

Strategies for Developing Viable and Empowering Women-Led Farmer Producer Organizations and Companies in India

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SUMMARY

Women, Womb and family for social change (Social Family), this assets/capital thrives her to move further for economic change with hope, faith, resilience and integrity by forming women led FPOs (Economic family) with sovereignty and freedom (Resource Mobilisation and its Management). Women-led Farmers producer organization are group of rural producers coming together based on the principle of membership, to pursue specific common interests of their members and developing technical and economic activities that benefit their members and maintain relations with partners operating in their economic and institutional environment. The study is based on secondary base data from research publications, journals, archives and relevant study material published in public and private decorum. The article discusses the Strategies for developing viable and empowering women-led Farmer Producer organizations focusing on crucial parameters like capacity building, resource allocation and its management, social to society support, leadership attributes, economic literacy and technical know about the crops and demography. The parameters are the need and scope virtues which must be adhered among the women led FPOs/FPCs to form a resilient ecosystem for social and economic benefits. “Across the board, access to finance for women farmers and strengthening their collective bargaining power through FPOs is a must for enhancing equality in decision making, developing viable entities, resource management and flow of income through women led FPOs”..

INTRODUCTION

In developing countries women farmers not only own fewer assets, and have less access to inputs and services compared to their male counterparts, but even with equal access to resources may not have returns equal to the latter (World Bank 2017). Given this, the increasing “feminisation” of agriculture in India, especially in the context of the emerging modern supply chains, calls for empirical understanding of the transforming gender roles in agriculture in response to the new opportunities, for the policymakers and practitioners to formulate strategies/policies that can help rural women to maximise these opportunities to increase productivity, improve food security, and subsequent reinvestments in their households. Organising farmers into groups, such as farmers/rural producer organisations, is a potential tool to address many issues that farmers, particularly women farmers, face in procuring inputs, receiving extension services and transacting through markets having different value chains. Such organisations due to scale benefits are expected to lower transaction costs for sellers and buyers, besides providing technical help in production and creating social capital. ^{4,7}

Need, Challenges of Farmer Producer Organizations and importance of women in it

As noted by the Tata Cornell Institute for Agriculture and Nutrition, “nearly 90% of the 570 million farms around the world are less than 2 hectares (about 5 acres) in size. Most are in low- and middle- income countries where a substantial amount of the population is dependent on the agriculture sector. Due to their size, small farms have an inherent disadvantage in accessing product markets, credit, management inputs, and technology.” FPOs offer the potential to overcome such disadvantages faced by smallholder farmers.

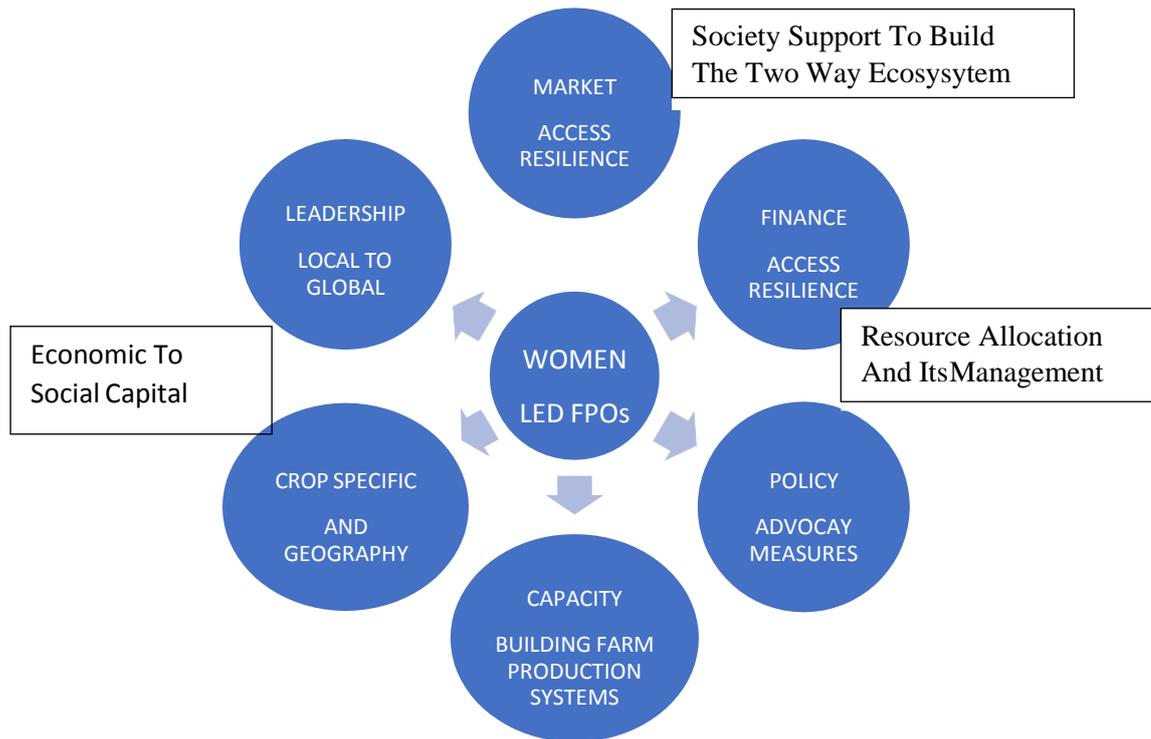
Well-functioning and inclusive FPOs can:

- Link farmers to formal markets (e.g., public, private, domestic and international buyers), which can offer differentiated end markets and pricing to farmers.
- Unlock benefits from public and related support programs for their smallholder members (e.g., accessing credit and infrastructure supports).
- Offer services to farmers at a reduced cost (e.g., aggregate purchases of inputs and facilitate inputs

distribution, and other kinds of value addition, all of which support efficiency and product differentiation).

- Help farmers launch new crop programs and participate more fully in markets and across the farm production seasons.
- Increase levels of professionalization, including helping to roll out sustainability practices in the field and to collect and share information that helps farmers increase yields while preserving natural resources.^{5, 12, 15}

“Strategies for developing viable and empowering women-led Farmer Producer organizations and Companies”.



The following strategies, factors can assist to empower women involvement and development of women –led FPOs and companies

The **Market Access portfolio** aims to increase the effectiveness of FPOs and unleash their potential to advance gender equity. FPOs boost their capacity and reach, invest in sustainable practices and access finance and infrastructure to add value to crop production. Henceforth a market Access Portfolio must be developed and executed to encourage more and more women in the FPO business ecosystem.

Encouraging Women Participation in smallholder programs. Depending on crop focus and geography women participate in small holder programs

Increasing women’s membership and leadership in FPOs/Leadership Role in FPOs: Women have made strides in gaining leadership roles in FPOs, but they need clearer pathways to grow. Interventions need to consider unbalanced male/female power structures in FPOs. For example, women overall are starting from lower positions, they have reduced opportunity for growth and acceleration, and they may require customized approaches. Performing needs analysis to inform action, Offering targeted training to promote women’s leadership as part of broader FPO strengthening and Promoting women’s income growth Encouraging women’s self-diagnostics will channelize the Leadership qualities and which would mould viable women led FPOs.^{12, 15}

Access to Market by More Access to Finance: Women face additional roadblocks in trying to access financing. Access to finance for female smallholders is limited. Where suitable finance products are available, they are often not designed to suit women’s needs (for example, appropriate level of financing or adequate support). Innovative

finance products like asset viability, Link between access to finance and women's economic and social capital, Finance increasing women's entrepreneurship, farm assets and income generation and control Unlocking financial products (credit, savings, insurance)

Accelerating women's digital tools will channelize the ways and means to access to finance.12, 15

Crop choices can increase women's rates of agricultural participation and empowerment. In addition to providing ecological benefits, focusing on crops that represent a highly nutritious food for people and/or livestock was motivating and increased inclusion of women in agricultural systems. (FPOs are mainly focused on cash crops/commercial crops, so crop choices can make women more viable to participate and form FPOs) 12, 15

Making the transition from measuring inclusion to economic empowerment will require additional effort. Insights into economic empowerment and livelihoods come over time from programs with strong gender equity indicators and measurement plans. Monitoring and evaluation, however, has traditionally focused on generic inclusion measures such as the number of women trained or number of women members in FPOs rather than measures of decision-making and income by sex.

The NRLM has created a good foundation of women's self-help groups (SHGs) across the country. Sixty nine million women have been organised under 6.7 million SHGs and as of March 2019, the NRLM has supported value chain development proposals covering 254,000 SHG members. Additionally, a strong rural women's movement in the country led by civil society organisations, has also organised women. These rural women's collectives can be the base for forming new FPOs.

Developing women's skills and capacity in farm production systems with a platform for Women's inclusive crop and marketing programs. This can be accelerated by Forming and training women-only producer groups, Offering specialized attention from enterprise facilitators and business advisory services and establishing marketing centres.

Policy Advocacy measures: Gender base segregated data of existing FPOs can be allocated and put in public domain, FPO guidelines must be framed with a gender lens. Have exclusive targets for women FPOs across sub sectors in agriculture, Ensure mixed FPOs with minimum 30 percent women as shareholders, and in governance structure of FPOs. Offer larger equity grants and subsidised processing infrastructure for FPOs with a minimum of 51 percent women shareholders, Have a separate cell and functional plan for the training and capacity building of women shareholders and women board members. Focus on training younger, educated women for agri-business management, as agri-preneurs, and appoint them as FPO managers. Have higher convergence with existing women's collectives to form FPOs. 2, 3, 6, 8

Ecosystem (Local to Global) Skill development within the village: Rural women are aligned within the vicinity of village resources and are well aware with its usage and productivity. So ecosystem which can flourish the rural bound activities by involving them collectively by setting up processing units, small procurements centres by forming FPOs. These will make the processing and value chain development in village itself.

Society Support: The supportive measures must come from society only as it will revolve the financial cycle and will make the viable movement of resources. The existing FPOs will be role model and it will be encouraged by the society to come up with new innovative functionaries models too. 2, 3

Awareness (SHGs-Cooperatives-FPOs) benchmark to platform for exploring it: Awareness must be channelized among the women farmers, entrepreneurs that the income generating activities can be encouraged by forming SHGs-Cooperatives-FPOs. The bulk activities of crop harvesting, grading and standardisation, packaging, market intelligence, market finance, logistic can be done smoothly. 7,8

Resource Management-FPOs-Women: Viable Women Led FPOs can be efficiently run with proper resource management. Studies say that, the Women are keen to conserve and utilise the resources properly and yield with good returns. This will balance the Backward Linkage to Forward Linkage forum and flourish farm activities Further it will come up with Culture Preservance too. Women's increased access to income generating activities gave them more power to participate in decision-making.

Women Participation (Sowing-All package and Practices-Harvesting-Production- Marketing-Postharvest Management) can be professionalized by promoting and making viable Women led FPOs.

CONCLUSION

It is only when we recognize women as farmers, decision makers, upcoming innovators, entrepreneurs and sees the promotion of FPOs from a gender perspective that we will be able to progress towards gender equality, recourse mobility and ensure the sustainability of FPOs. If we do not do this, FPOs will result in all resources—knowledge, credit, inputs, market and technology—being available only to men. This in turn will leave women farmers behind in the farms only to labour, making them even more invisible, and thereby deepening the existing gender divide.

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