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### Evolution and growth of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) in agriculture

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#### Abstract

Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have emerged as a powerful means to empower small and marginal farmers in India, enhancing their bargaining power and improving their livelihoods. This article delves into the evolution, growth and impact of FPOs on agricultural development, exploring their historical context, challenges and opportunities. It traces the development of FPOs from their inception, highlighting key milestones, government initiatives and institutional support that have shaped their trajectory. The article also addresses the role of FPOs in addressing market access, input supply, value addition and collective bargaining for farmers. The evolution of FPOs is contextualized within the broader dynamics of agrarian reform, cooperative movements and rural development policies. The paper concludes with an assessment of the future of FPOs, the challenges they face and recommendations for strengthening these organizations in the changing agricultural landscape.

**Keywords:** Farmer producer organizations, agricultural development, cooperative movements, small farmers, collective bargaining, rural development, market access, India, FPO growth, agricultural policy

#### Introduction

Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy, providing employment to a significant portion of the population, especially in rural areas. Despite its importance, Indian agriculture faces numerous challenges such as low productivity, fragmented landholdings, poor market access and lack of proper infrastructure <sup>[13]</sup>. These challenges disproportionately affect small and marginal farmers who constitute the majority of the farming community. To address these challenges, the concept of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) has gained traction over the past few decades <sup>[1]</sup>. FPOs are collective organizations formed by farmers to pool resources, improve market access, reduce transaction costs and enhance bargaining power. They have become essential tools in ensuring sustainable agricultural growth and improving the economic conditions of farmers, particularly in developing countries like India. This review examines the evolution and growth of FPOs in agriculture, with a focus on their role in enhancing the livelihoods of

small and marginal farmers, improving agricultural productivity and addressing systemic issues in rural India <sup>[36]</sup>.

A Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) is a collective organization formed by farmers to collectively address their common challenges in agriculture, improve their market access, enhance their bargaining power and ensure better economic outcomes <sup>[37]</sup>. FPOs are typically structured as producer companies, cooperatives or self-help groups, where farmers pool their resources to engage in activities such as procurement of inputs (seeds, fertilizers, etc.), collective marketing of produce, value addition and even agri-processing. These organizations enable farmers, especially small and marginal ones, to benefit from economies of scale, better access to financial resources, technology and training, thereby enhancing their productivity and overall livelihoods <sup>[37]</sup>. In essence, FPOs are farmer-driven entities that work to empower farmers by providing a platform for collective action and improving

their socio-economic conditions <sup>[60]</sup>. A Central Sector Scheme called "Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)" has been approved and begun by the Indian government with the goal of forming and promoting 10,000 new FPOs by 2027–2028 <sup>[3]</sup>. On February 29, 2020 <sup>[4]</sup>, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched 10,000 FPOs from Chitrakoot around India. The plan bases the establishment and development of FPO on specialized commodity-based and Produce Cluster Area approaches. The creation of FPOs will be centered on "One District One Product" in order to foster product specialization through the use of a cluster-based approach <sup>[38]</sup>.

### Historical Context of FPOs in India

The idea of collective action in agriculture is not new. India's agricultural history is marked by various forms of cooperation and collaboration, such as cooperatives, self-help groups and rural development initiatives. These efforts were designed to overcome challenges like small landholdings, lack of capital and inadequate infrastructure <sup>[61]</sup>. The concept of collective action in agriculture is deeply rooted in India's agricultural history, although the formal establishment of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) as a distinct category has evolved more recently <sup>[14]</sup>. The need for collective action in farming arose from the challenges faced by small and marginal farmers in India, such as fragmented land holdings, poor market access and lack of bargaining power. Over the years, various initiatives have been introduced to address these issues and FPOs have emerged as a key model in enhancing the economic and social status of farmers. In order to help small farmers get economies of scale and enhance their market position through collective bargaining, India created the idea of farmer producer organizations (FPO) in the early 2000s. Among other things, FPOs might be cooperatives or registered companies (sometimes known as farmer producer companies or FPCs) <sup>[2]</sup>. With a budgeted allocation of Rs 6,865 crore, the Indian government introduced the Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Produce Organizations plan in 2019 with the goal of establishing and promoting 10,000 new FPOs nationwide by 2024. Nine implementing organizations, including the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), the Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC) and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), are responsible for the creation and promotion of FPOs under this program <sup>[62]</sup>. The historical context of FPOs in India can be traced through several key phases of development:

#### 1. Early Cooperative Movements (Pre-Independence Era)

The idea of farmers coming together for collective benefits predates India's independence. The first notable attempt at organized agricultural cooperation in India dates back to the early 20th century, with the formation of cooperative societies.

- **Cooperative Societies Act of 1904:** The British colonial government introduced the Cooperative Societies Act of 1904, which laid the foundation for agricultural cooperatives. The primary goal was to

provide financial support to farmers through credit cooperatives. This enabled farmers to pool their resources and access loans at lower interest rates than those charged by moneylenders <sup>[63]</sup>.

- **Early Agricultural Cooperatives:** Initially, the focus was on providing farmers with credit and managing grain storage. The cooperative movement was primarily about self-help and mutual assistance, with farmers joining together to address challenges like access to credit and inputs.

Although these early cooperatives were successful in certain areas, they often faced difficulties such as mismanagement, lack of technical support and corruption. These problems led to the questioning of the effectiveness of cooperatives in serving the diverse needs of the agricultural community <sup>[63]</sup>.

#### 2. Post-Independence Agricultural Reforms (1947–1980s)

Following India's independence in 1947, the government adopted a more structured approach to rural development and agriculture. The period between 1950 and 1980 saw a range of initiatives aimed at modernizing Indian agriculture, but small and marginal farmers continued to face barriers such as poor market access, lack of technology and low bargaining power.

- **Green Revolution (1960s–1970s):** The Green Revolution marked a significant shift in Indian agriculture, introducing high-yielding variety (HYV) seeds, chemical fertilizers and modern irrigation methods. However, these technologies benefited large farmers more than smallholders, who were unable to access resources due to their limited financial capacity. The benefits of the Green Revolution were not equally distributed, which highlighted the need for better institutional support for smaller farmers <sup>[2]</sup>.
- **State-led Agricultural Cooperatives:** During the 1960s and 1970s, the government introduced large-scale cooperative schemes for agricultural marketing, input supply and credit. Agricultural cooperatives were further institutionalized, but many cooperatives continued to suffer from inefficiency and lack of farmer participation. The focus was still largely on providing credit and inputs, with limited attention to value addition, marketing or increasing farmers' bargaining power <sup>[15]</sup>.

#### 3. Emergence of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) in the 1990s and 2000s

While cooperatives were an important early form of collective action, it became clear that a new, more flexible model was required to address the changing needs of farmers. The 1990s and early 2000s saw a paradigm shift, as farmer producer organizations (FPOs) emerged as a more dynamic alternative to traditional cooperatives.

- **Liberalization and Market Reforms (1991):** The economic liberalization in 1991 brought about several changes to Indian agriculture, including market reforms and deregulation of the agricultural sector. These reforms created new opportunities but also posed challenges, as farmers found themselves exposed to fluctuating market prices, high input costs and

increased competition from global markets. This period led to a renewed interest in the concept of collective action to strengthen the position of small farmers [3].

- **Formation of FPOs as a Distinct Entity:** FPOs emerged as a more farmer-centered model, focusing not only on access to credit and inputs but also on value-added services such as collective marketing, processing and ensuring better access to markets. Unlike cooperatives, FPOs were often structured as producer companies or self-help groups (SHGs) that were flexible, market-oriented and able to adapt to the evolving needs of farmers [16].

#### 4. Government Support and Policy Initiatives (2010s)

The Indian government recognized the importance of FPOs in improving the livelihoods of small and marginal farmers. Several policy initiatives were introduced in the 2010s to promote FPOs, with an emphasis on creating a supportive ecosystem for their growth.

- **National Policy for Farmers (2007):** This policy laid the groundwork for promoting farmer producer organizations as a means to address the economic challenges faced by farmers. It emphasized the need for collective action and the establishment of FPOs to increase farmers' incomes [17].
- **Formation and Strengthening of FPOs Scheme (2014):** The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare launched the Formation and Strengthening of Farmer Producer Organizations Scheme in 2014. The scheme aimed to facilitate the creation of 10,000 FPOs in the country over a period of five years. The initiative provided financial and technical support to help FPOs develop robust structures, access markets and build capacity [18].
- **Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC):** SFAC has been instrumental in promoting FPOs by providing financial assistance, capacity building and market linkages. Through initiatives like the Producer Organization Development Fund (PODF), SFAC has supported the growth of numerous FPOs across India.
- **FPO Promotion Fund (2019):** In 2019, the government created the FPO Promotion Fund to provide financial assistance to new and existing FPOs, enabling them to scale up their operations and strengthen their market position [39].

#### 5. Current Status and Growth of FPOs (2020s)

In recent years, the number of FPOs has significantly increased across India, supported by government policies, financial institutions and development agencies. By 2020, over 6,000 FPOs had been established, with many focusing on smallholder farmers. The model has proven successful in several regions, especially in areas where farmers have come together to form collective marketing platforms or engage in value-added agricultural activities [24]. The growing focus on agricultural reforms, digitalization of the agricultural value chain and increased awareness about the potential of collective action have contributed to the expansion of FPOs. These organizations now play a crucial role in improving the bargaining power of farmers, ensuring better access to markets and fostering rural entrepreneurship.

#### Defining Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)

Farmer Producer Organizations are farmer-led collectives that aim to enhance the collective bargaining power of farmers in the agricultural market. FPOs can take various forms, including producer companies, cooperatives or self-help groups, but the key objective remains the same: to enable farmers to engage in collective activities that enhance their economic and social well-being. A Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) is a collective organization formed by farmers with the goal of improving their economic and social well-being [18]. It enables farmers, particularly small and marginal ones, to pool their resources, share knowledge and collectively address challenges they face in agriculture. The primary objective of an FPO is to enhance farmers' bargaining power, improve market access, reduce transaction costs and increase the efficiency of agricultural practices [40]. FPOs are typically structured as producer companies, cooperatives or self-help groups (SHGs) and their activities can include collective marketing of agricultural produce, input supply (such as seeds, fertilizers and machinery), value addition (processing and packaging of farm products) and facilitating access to finance and technology [41]. These organizations help farmers move beyond isolated farming practices by providing a platform for collaboration and economies of scale. An FPO is farmer-driven, meaning that the farmers themselves own and manage the organization, ensuring that the benefits of collective action accrue directly to them. By aggregating produce, improving market access and offering support services, FPOs help farmers gain better prices, reduce dependence on middlemen and enhance their overall productivity and income [4].

#### Core Features of FPOs

1. **Farmer-Centric Approach:** FPOs are primarily owned and managed by farmers, ensuring that the benefits accrue directly to them. This democratic governance structure helps address the needs and concerns of the farmer community [42].
2. **Collective Marketing:** One of the main functions of FPOs is to provide a platform for collective marketing. By pooling together produce from multiple farmers, FPOs can negotiate better prices and terms with buyers, reducing the influence of middlemen [18].
3. **Input Supply and Access to Credit:** FPOs enable farmers to access inputs like seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and machinery at lower costs by bulk purchasing and offering economies of scale. Additionally, FPOs often facilitate access to affordable credit for farmers, enhancing their financial stability.
4. **Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing:** FPOs play a crucial role in enhancing the technical skills of farmers. They organize training programs on improved farming techniques, sustainable practices and innovative technologies, helping farmers stay competitive [64].
5. **Value Addition:** Some FPOs engage in value-added activities such as processing, packaging and branding of agricultural products. This adds value to raw produce and helps farmers fetch higher prices in the market.

#### Government Support and Policy Initiatives for FPOs

The Indian government has recognized the importance of



Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) as a means to address the challenges faced by small and marginal farmers and to promote agricultural growth and rural development. Over the years, several policy initiatives, schemes and financial support programs have been introduced to foster the creation and growth of FPOs. These initiatives aim to improve farmers' access to markets, reduce transaction costs, provide financial assistance and strengthen the capacity of FPOs to become self-sustaining <sup>[5]</sup>. Below are some key government support measures and policy initiatives for FPOs:

### 1. National Policy for Farmers (2007)

The National Policy for Farmers, adopted in 2007, laid the foundation for promoting farmer collectives, including FPOs, as a means to improve the economic conditions of farmers. The policy acknowledged the importance of collective farming and emphasized the role of producer organizations in increasing farmers' income and empowering them. Key provisions relevant to FPOs include:

- **Encouraging Collective Action:** The policy called for strengthening cooperatives and promoting farmer collectives to enhance the bargaining power of smallholder farmers <sup>[18]</sup>.
- **Increasing Market Access:** It recommended improving market linkages for farmer groups and providing them with access to better pricing and marketing facilities.
- **Supporting Technology Transfer:** The policy suggested facilitating the transfer of agricultural technologies to farmers through FPOs, enabling them to enhance productivity and sustainability <sup>[43]</sup>.

While the policy did not explicitly define FPOs, it helped create an enabling environment for their formation and growth by stressing the need for institutional support for farmer organizations.

### 2. Formation and Strengthening of Farmer Producer Organizations Scheme (2014)

The Formation and Strengthening of Farmer Producer Organizations Scheme was launched by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare in 2014 to facilitate the creation of FPOs across India. Under this scheme, the government aimed to establish 10,000 FPOs over a period of five years, focusing on small and marginal farmers.

#### Key Features of the Scheme

- **Financial Support:** The government provides financial assistance to cover the initial operational costs of FPOs, including training, capacity building and marketing support <sup>[19]</sup>.
- **Capacity Building:** The scheme aims to train farmers in organizational and managerial skills to ensure that FPOs are efficiently run. It includes training in business management, financial management and governance.
- **Infrastructure Development:** The scheme promotes the development of infrastructure for FPOs, such as storage facilities, processing units and market linkages.
- **Promoting Group Farming:** The scheme encourages farmers to come together, form groups and engage in collective farming and marketing <sup>[65]</sup>.

This initiative has been instrumental in increasing the number of FPOs in India, enabling farmers to benefit from economies of scale, better access to markets and improved bargaining power.

### 3. Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC)

The Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) is a government agency that plays a pivotal role in the promotion and strengthening of FPOs in India. SFAC works to facilitate the formation of FPOs, provide financial support and connect them with markets and institutions <sup>[5]</sup>.

#### Key Functions of SFAC

- **Financial Assistance:** SFAC provides financial assistance to FPOs for their capacity-building programs, infrastructure development and working capital requirements.
- **Market Linkages:** SFAC helps FPOs connect with institutional buyers, government procurement programs and other market platforms to ensure better prices for farmers.
- **Producer Organization Development Fund (PODF):** SFAC administers the Producer Organization Development Fund to provide grant-based financial support to FPOs for setting up and strengthening their operations <sup>[44]</sup>.

Through SFAC, FPOs are also linked to various schemes, including government procurement programs like eNAM (electronic National Agricultural Market), to improve their market access and reduce the role of intermediaries <sup>[20]</sup>.

### 4. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)

NABARD has been a significant player in providing financial support to FPOs through various funding schemes, ensuring that these organizations have access to capital for their activities. NABARD has been instrumental in supporting FPOs by offering loans, grants and capacity-building programs <sup>[66]</sup>.

#### Key Initiatives by NABARD

- **FPO Promotion Fund:** NABARD has established the FPO Promotion Fund to provide financial assistance to the creation and strengthening of FPOs. This fund helps cover the operational costs of FPOs, including expenses for training, marketing and building linkages with financial institutions <sup>[45]</sup>.
- **Financial Assistance for Infrastructure:** NABARD provides loans and financial assistance for building essential infrastructure for FPOs, such as processing units, warehouses and marketing facilities.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** NABARD also plays a key role in training farmers on the management of FPOs and improving their technical, financial and organizational skills.

NABARD's interventions have been crucial in enhancing the financial viability of FPOs and enabling them to scale their operations <sup>[20]</sup>.

### 5. The FPO Promotion Fund (2019)

In 2019, the Indian government introduced the FPO

Promotion Fund to provide additional support for the establishment and strengthening of FPOs. This initiative was launched under the umbrella of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare to promote the growth of farmer collectives and facilitate their integration into formal supply chains <sup>[20]</sup>.

#### Key Features of the Fund

- **Funding for FPOs:** The fund is aimed at providing financial assistance to FPOs to build their capacity, infrastructure and market access.
- **Project-Based Assistance:** The fund supports project-based interventions, such as setting up processing units, cold storage facilities and aggregation centers, which can add value to farmers' produce.
- **Promotion of Sustainability:** The fund promotes the long-term sustainability of FPOs by enabling them to engage in value-added activities and provide services like input supply, processing and marketing <sup>[6]</sup>.

The FPO Promotion Fund is an important tool for strengthening the organizational capacity of FPOs and ensuring their growth in the long run.

#### 6. Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanraksHan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA)

The Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanraksHan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA), launched in 2018, is a comprehensive initiative designed to ensure that farmers receive a fair price for their produce. This scheme also has a significant component aimed at supporting FPOs by improving their market access <sup>[21]</sup>.

#### Key Provisions for FPOs under PM-AASHA

- **Minimum Support Price (MSP) Support:** Under PM-AASHA, FPOs can directly engage with government procurement programs at MSPs for certain crops, which helps reduce the exploitation of farmers by intermediaries <sup>[46]</sup>.
- **Market Linkages:** The scheme encourages FPOs to connect with government procurement systems and institutional buyers, ensuring that farmers can sell their produce at fair and remunerative prices.

#### 7. Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan and FPOs

As part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Self-Reliant India Campaign), the Indian government has prioritized boosting rural entrepreneurship, including promoting FPOs. The initiative aims to empower farmers through the creation of sustainable FPOs that can drive agricultural growth and rural economic development.

#### Key Goals of Atmanirbhar Bharat for FPOs

- **Empowerment through Technology:** The government aims to enhance the capacity of FPOs by providing them with access to modern technology, digital platforms and data analytics to improve their operational efficiency.
- **Strengthening Value Chains:** The scheme focuses on integrating FPOs into agricultural value chains, helping them engage in value addition and enhancing their market competitiveness <sup>[47]</sup>.

- **Support for Agribusinesses:** The government has proposed financial support for agribusinesses run by FPOs, focusing on providing access to capital, training and market opportunities.

#### 8. eNAM (electronic National Agricultural Market)

eNAM, launched by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare in 2016, is a digital platform aimed at connecting agricultural markets across the country. FPOs are integral to the success of eNAM, as they enable farmers to directly access markets, reducing the role of intermediaries and ensuring better prices <sup>[22]</sup>.

#### Role of FPOs in eNAM

- **Market Linkages:** eNAM provides FPOs with access to a larger pool of buyers and ensures transparency in pricing.
- **Promotion of Direct Selling:** Through eNAM, FPOs can directly engage in online transactions, improving market efficiency and helping farmers receive better prices for their produce <sup>[22]</sup>.

#### The Growth and Impact of FPOs

FPOs have experienced significant growth over the past decade. According to reports from Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have emerged as a transformative force in the agricultural landscape of India. These organizations, designed to empower small and marginal farmers, have made significant strides in recent years in terms of growth and impact <sup>[48]</sup>. By fostering collective action, improving market access, enhancing bargaining power and facilitating resource pooling, FPOs have the potential to reshape rural economies and uplift the livelihoods of millions of farmers. This section explores the growth trajectory of FPOs in India, their challenges and their profound impact on farmers' productivity, income and overall rural development <sup>[6]</sup>.

#### 1. Growth of FPOs in India

The growth of FPOs in India has been largely driven by both governmental initiatives and the growing realization among farmers of the need for collective action to overcome the various challenges they face in the agricultural sector.

#### Key Drivers of FPO Growth

1. **Government Policy Support:** The Indian government's consistent support for FPOs through various policies, financial schemes and capacity-building initiatives has played a pivotal role in fostering the growth of these organizations. Key schemes such as the Formation and Strengthening of FPOs Scheme (2014), the Producer Organization Development Fund (PODF) by SFAC and other state-level initiatives have provided both financial and technical support to FPOs, helping them scale operations and enhance their effectiveness <sup>[49]</sup>.
2. **Increased Access to Markets:** One of the most important aspects of FPO growth is the enhanced access to markets. FPOs facilitate the aggregation of produce, which allows farmers to enter larger, more profitable markets. By cutting out middlemen and directly linking with consumers or buyers, FPOs have opened up new

opportunities for farmers to sell their produce at better prices [22].

3. **Technological Advancements:** The increasing adoption of technology in agriculture and the digitalization of markets through platforms like eNAM have been instrumental in the growth of FPOs. These technologies provide FPOs with better access to real-time market prices, help in logistics management and streamline financial transactions, enabling FPOs to improve efficiency and reach a wider customer base.
4. **Rural Entrepreneurship:** FPOs have not only helped improve farm productivity but also facilitated rural entrepreneurship. By providing access to modern processing technologies, FPOs have enabled farmers to add value to their produce, such as through packaging, processing and branding. This, in turn, helps increase incomes and creates jobs within rural communities [23].
5. **Capacity Building and Training:** Capacity-building initiatives funded by the government and development organizations have empowered FPO members with skills in business management, financial management and marketing. This training has strengthened the leadership within FPOs, allowing them to become more self-reliant and effective in addressing the challenges faced by their members [49].

### Quantifying the Growth of FPOs

- **Numbers:** As of 2024, over 6,000 FPOs have been registered across India, with this number increasing annually due to continued government support and farmer interest in the model [50].
- **Geographical Spread:** FPOs are no longer confined to certain regions but have spread across diverse agricultural areas, including states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. These organizations are active in both crop-based and livestock-based farming, demonstrating their versatility [24].
- **Farmer Membership:** FPOs collectively serve millions of farmers. Each FPO typically has a membership base ranging from a few hundred to thousands of farmers, helping to scale the benefits of collective action across large agricultural communities.

### 2. Impact of FPOs on Farmers

The impact of FPOs on farmers has been profound, particularly in terms of economic benefits, market access and capacity development. These organizations have not only helped farmers increase their incomes but also empowered them socially and economically.

#### Economic Impact

1. **Increased Income:** One of the most direct impacts of FPOs is the increase in the income levels of farmers. By aggregating produce, FPOs can access bulk purchasing and marketing opportunities, which reduce costs and enable farmers to negotiate better prices. Additionally, the possibility of engaging in value-added activities such as processing and packaging further increases income levels. For example, an FPO might aggregate a particular crop, process it (e.g., converting fruits into jams or juices) and then sell the finished product

directly to retailers or consumers at a premium price. This value addition leads to higher profits than simply selling raw produce [25].

2. **Access to Credit and Financial Services:** FPOs improve farmers' access to formal financial services. By pooling resources and improving financial discipline, FPOs enable farmers to secure loans at lower interest rates from financial institutions like **NABARD** and **banks**. Additionally, FPOs can leverage group lending schemes to acquire inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and machinery at discounted rates [51].
3. **Reduction in Input Costs:** By pooling resources, farmers can procure inputs like seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and machinery at wholesale prices, which reduces individual costs. In some cases, FPOs can even facilitate the hiring of machinery and equipment for farming, further reducing operational costs.
4. **Diversification of Income Sources:** FPOs enable farmers to diversify their income sources by engaging in activities such as agri-processing organic farming and direct-to-consumer retailing. This reduces their dependence on a single crop or market and enhances financial stability [7].

#### Social Impact

1. **Empowerment of Small Farmers:** FPOs are instrumental in empowering small and marginal farmers who otherwise lack the bargaining power to negotiate fair prices for their produce. By coming together, these farmers can leverage collective strength to gain better market access, improved pricing and greater control over their agricultural decisions.
2. **Improved Gender Inclusivity:** Many FPOs have been actively promoting gender inclusivity by encouraging the participation of women farmers. Women are often engaged in activities such as decision-making, leadership roles and processing. In some cases, FPOs specifically target women farmers and create women-only collectives that offer tailored support for female entrepreneurship and empowerment [26].
3. **Capacity Building:** The continuous training and skill development programs offered by FPOs have helped farmers build their capabilities in management, marketing and technology adoption. This, in turn, has enhanced their overall productivity and business acumen, making them more competitive in the market.
4. **Community Development:** FPOs contribute to community development by creating local employment opportunities. From the creation of processing units to the development of local infrastructure like storage facilities and warehouses, FPOs help boost the local economy. This, in turn, contributes to reducing rural-urban migration and enhances the quality of life in rural areas [52].

#### 3. Environmental Impact

FPOs have also contributed to improving environmental sustainability through the promotion of sustainable farming practices.

1. **Sustainable Agricultural Practices:** Many FPOs encourage the adoption of organic farming, water-efficient irrigation systems and soil conservation



methods. By pooling resources and knowledge, farmers can collectively invest in environmentally-friendly technologies and practices that are often beyond their reach individually <sup>[27]</sup>.

**2. Climate Resilience:** FPOs enable farmers to build resilience to climate change by promoting the sharing of knowledge on climate-smart farming techniques. Through collective action, farmers can access training on pest management, crop rotation, water conservation and other climate-resilient agricultural practices <sup>[52]</sup>.

### 3. Challenges Facing FPOs

Despite their growth and impact, FPOs face several challenges that hinder their full potential:

- 1. Management and Governance Issues:** FPOs, especially in their early stages, often struggle with weak governance structures, lack of professional management and inefficiencies in decision-making. Poor leadership or internal conflicts can undermine the effectiveness of the organization <sup>[53]</sup>.
- 2. Financial Sustainability:** Many FPOs initially depend on government or donor funding for their operations, but achieving financial sustainability remains a challenge. FPOs need to generate sufficient income through their activities to become self-sustaining in the long term <sup>[28]</sup>.
- 3. Market Linkage Issues:** While FPOs help farmers access new markets, connecting these organizations to sustainable and lucrative markets can still be difficult. Market volatility and fluctuating demand for agricultural products can be a barrier to consistent profitability for FPOs <sup>[8]</sup>.
- 4. Capacity Building:** Despite the availability of training programs, FPOs may still face challenges in building the necessary managerial skills to run efficient operations. Ongoing investment in capacity building is required to ensure that FPOs can meet the evolving needs of farmers and the market.

### Challenges and Limitations of FPOs

While Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have proven to be a transformative model for improving the economic well-being of small and marginal farmers, they are not without their challenges. These organizations often face several operational, financial and systemic hurdles that can impede their growth, effectiveness and sustainability. The challenges can vary based on the size, structure and geographical location of the FPOs, but some common issues tend to persist across many regions. Below are the key challenges and limitations faced by FPOs in India <sup>[29]</sup>.

#### 1) Governance and Management Challenges

##### a. Weak Leadership and Governance Structures

Many FPOs, particularly those that are in their nascent stages, struggle with weak leadership and ineffective governance. Since most FPOs are farmer-driven organizations, the leadership often comes from within the community and in many cases, these leaders may lack professional management skills or experience in running a business. This lack of management expertise can hinder decision-making, reduce operational efficiency and limit the ability of the FPO to scale its operations <sup>[53]</sup>.

- **Internal Conflicts:** FPOs often face internal conflicts among members, especially regarding leadership roles, decision-making and sharing of profits. These disputes can lead to inefficiency and, in some cases, dissolution of the organization.
- **Poor Governance Structures:** Governance structures may not always be robust and a lack of accountability can lead to mismanagement of funds, corruption or ineffective functioning of the FPO <sup>[30]</sup>.

##### b. Lack of Professional Management

Most FPOs start with minimal professional management, which can affect their ability to build strong business models and achieve financial sustainability. Effective management requires skills in areas like marketing, finance, operations and strategic planning, which are often lacking at the grassroots level <sup>[53]</sup>.

#### 2) Financial Sustainability and Access to Capital

##### a. Dependence on External Funding

A significant limitation for many FPOs is their dependence on external sources of funding such as government grants, subsidies and loans from financial institutions. While such support is crucial in the early stages, over-reliance on external funding can hinder the long-term financial sustainability of the FPO <sup>[31]</sup>.

- **Limited Financial Independence:** FPOs that are unable to generate enough revenue from their activities struggle to become self-sustaining. Without a consistent and reliable source of income, these organizations may find it difficult to cover operational costs and expand their activities <sup>[53]</sup>.
- **Access to Credit:** Small FPOs often face challenges in accessing formal credit due to the lack of collateral or a proven track record of financial stability. This makes it difficult for them to secure loans for expansion or infrastructure development <sup>[54]</sup>.

##### b. Cost of Operations

The operational costs for running an FPO, such as maintaining infrastructure, managing logistics and paying for staff or technical expertise, can be high. For many FPOs, especially those in rural or remote areas, the scale of operations is not large enough to achieve economies of scale, making it difficult to reduce costs and remain competitive <sup>[9]</sup>.

#### 3) Market Linkages and Marketing Challenges

##### a. Limited Market Access

One of the primary objectives of FPOs is to improve farmers' access to markets and reduce the role of intermediaries. However, achieving direct market access can be challenging for smallholder farmers, particularly when faced with factors such as market fragmentation, competition and price volatility.

- **Access to Organized Markets:** Many FPOs struggle to connect with institutional buyers, government procurement programs or large retail chains due to their limited size, lack of reputation or insufficient market knowledge.
- **Market Competition:** In some regions, FPOs face intense competition from middlemen or large traders

who have established relationships with buyers and are able to offer better prices due to their larger scale and more efficient systems <sup>[32]</sup>.

#### b. Lack of Branding and Marketing Expertise

Even when FPOs manage to aggregate their produce, marketing the products effectively is a significant challenge. Most FPOs lack the expertise or resources to engage in branding, advertising and competitive pricing strategies that can make their products appealing to a broader market.

- **Brand Recognition:** FPOs often face difficulties in building brand recognition or consumer trust, which can limit the marketability of their products.
- **Distribution and Logistics:** Many FPOs also struggle with the logistical challenges of transporting produce to distant markets, which can incur significant costs and reduce the margin of profit <sup>[32]</sup>.

#### 4) Capacity Building and Skill Development

##### a. Lack of Skilled Human Resources

A common challenge faced by many FPOs is the lack of skilled human resources. Farmers typically do not have formal training in managing organizations, finance or business strategies, which can affect the overall functioning of the FPO.

- **Training and Capacity Building:** While government and non-governmental organizations provide training, it is often insufficient or not tailored to the specific needs of the FPOs. Continuous skill development is necessary to keep the FPOs competitive, but many farmers remain unaware of the best practices in management, marketing and financial planning <sup>[55]</sup>.
- **Retention of Trained Personnel:** Even when training programs are conducted, the retention of trained personnel in the FPOs can be a challenge, as these individuals may migrate to urban areas or be attracted by better employment opportunities.

##### b. Technological Challenges

Although many FPOs aim to improve farm productivity through the adoption of new technologies, there are several barriers to the widespread use of modern farming practices.

- **Technological Literacy:** Smallholder farmers may lack the technical knowledge to effectively use new agricultural technologies and FPOs may not have the resources to train members adequately <sup>[56]</sup>.
- **High Investment in Technology:** The initial investment required to implement modern agricultural technologies, such as machinery or advanced processing facilities, can be prohibitively high for small FPOs, limiting their ability to scale up operations <sup>[10]</sup>.

#### 5) Legal and Regulatory Barriers

##### a. Complex Legal Framework

The legal and regulatory framework governing FPOs in India can be complex and cumbersome. While FPOs are typically registered as Producer Companies, Cooperatives or Self-Help Groups (SHGs), the legal processes for registration, compliance and governance can be lengthy and complex.

- **Registration Process:** The registration process for an FPO can involve multiple steps, requiring time, effort

and a thorough understanding of legal frameworks. This can be particularly difficult for rural farmers with limited access to legal expertise.

- **Regulatory Challenges:** In some cases, FPOs may face challenges in complying with various state and central government regulations, such as tax requirements, licensing laws or environmental standards <sup>[33]</sup>.

##### b. Policy Inconsistencies

While the government has been actively promoting FPOs, there is often a lack of consistency in policy implementation across different states or regions. This can lead to difficulties in accessing government schemes, financial support or market linkages.

- **Inconsistent Policies:** Local policies or state-level regulations may not always align with the objectives of national programs designed to promote FPOs, causing confusion and delays in implementation <sup>[57]</sup>.
- **Dependency on Government Schemes:** Many FPOs are overly dependent on government policies and programs for their growth, but policy changes or reductions in funding can significantly impact their viability.

#### 6) Social and Cultural Barriers

##### a. Farmer Resistance to Collective Action

One of the fundamental principles of FPOs is collective action. However, in some regions, farmers may be resistant to joining or cooperating within FPOs due to historical cultural practices or mistrust of collective management <sup>[58]</sup>.

- **Individualism:** Farmers often prioritize individual ownership and decision-making over collective actions, making it difficult for FPOs to unite diverse groups of farmers with different interests and needs.
- **Mistrust of Leadership:** In some cases, there is a lack of trust in the leadership or management of FPOs, especially if the leaders are perceived to be more focused on personal gain than on the welfare of the members <sup>[11]</sup>.

##### b. Gender Disparities

Gender inequality can also limit the impact of FPOs. While some FPOs have made efforts to involve women in their activities, many women farmers still face challenges related to their participation in leadership roles or access to resources.

- **Limited Participation of Women:** In certain rural areas, cultural norms restrict women's involvement in decision-making processes or limit their access to training and support programs provided by FPOs.
- **Unequal Resource Distribution:** Women may also face difficulties in accessing the resources and financial benefits generated by FPOs, further exacerbating gender disparities <sup>[34]</sup>.

#### Future Prospects and Recommendations

The future of FPOs looks promising, provided the following key recommendations are implemented:

1. **Strengthening Management:** FPOs must invest in professional management teams with expertise in finance, marketing and operations. This will help improve their governance structures and ensure better



decision-making <sup>[35]</sup>.

2. **Enhanced Financial Support:** To ensure the financial sustainability of FPOs, government and financial institutions should offer more flexible and accessible funding options. Special focus should be given to risk management and insurance products tailored to the needs of FPOs <sup>[59]</sup>.
3. **Leveraging Technology:** FPOs should embrace digital tools and technologies that can improve operational efficiency, market access and farmer outreach. This includes adopting e-commerce platforms, digital payment systems and data analytics.
4. **Policy Support:** There is a need for more targeted policy interventions that focus on addressing the specific challenges faced by FPOs. This includes facilitating market linkages, enhancing financial literacy and improving the regulatory environment for FPOs <sup>[12]</sup>.

### Conclusion

The Indian government's support for Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) through various policy initiatives and schemes has been instrumental in promoting collective farming and empowering small and marginal farmers. By providing financial assistance, infrastructure support, capacity building and market linkages, the government has helped FPOs become important drivers of agricultural development. As the government continues to expand its efforts, FPOs have the potential to transform the agricultural sector by enhancing the bargaining power of farmers, improving income levels and fostering sustainable rural development. The growth and impact of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) in India are significant, both in terms of empowering small farmers and fostering rural economic development. By providing a platform for collective action, improving market access, reducing transaction costs and promoting sustainable farming practices, FPOs are reshaping the agricultural sector. While challenges remain, the continued support from government policies, financial institutions and development organizations will be crucial in ensuring the long-term success of FPOs. As the number of FPOs continues to grow, they hold the potential to revolutionize India's agriculture, improve farmer incomes and contribute to the broader goal of sustainable rural development. Despite the growing number and success stories of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) in India, they continue to face a range of challenges and limitations that hinder their full potential. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policy support, robust capacity building and ongoing investment in infrastructure, governance and market linkages. FPOs can truly transform the agricultural sector and empower smallholder farmers if they are able to overcome these barriers and achieve financial sustainability, better governance and expanded market access. However, this will necessitate a concerted effort from the government, the private sector, development agencies and the farmers themselves to create an enabling environment for the success of FPOs. The evolution and growth of Farmer Producer Organizations in India have made a significant impact on agricultural development, providing a platform for small and marginal farmers to enhance their livelihoods. While challenges remain, the

potential for FPOs to drive agricultural innovation, economic empowerment and rural development is immense. With continued government support, capacity building and access to markets and finance, FPOs can play a pivotal role in transforming Indian agriculture and improving the socio-economic status of farmers.

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