

5. Women In Agri Food System-Economy

In March 2026, the Global Conference on the Role of Women in Agri-Food Systems (GCWAS-2026) convened in New Delhi, marking a significant milestone in the global pursuit of gender equality within the agricultural sector. The conference serves as a precursor and a call to action for the UN-declared "International Year of the Woman Farmer."

1. Background and Definitions

To understand the scope of this global initiative, it is essential to define the central concepts discussed-

Agri-Food Systems- A comprehensive term defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) that encompasses the entire "field to fork" journey. It includes the production, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food and non-food agricultural products (like fibre and forest products).

Gender Equality in Agriculture- The state where women and men have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities across the agricultural value chain, including equal access to land, credit, and decision-making power.

Women-Led Development- A strategic shift from "women's development" to women being the architects and leaders of developmental processes, particularly in rural and agricultural economies.

2. Key Highlights of the GCWAS-2026

The conference, inaugurated by the President of India, emphasized that gender-inclusive agricultural growth is no longer optional but a necessity for global stability.

The Five "P" Global Priorities

The President stressed that sustainable development must be anchored in five pillars-

People- Prioritizing gender in every thought and action.

Planet- Creating a sensitive and harmonious environment through inclusive practices.

Prosperity- Ensuring economic gains reach the grassroots level.

Peace- Promoting social cohesion through equitable resource distribution.

Partnerships- Fostering collaboration between governments, NGOs, and the private sector.

Legislative and Social Pillars

Leadership Beyond Motherhood- The President called for a shift in mindset—recognizing that the leadership inherent in motherhood must transition into formal leadership in policy and agri-business.

Academic Excellence- Highlighting that over 50-60% of students in agricultural universities are girls, stressing the need to convert this academic talent into professional leadership.

Recognition of "Invisible" Work- The conference addressed the "unrecognized" contributions of women in conserving biodiversity and managing livestock.

3. The 2026 International Year of the Woman Farmer

The United Nations has officially designated 2026 as a year to spotlight the often-overlooked backbone of global food security.

Primary Objective- To close gender gaps in farm productivity and wages.

Economic Impact- According to the FAO, closing these gaps could increase global GDP by approximately \$1 trillion and reduce food insecurity for 45 million people.

Collective Action- The declaration encourages nations to implement structural reforms in land titles, technical knowledge sharing, and financial inclusion.

4. Understanding Agri-Food Systems- The Value Chain

The FAO defines the system as a series of interconnected stages. Below is a comparison of traditional views versus the modern "System" approach-

Feature	Traditional Agriculture View	Modern Agri-Food System View
Focus	Primarily on Crop Production (Farming).	The entire "Field to Fork" journey.

Components	Seeds, Sowing, and Harvesting.	Production, Processing, Trade, and Waste Management.
Role of Women	Often viewed as "helpers" or manual laborers.	Viewed as leaders, entrepreneurs, and scientists.
Outcome Goal	High Yield/Output.	Four Betters- Better Production, Nutrition, Environment, and Life.
Observance	National Farmers' Days.	Agri-Food Systems Day (December 5).

5. Structural Challenges and Global Responses

Despite their vital role, women in agri-food systems face persistent barriers that the 2026 initiatives aim to dismantle-

The Property Gap- Women often lack formal land titles, which restricts their access to institutional credit and government subsidies.

The Digital Divide- Limited access to AI-powered advisory and climate-smart technologies.

Regulatory Barriers- Complex regulatory processes in seed value chains often prevent women from transitioning from "custodians" of seeds to "entrepreneurs."

Government of India Initiatives Mentioned-

Financial Inclusion- The Jan Dhan Yojana, where 56% of the 570 million accounts are held by women.

Technological Integration- 'Sarlaben', an AI-powered initiative for livestock care, showcasing the intersection of high-tech and women's traditional roles.

Community Leadership- Strengthening Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) to create collective bargaining power.

6. Way Ahead- The Delhi Declaration

The GCWAS-2026 concluded with the adoption of the Delhi Declaration, which outlines the future roadmap-

Global Alliance- Establishing a Global Alliance on Women in Agri-Food Systems.

Gender Audits- Implementing periodic audits and gender-responsive budgeting.

One Health Framework- Integrating agriculture with nutrition and environmental health to build resilient systems.

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