

Bridging the Gender Gap: Empowering Women Through FPOs

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Abstract

Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have emerged as a powerful tool to strengthen the economic resilience of small and marginal farmers in India. However, the inclusion and active participation of women in FPOs remain a crucial factor for truly equitable rural development. This abstract explores how FPOs serve as platforms for women to gain economic independence, leadership roles, and collective bargaining power. Despite societal and structural barriers, women's involvement in FPOs is gradually transforming traditional gender roles, improving household incomes, and fostering community-level change. Through capacity-building, access to credit, and value-chain participation, women in FPOs are not only contributing to agriculture but also redefining rural entrepreneurship. Bridging the gender gap in FPOs requires targeted policy support, gender-sensitive training, and inclusive governance models. Empowering women through FPOs is not just about equity—it is a strategic imperative for sustainable and inclusive agricultural growth.

Keywords: Farmer Producer Organizations, Empowering women, gender roles

Introduction

Agriculture sector is diverse and full of contradictions. The sector accounts for a comparatively small share of the global economy, but remains central to the lives of a great many people. Most of the world's farmers are found in middle and low-income countries, wherein, agriculture accounts for a much greater share of their national income and employment. For instance, in India, agriculture represents 18.00 percent national income and 54.00 percent of employment. In developed countries very few percent of people are involved accounting for their major share in agriculture contributing for the national income.



In rural India, the seeds of change are being sown not just in the soil, but in the hearts and minds of women. As agriculture shifts from subsistence to entrepreneurship, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) are emerging as game-changers—especially for women who have traditionally been sidelined in the agri-economy.

The Gender Divide in Agriculture Women contribute nearly 60–80% of labor in agriculture, yet their visibility and decision-making power remain disproportionately low. Limited access to land, markets, finance, and technology keeps them locked in cycles of dependency and low income.

Structure of Farmer Producer Organization (FPO)

Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) is managed by an elected President who is in charge of making decisions. A regularly elected Board of Directors (10–15), which includes women representation, also provides guidance. The corporation also has an elected secretary in addition to the Board. A chief executive officer (CEO) and other members of the designated personnel provide this honorary body with necessary support. In general, the designated personnel assist the producer members by

providing input, setting up on-farm or on-campus training, offering advice on agro-techniques, organizing group formation and strengthening activities, etc.



Important activities of a Producer Organization

The primary producers have skill and expertise in producing. However, they generally need support for marketing of what they produce. The PO will basically bridge this gap. The PO will take over the responsibility of any one or more activities in the value chain of the produce right from procurement of raw material to delivery of the final product at the ultimate consumers' doorstep. In brief, the PO could undertake the following activities:

- Procurement of inputs
- Disseminating market information
- Dissemination of technology and innovations
- Facilitating finance for inputs
- Aggregation and storage of produce
- Primary processing like drying, cleaning and grading
- Brand building, Packaging, Labelling and Standardization
- Quality control
- Marketing to institutional buyers
- Participation in commodity exchanges
- Export

Women Participation in Farmer Producer Organization (FPO)

Women farmers in developing nations not only own less property and have limited access to supplies and services than their male counterparts,

but even with the same approach to resources, they might not see returns on their investments that are equivalent to those of the male counterparts (World Bank 2017). In order for policymakers and specialists to create strategies and policies that can help women accelerate these opportunities to increase productivity, food availability, and then reinvest in their homes, it is necessary to have an actual understanding of how gender roles in agriculture and allied sectors are changing in response to new opportunities. Assembling farmers into organisations, such as farmer producer organisations or farmers' cooperatives, is one way to potentially handle the myriad problems that farmers, especially women farmers, encounter while buying inputs, obtaining extension services, and interacting with marketplaces with various value chains.



The fact that men made up slightly more than 87.00 per cent of the membership in the studied FPOs indicates that women are underrepresented in these groups. Lack of time could be a big factor, as rural women are expected to perform two jobs in addition to caring for their families, the last of which is thought to take up between 85.00 per cent and 90.00 per cent of their time. Women's engagement in organisational activities can be facilitated by offering labor-saving technologies, access to free medical care, and childcare services to female members and female relatives of male members.

The Way Forward To truly bridge the gender gap, we must:

- Promote and fund women-only FPOs.
- Build leadership and financial literacy.
- Ensure policy inclusion (e.g., quotas in FPO boards).
- Leverage digital tools to reach remote areas.

Conclusion

Empowering women through FPOs is vital for inclusive and sustainable rural development. Their active participation enhances productivity, strengthens communities, and fosters economic resilience. By bridging the gender gap in agriculture, FPOs can become true agents of transformation, ensuring that women are not just beneficiaries but key drivers of change.

Reference

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