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## Opportunities And Challenges For Women Farmer Producer Organizations (Wfpo's)

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### ABSTRACT

In India's agrarian landscape, the emergence of Women Farmers' Producer Organizations (WFPOs) represents a significant step forward, providing rural women with a platform to enhance their economic status and participate in decision-making processes, thereby augmenting their incomes. Despite their crucial role in agriculture, women farmers face substantial barriers such as limited access to resources and services, which hamper their productivity. To address these challenges, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have been actively promoted to improve the productivity and profitability of small-scale farmers, including women, through policy interventions and institutional support. The present study conducted in the southern Telangana region explored the opportunities and challenges faced by WFPOs. The findings revealed that respondents generally exhibited moderate levels of leadership, interpersonal communication, group motivation, and participation. However, they also highlighted significant challenges including limited access to information, lack of strategic vision and planning, delays in subsidy payments, and inadequate storage facilities, which hinder the effectiveness of WFPOs in the region.

**Keywords:** Women Farmers' Producer Organizations, Farmers' Producer Organizations, Women Farmers, Women Empowerment and Financial Support.

### INTRODUCTION:

In the context of India's predominantly agrarian economy, the emergence of women farmer's producer organizations (WFPOs) has become a significant development in recent years. These organizations serve as an important instrument for economic and social change, providing rural women with a platform to actively participate in the decision-making process and supplement their income and employment (Gupta, 2020). Women farmers play a crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields. However, they often face numerous challenges, including limited access to agricultural information, services, production assets, and control over their earnings. The less productivity among women farmers is recognized to be due to inadequate information and knowledge (Kamala *et al.*, 2019).

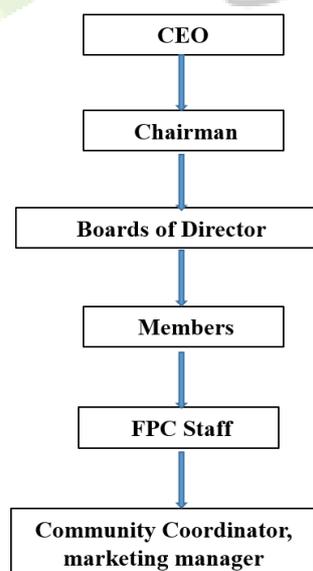
Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have been promoted by various governmental and non-governmental organizations to address these challenges and enhance the profitability of small and marginal farmers. NABARD, with its mission of promoting equitable and sustainable agricultural and rural prosperity, has been exploring various approaches to support and enable small farmers negotiate the market by providing policy, credit, and institutional interventions. The Farmer Producer Organizations initiative aims to work closely with

the Department of Agriculture & Cooperation and the various State Governments to enhance production, productivity, and profitability of small farmers in the country (Devi *et al.*, 2020). While these efforts have been lauded for their potential to empower rural communities, the participation and leadership of women in such organizations have been relatively limited.

Issues of women participation in FPOs and their inclusion in decision making were reported in many studies across the world (Golan and Lay 2008, Mudege *et al.* 2015). Towo (2004) found clear differences between the experience of women and male farmers within producer organizations; lack of sensitization to gender issues, restricted participation of women in meetings and the difficulties in balancing heavy domestic workloads were major factors behind the low female participation in producer organizations. Most of the organisations lacked the necessary lobbying and advocacy skills to encourage the participation of women. To, overcome this problem some studies suggested exclusive FPOs for women (Abokyi 2013, Towo 2004). Single gender FPO was more helpful to each other than the mixed gender FPO (Abokyi 2013).The women showed more commitment to the FPOs than men in the groups (Mudege *et al.*, 2015). Male outmigration and feminization of agriculture witnessed in country. A key understanding of societal issues underlying the gender inequality is essential to achieve gender inclusiveness in FPOs. According to Chamala (1990), extension agents and agencies can play role, viz. empowerment, community organizing, human resource development, education and problem solving for strengthening the women producers' organizations. Self-help groups at the village level play a crucial role in the socio-economic development of rural communities, particularly in empowering women (Rathod and Devi, 2019). By connecting farmer producer organizations (FPOs) with self-help groups, these initiatives can enhance marketing opportunities and improve bargaining power. A. H. Lade *et al.*, (2024) recommended that various extension agencies take the initiative to encourage broader participation of FPC beneficiaries in programs such as knowledge and skill-oriented training, study tours, exhibitions, farmers' rallies, field demonstrations, and meetings. This engagement aims to enhance their cosmopolitanism

## METHODOLOGY:

Ex post facto and exploratory designs were employed for this study to explore opportunities and challenges for promoting Women Farmer Producer Organizations (WFPOs). In the majority of the Farmers Producer Companies (FPCs), women farmers were mobilized at the primary village level, uniting as members from different villages to form WFPOs. Each WFPO had a Board of Directors consisting of 10-12 members, including women representatives, with one member elected as the chairman of the FPO. Three WFPOs were randomly selected, and from these, 40 respondents were randomly chosen from each, resulting in a total of 120 respondents from Telangana were selected for the study.



**Fig.1. Organizational Structure of WFPOs**

**Figure 1** represents the organizational structure of the sampled FPOs in the study area. Farmers are the owners of the producer organization, contributing individual share capital, procuring inputs, and marketing produce

through the FPO. The Board of Directors is elected or selected by members, making critical business decisions for the organization. Promoting institutions such as GMM and APMASS have aided in the formation of FPOs, providing technical advice and financial resources for effective functioning (Manaswi *et al.*, 2019). The chairman and CEO play pivotal roles within the organization. The CEO regularly inspects members' farms, provides necessary production information, sources inputs, and coordinates the marketing of final produce. Interestingly, it was noted in the study area that the CEOs of these organizations were often educated youths rather than professionals with agricultural degrees.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table: 1 Distribution of respondents according to their Socio-economic status n=120**

S.No	Demographic Variables	F	%
<b>1</b>	<b>Age</b>		
	Young age ( 18-35)	38	31.7
	Middle age (36-55)	67	55.8
	Above 55 years	15	12.5
<b>2</b>	<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
	Illiterate	30	25.00
	Functional Literate	15	12.50
	Primary School	18	15.00
	Middle School	25	20.83
	High School	13	10.83
	Intermediate	10	8.33
	Graduation& Above	9	7.50
<b>3</b>	<b>Marital status</b>		
	Married	103	85.83
	Widow	17	14.17
<b>4</b>	<b>Family type</b>		
	Nuclear	76	63.33
	Joint	28	23.33
	Extended family	16	13.33
<b>5</b>	<b>Family Size</b>		
	Small family 1-4 members	69	57.50
	Medium family 5-6 members	33	27.50
	Large family >6 members	18	15.00
<b>6</b>	<b>Occupation</b>		
	Agriculture	63	52.50
	Labour	27	22.50
	Service (Govt./Private)	15	12.50
	Small Business	9	7.50
	House wife	6	5.00
<b>7</b>	<b>Land holding</b>		
	Marginal holding (Up to 1 hectares)	27	22.50
	Small holding (1-2 hectares)	43	35.83
	Semi-medium holding (2-4 hectares)	21	17.50
	Medium holding (4-10 hectares)	18	15.00
	Large holding (10 hectares or above)	11	9.17

8	Monthly Income		
	10,000-15,000	62	51.67
	16,000- 20,000	31	25.83
	21,000-30,000	16	13.33
	More than 30,000	11	9.17

The table above, Table 1, presents the socio-economic status details of WFPOs (Women Farmers and Primary Operators). It reveals that 25% of the sample were illiterate. Regarding marital status, the majority (85.83%) of the sample were married. Further analysis of the table shows that 63.33% of the women belonged to nuclear families. In terms of family size, 57.50% of the sample had between 1-4 members. In terms of occupation, the majority (52.50%) were engaged in agriculture. Regarding landholding, more than a quarter (35.83%) of the sample owned 1-2 hectares of land, while 22.50% owned up to 1 hectare. Nearly three-quarters of the sample had 1-4 acres of land. In terms of monthly income, 51.67% of the sample earned between Rs. 10,000-15,000. Overall, Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the socio-economic characteristics of WFPOs, highlighting their educational levels, marital status, family arrangements, occupation types, landholdings, and income levels.

### Mass Media Exposure

**Table: 2 Distribution of respondents according to their mass media exposure n=120**

S. no	Mass media contact	Regular		Occasionally		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Radio	20	16.67	81	67.50	19	15.83
2.	Television	24	20.00	85	70.83	11	9.17
3.	Mobile	14	11.67	63	52.50	43	35.83
4.	Internet	0	0.00	27	22.50	93	77.50
5.	Kisan Call centre	15	12.50	52	43.33	53	44.17
6.	News papers	11	9.17	51	42.50	58	48.33
7.	Visits to Agril. Exhibitions/Fairs	10	8.33	36	30.00	74	61.67
8.	Others	0	0.00	21	17.50	99	82.50

The above Table 2 presents details on the mass media exposure of women. According to Table 2, it was revealed that 67.50% of the sample had medium-level exposure to radio. Nearly equal proportions of the sample had low (15.83%) and high (16.67%) levels of exposure to radio. Regarding television, three-fourths (70.83%) of the sample had medium-level exposure to television programs related to agriculture activities. This was followed by 20.00% with high exposure and a minimal 9.17% with low exposure to such programs. A majority (52.50%) of the sample used mobile phones, with 35.83% using them extensively for gathering information on agricultural activities, while 11.67% used them minimally for this purpose. Concerning internet use for agricultural activities, more than three-fourths (77.50%) of the sample used it minimally, while 22.50% used it moderately. A notable 42.50% of the sample utilized Kisan Call Centers for agricultural information, with 44.17% having low usage and 12.50% high usage of these centers. In terms of newspaper exposure, 42.50% of the sample read newspapers, with 48.33% reading them infrequently and only 9.17% regularly. Regarding agricultural exhibitions and fairs, the majority (61.67%) of the sample had low exposure or interest in attending, while 30.00% were interested in participating. Overall, a significant majority (82.50%) of the sample reported low levels of media exposure across various agricultural sources, whereas only 17.50% had medium-level exposure through sources like posts or pamphlets.

**Table: 3 Distribution of respondents according to their Leadership, Interpersonal, group motivation and participation**

n=120

	leadership		Interpersonal Communication		Group motivation		Participation	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
<b>Low</b>	21	17.50	18	15.00	16	13.33	13	10.83
<b>Medium</b>	80	66.67	77	64.17	83	69.17	89	74.17
<b>High</b>	19	15.83	25	20.83	21	17.50	18	15.00

**a. Leadership Abilities:**

A significant majority (66.67%) exhibited medium-level leadership abilities. This suggests that most respondents possess a baseline competency in leadership, which is crucial for guiding and influencing others. A smaller proportion demonstrated low leadership abilities (17.50%), indicating some respondents may struggle with taking charge or providing direction. High-level leadership abilities were observed in 15.83% of respondents, indicating that a notable portion display advanced leadership skills, capable of inspiring and guiding others effectively.

**b. Interpersonal Communication Skills:**

The majority (64.17%) demonstrated medium-level interpersonal communication skills. This suggests that most respondents are reasonably adept at communicating effectively with others, essential for building relationships and conveying information. A substantial proportion (20.83%) exhibited high proficiency in interpersonal communication, indicating strong abilities in expressing ideas, listening, and understanding others. A smaller percentage (15.00%) displayed low proficiency, implying that some respondents may face challenges in effectively communicating with others.

**c. Group Motivation:**

A significant majority (69.17%) of respondents showed medium-level group motivation skills. This indicates that most individuals possess the ability to encourage and mobilize groups towards common goals. High-level group motivation skills were evident in 17.50% of respondents, suggesting a considerable number excel in inspiring and energizing group members. A minority (13.33%) demonstrated low group motivation skills, suggesting some respondents may struggle with motivating or engaging others within group settings.

**d. Participation Skills:**

The majority (74.17%) demonstrated medium-level participation skills. This indicates that most respondents are capable of actively engaging in activities and initiatives. High proficiency in participation skills was noted in 15.00% of respondents, highlighting a notable subset that actively contributes and engages deeply in various endeavors. A small proportion (10.83%) exhibited low participation skills, suggesting challenges among some respondents in effectively contributing or engaging in group activities.

**2. Support extended by the implementing agencies to WFPOs**

The support provided by implementing agencies to WFPOs through economic linkages can be assessed by considering the proportion of inputs purchased from other industries for backward linkages and the percentage of output sold to other industries for forward linkages. Industries exhibiting strong linkages in both directions, like petroleum products and chemicals, differ from those primarily involved in forward linkages (such as metal mining and agriculture) and those primarily in backward linkages (like grain mill products and leather products). It's important to note that while linkages are significant, they represent just one of several potential channels through which implementing agencies can support FPOs.

## Backward Linkages:

Backward linkages are the channels through which information, materials, and money flow between a firm and its suppliers, creating a network of economic interdependence. FPCs in the study area have assurance in the supply of farm inputs such as fertilizers.

**Farmer shareholders benefit in various ways:** They experience a reduction in the cost of cultivating paddy due to the supply of fertilizers and chemicals at prices lower than the market rate. They also benefit from assured supplies of fertilizers and chemicals, even during periods of market shortages, thereby avoiding pitfalls associated with incorrect recommendations from various dealers and private companies. Furthermore, the FPC provides crop advisories to cluster farmers and develops post-harvest management infrastructure near crop clusters to facilitate the aggregation of horticultural produce for improved marketing interventions. The identification, mobilization, and sensitization of farmer groups for participation in backward and forward linkages are also part of their operational focus.

## Forward linkages involve:

Providing subsidies or assistance (70-90%) to FPOs/FPCs for the creation of logistical farm-to-market infrastructure, including post-harvest management centers equipped with facilities such as Cold Storage (CHC) and waste management, alongside amenities like water and sanitation that maintain food safety and hygiene standards. These facilities cater to the needs of end-users such as retailers, processors, exporters, and the general public. Developing cluster-specific business plans for FPOs/FPCs, which include strategies to create business opportunities and connect them with off-season markets, institutional buyers, processing industries, and export markets.

## 3. Business performance and practices adopted by WFPOs and to suggest strategies for improving the same.

Business performance is crucial for achieving the company's goals of expanding and growing the business strategically.

The average authorized capital of the selected FPOs was Rs. 5-25 lakh, and the average mobilized share capital was Rs. 5 lakhs. The average turnover of the selected FPOs was Rs. 1-4 lakh, with an average profit ranging from Rs. 1-2 lakh.

The study revealed that women respondents who joined the FPCs were in a better position compared to those not in FPCs. Non-FPC members purchased inputs at market rates, whereas FPC members obtained them at lower costs due to bulk purchases. FPC members also accessed credit at below-market rates, facilitated by NGOs and supporting agencies providing loans at reduced interest rates. FPC members benefited from extension services and training, leading to increased productivity. They also enjoyed marketing advantages such as reduced transportation costs, no charges for labor, packing, and grading, and access to various markets ensuring competitive prices. Transaction costs were minimized as farmers' produce was procured through FPC procurement centers. These factors collectively contributed to enhancing household income among respondents. Moreover, FPCs were observed to enhance leadership qualities and representation of women from marginalized groups. A significant 95% of the respondents strongly agreed with the company's commitment to the long-term success of their farmer members. Additionally, factors like cohesion among members, sharing of common benefits, and the commitment of both management and members towards business goals were identified as influential in the performance and sustainability of FPCs.

#### 4. Opportunities, challenges of Women Farmer Producer Organisations and to suggest suitable strategies to improve the functioning of the WFPOs

**Table: 4 Opportunities of Women Farmer Producer Organisations n=120**

Category	Opportunities	
	F	%
<b>Low</b>	14	11.67
<b>Medium</b>	85	70.83
<b>High</b>	21	17.50

A majority of the respondents (70.83%) reported being in the medium category. This suggests that a significant portion of WFPO members perceive moderate opportunities available to them, possibly indicating a balanced outlook on the potential for growth, development, and advancement within their organizations. A notable proportion (17.50%) of respondents expressed high levels of opportunity. This indicates that a substantial subset of WFPO members perceive extensive prospects and favorable conditions for progress and success within their roles. A smaller percentage (11.67%) reported low levels of opportunity. This minority suggests that some WFPO members perceive limited chances or challenges in accessing beneficial opportunities within their organizations or broader contexts.

Overall, these findings highlight that while the majority of WFPO respondents perceive moderate levels of opportunities, there is a segment that identifies fewer opportunities. This insight can guide strategies to enhance supportive environments and resources that foster growth and empowerment within WFPOs.

#### Challenges

Constraints have limited their access to profitable economic activities. During institutional building, FPCs must mobilize women farmers. Lack of vision and planning among farmers has resulted in FPOs facing difficulties in mobilizing farmers and promoting organic farming. Farmers have been reliant on fertilizers and pesticides to enhance crop yields. There is a prevailing belief among farmers that the same land will yield less without synthetic fertilizers and other conventional agricultural tools. Changing these attitudes requires significant determination and courage.

Delay in subsidy payments is another challenge. Farmers often experience delays in subsidy payments, sometimes extending beyond a year. These delays result in financial losses as banks deduct additional interest for the delayed period from farmers' savings accounts. Banks also deduct interest amounts for pandal subsidies.

Improper storage facilities pose significant issues. Horticultural produce is highly perishable, necessitating proper storage facilities to extend shelf life. However, constructing such facilities and purchasing necessary equipment require substantial investment, which is often unaffordable for small and marginal farmers. Consequently, they incur losses when storing produce at home.

Padaliya M *et al.* (2022) identified several challenges faced by farmer producer organizations (FPOs). These challenges include a lack of legal and technical knowledge, insufficient experienced and trained leadership, limited financial resources, inadequate access to credit, a lack of risk-taking ability, insufficient market access information, and inadequate access to infrastructure.

#### Marketing:

Marketing has perennially posed a significant challenge for farmers. The nearest market accessible to them is near Hyderabad, approximately 40-50 km away. Local mandis in villages often lack the capacity to absorb all the agricultural produce cultivated. Consequently, farmers frequently find themselves reliant on middlemen and other intermediaries. These middlemen exploit the situation by purchasing produce at low prices and selling them at higher rates in urban markets. There is a pressing need for processing units and storage facilities, which has been requested from promoting agencies to address these issues effectively

### **Small Landholdings:**

This is a widespread issue faced by the majority of farmers in India. The study reveals that small and marginal farmers constitute the largest segment. The challenge with small landholdings is their inability to cover the costs required for modern agricultural implements and technology. Consequently, farmers often adhere to traditional farming methods, resulting in lower productivity.

### **Price of the Crop:**

The Minimum Support Price (MSP) of crops is set and announced by the government and promoting agencies. However, small and marginal farmers rarely receive the government-declared price.

### **Financial Problems:**

The grant of Rs. 150,000 from NABARD and SFAC was intended solely for initial expenses in establishing the Farmers Producers Company (FPC). Matching grants from the Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC), NABARD, MAS, and SERP are contingent upon achieving a target of 500 farmers. Therefore, promoting regular income generation activities is crucial for sustaining FPCs.

### **Strategies:**

- Convergence with existing schemes for all types of farmer organizations and facilitating credit facilities for farmer members by the FPCs.
- Establishment of infrastructure and storage facilities.
- Promotion of processing and value addition.
- Training programs for women FPOs on sustainable agriculture and leadership.
- Establishment of processing units.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Women Farmers' Producer Organizations (WFPOs) represent a crucial advancement in India's agrarian sector, providing rural women with opportunities to participate actively in decision-making processes and improve their economic standing. Despite their potential, these organizations face formidable challenges such as limited access to resources and inadequate support systems, which hinder their ability to effectively enhance productivity and profitability among women farmers. Addressing these barriers requires concerted efforts from governmental and non-governmental organizations to strengthen WFPOs through targeted policies, better access to information, and improved infrastructure. Moreover, fostering gender inclusivity within these organizations is essential for their long-term sustainability and impact on rural communities. Governmental and non-governmental organizations should develop targeted support systems that provide Women Farmers' Producer Organizations (WFPOs) with access to essential resources, including financial assistance, training programs, and technological tools. This support will enhance the capacity of WFPOs to improve productivity and profitability for women farmer. By addressing these challenges comprehensively, WFPOs can play a transformative role in empowering women farmers and fostering sustainable agricultural development across India.

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