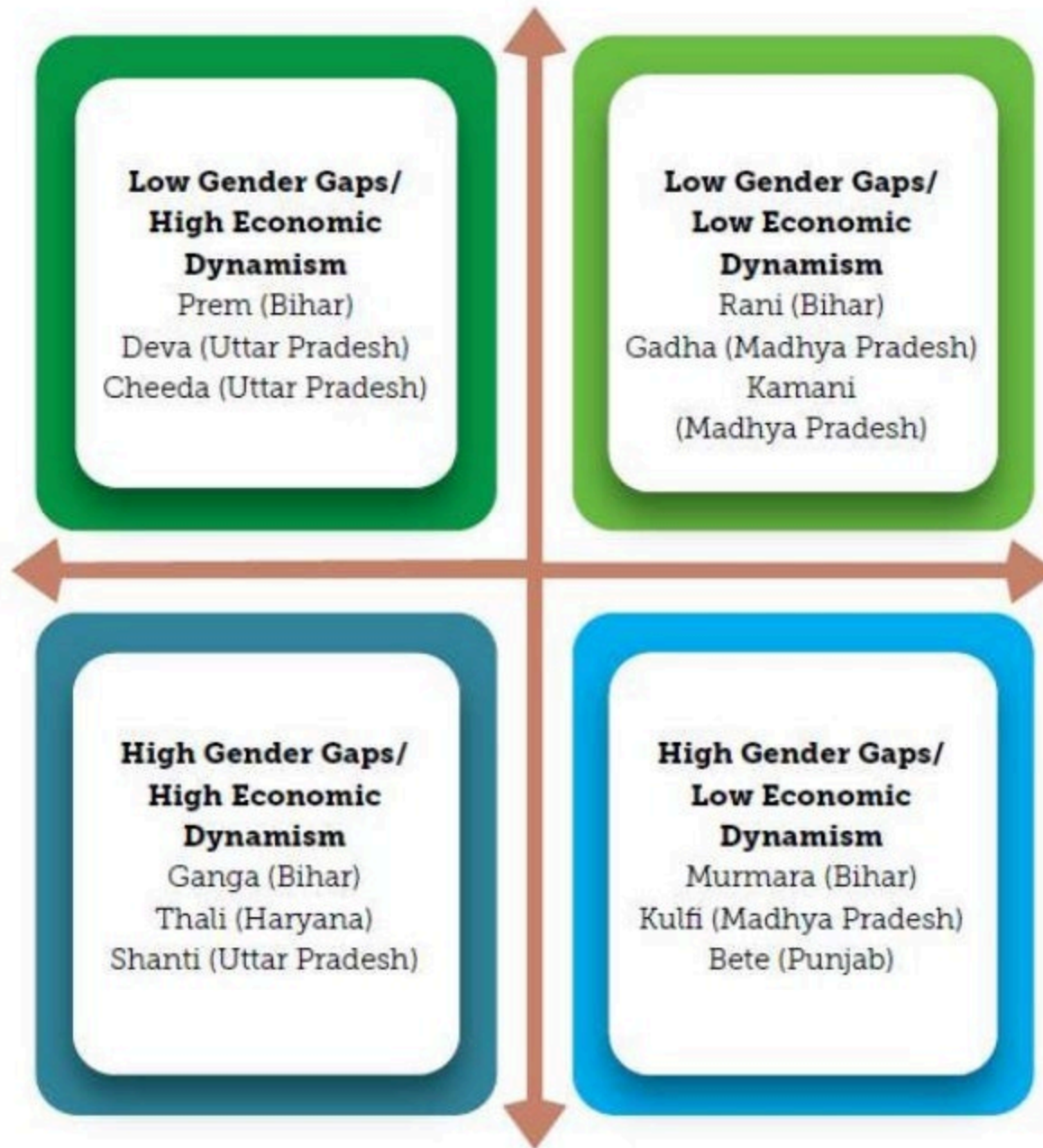
**Punjab**

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**Haryana**

**Bihar**

**Madhya Pradesh**





# Low gender gap communities

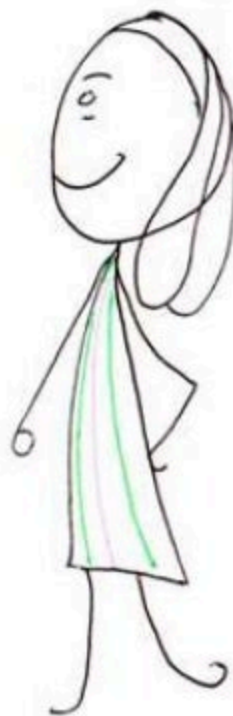
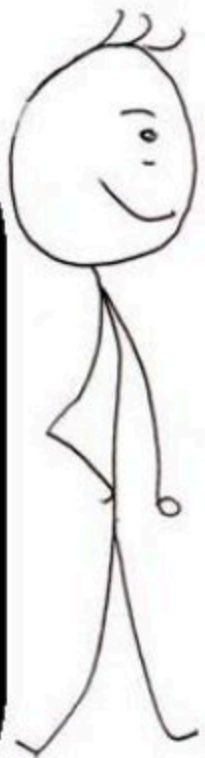
Typically strong male outmigration.

- **OBC** women increasingly taking key decisions in wheat, hiring machinery, labour, sometimes operating tractors/zero tillers. Often ,consult' husbands.
- **SC** women (and men) losing work due to mechanization. Women rarely find alternative work but men do. SC women (esp.) strongly interested in wheat innovations. Some sharecrop to take advantage.

50% of women in our village farm themselves or hire labour.

There's not much difference in the way a woman works and the way a man works.

Women here manage the household and do men's work on the farm. They are doing a good job.



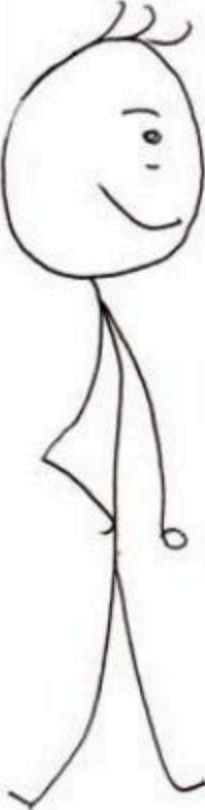
Women are the farmers here and machines.



# High gender gap communities


Men generally at home, active in farming.

- **Upper caste/ wealthier OBC** women – rarely work in fields.
  - If they do, mechanization removes them from field – appreciate this (home-based business/ more time/ respect).
- **Very poor OBC/ SC** women work as hired labourers.
- Upper caste/all socio-economic levels of OBC / SC women **ALL want to be informed about wheat innovations, but are excluded by husbands, village heads, RAS ...**,
- ... Nevertheless seek ways to influence wheat innovation.



Women are the pride of our families and cannot go hobnobbing outside

If there is anything women need to know they can ask their husbands.



Women never get as many opportunities as men and cannot innovate

Even though we work in the fields extension agents never approach us

# Moving Forward





# Tips: general

## Low Gender Gap

- Support and highlight women role models (all castes).
- Include poor women and men in innovation dissemination.
- Single sex or mixed gender technical training.
- Affordable credit.
- Innovative machinery hire arrangements (group, *etc.*)

## High Gender Gap

- Support and highlight women role models (esp. SC/ low socio-economic OBC).
- Include poor women and men in innovation dissemination.
- Single sex technical training.
- Affordable credit.
- Develop strategies to encourage inclusion of secluded women in wheat decision-making (technical training, budgeting).

„We women should be machine-friendly since machines are made for our benefit.“





# Tips: institutionalization

Be **creative** in ensuring change processes are led from within ...

Find **culturally appropriate** ways to ..

- Get **village heads** on board!
- Ensure women are invited to meetings!
  - Arrange seating and other ways to make women welcome and feel able to speak.
  - Work with women's organisations to help build women's agency.
- Develop gender/caste/ pro-poor inclusion strategies with **RAS!** Work with **agricultural cooperatives**.
- Use ICTs and other materials to secure inclusion.
- Work with **private sector actors** to get innovations to women.





**A lot more research is needed!**

**Leave No One Behind!**

# From working in the fields to taking control: Women wheat farmers in India

CATHY ROZEL FARNWORTH, PREETI BHARATI, LONE BADSTUE, TAHSEEN JAFRY,  
ASHOK YADAV

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