

Gender Equality: A Pillar for Sustainable Agriculture Future in Farmer Producer Companies in India

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Abstract

This study investigates survival and growth of Indian Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) within the prism of gender equality. In introduction: Rural development and sustainable agricultural practices depend on farmers' cooperative organizations (FPCs), which are becoming ever more important. Said another way, little research has been done on how gender inclusiveness affects the resilience and effectiveness of FPC operations. This paper closes this gap by looking at how women's active participation in FPC decision-making and leadership roles improves its sustainability and effectiveness.

This study looked at the gendered elements of FPC sustainability, pointed up obstacles to women's involvement, and developed subtle inclusion rules. Women enhance governance, resource management, and decision-making as FPC members, the study noted. Women leaders boost agricultural output, community involvement, and resource allocation, therefore fostering long-term FPC sustainability.

These obstacles, it adds, are cultural standards, a lack of resources, and inadequate training for women. It also emphasizes organizational improvements, focused training courses, and supportive institutions that enable women and their involvement in FPCs. The report advises gender-sensitive agricultural cooperative policies and structures guaranteeing equal opportunities for men and women.

This study adds to scholarly output and policy decisions. It clarifies sustainable farming in FPCs as well as gender justice. The paper offers a justification for including gender equity into agricultural cooperative activities and strategy by proving how gender-inclusive initiatives improve FPC performance and sustainability (Hernández and Torgerson 2017). The study reveals that the resilience, expansion, and sustainability of FPCs—key players in rural India's economy—depend critically on gender parity.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Agricultural Sustainability, Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs), Rural Development, Gender-Inclusive Practices

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Overview of Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) in India and their Role in Agricultural Sustainability

Farmers Producer Companies (FPCs) are a transformational institutional innovation in India that collectivize small and marginal farmers under a corporatized framework that is recognized by law. FPCs are demarcated under the Companies Act, 1956 which was unified with the Companies Act, 2013 and are an amalgamation of the cooperative benefits and the private company efficiency. Mostly farmer shareholders run these organizations that manage inputs, marketing, processing and other agribusiness operations leading to better bargaining power and higher returns for rural

producers (Government of India, 2013).

FPCs have been well-documented in both policy and practice to advance agricultural sustainability. FPCs facilitate smallholder farmers to purchase inputs, adopt sustainable agricultural practices, and access markets, capital, and technology through collective action. Collaboration and risk diversification enable these companies to endure market instability and climate change. FPCs have also advocated for organic farming, crop variety, and water efficiency, all of which encourage long-term ecological and economic sustainability (Trebbin, 2014).

The Government of India also encourages the formation of FPCs through projects like SFAC (Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium) for the inclusion of farmers at rural development. FPCs were formed to a significant extent by 2023 in demonstration of this commitment (NABARD, 2023) – over 10,000 of them. State and federal governments, NGOs, and donor organizations have provided governance and sustainability capacity building to FPCs. These measures have made FPCs essential for agriculture sustainability in India.

1.2 Importance of Gender Equality in Agriculture

A good start to promoting agriculture gender equality is that it is necessary for the sustainable development and food security of the world, not just social equity. Women could increase yields on farms by 20–30% if they had the same productive resources as men, decreasing hunger (FAO, 2011). Women account for around 33% of the agricultural workforce in India, but they are generally bereft of land, credit, extension services and control over decisions. It aggravates this marginalization which inhibits growth in agriculture and sustained rural development.

Experts such as Bina Agarwal (2018) point out that gender balance in agricultural institutions promote efficient management of the resources as well as inclusive governance. Women bring their own perspectives and goals to sustainability as active stakeholders in seed preservation, soil management, and biodiversity conservation. Agricultural decision-making organizations such as FPCs must listen to, and include stakeholders who have previously been unheard, in order to deliver interventions that meet the needs of all stakeholders.

Women groups evidently have been more socially oriented and have performed better in planning for the long term which also help to bring sustainable agriculture (Agarwal, 2010). Gender-inclusive FPCs also strike a balance between economic growth and other environmental and social issues, producing holistic outcomes. The active engagement of women promotes intergenerational learning and community action and leads to inclusive innovation which is vital for rural development.

For FPCs, gender equity is not simply about regulatory requirements; it is about cultural shifts, capacity building, and institutional reform. Tackling entrenched attitudes and power relationships that bar women from leadership is critical. Gender audits, women's leadership training, and gender-sensitive governance targeted initiatives may change the FPCs. How these institutions serve agriculture will depend on whether gender equality is positioned as a priority.

1.3 The Role of Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs)

Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs), in India, are enabling small and marginal farmers to merge and start businesses, thus transforming the Nation's agriculture landscape. FPCs are designed to increase income for producers by aggregating agricultural output, procuring inputs and integrating value chains. Because FPCs permit rural producers to sell in formal markets and bargain for prices,

they help to get rid of parasitic middlemen and increase exploitative per unit returns to these rural producers (Trebbin et al., 2014). These FPCs also enable farmers to obtain subsidized seeds, fertilizers, and even machinery which maximizes input efficiency and enhances production.

The ecological importance of agriculture is understood by FPCs along with the economic benefits. FPCs facilitate organic farming, crop rotation, bio-fertilizers etc. through collective decision making and reinforcing knowledge. They enhance soil health and help mitigate climate change. Water is scarce in India and for that reason many FPCs promote water-use efficiency practices such as drip irrigation and rainwater harvesting (Patel et al., 2020). These sustainable practices are essential to safeguarding the natural resource base of Indian agriculture against challenges of climate change and depletion of resources.

FPCs help build communities through increased social capital at the rural level. They provide skills training to members in agricultural management, financial literacy, post-harvest utilization, and digital technologies. Interventions of this kind raise farmer awareness, and help them to make decisions regarding production, marketing and investments. FPCs also partner with government institutions, NGOs, and private sectors for development- they connect grassroots producers to institutional structures (NABARD, 2023). Improving access to agriculture and rural development policies. These partnerships enhance the influence and impact of agriculture and rural development policy

But for FPCs to achieve their potential, they must actively foster inclusivity — particularly gender inclusivity. Another limitation is the underrepresentation of women in FPC membership and governance, despite their contribution to the family's agricultural work and decision-making (Agarwal, 2018). To achieve these aims, each FPC had to ensure gender-balanced boards, initiate women-specific capacity-building measures and encourage flexible membership formats. By embedding gender-sensitive practices into future policy and action, FPCs can truly become representative of all stakeholders in farming and benefit all. Inclusion creates equity and ensures the sustainability and effectiveness of these institutions long term.

1.4 Research Gap

Farmers' producer companies or FPCs are critical to boosting agricultural productivity and improving income opportunities for farmers. Their governance systems and operational modalities are not sensitive to gender equity bias, however. There have been some policies aimed at addressing this gap, but diversity and inclusion within FPCs is less touted. The inequality in access to governance, leadership, resource control, and decision-making by different genders in FPCs profoundly affect equity and sustainability frameworks but these women have scant attention in the research literature.

Meinzen-Dick et al 2019 illustrate how women's voice and decision-making gaps perpetuate inequity and unproductive policies at local levels derail the efficacy and sustainable of women's cooperation at a broader coalition scope. When women are left off the board of the FPC, their input and perspectives pertaining to sustainable development are often omitted in the planning frameworks which poses a danger to their communities and environment. The exclusion of these labor- and public health issues relegates a broad segment of agricultural labor to the margins of the conversation, effectively limiting the FPC's scope to address ecological sustainability and climate resilience in a holistic way. The prominence of these men s consumer organisations in inevitable angst also creates a gender imbalance in forming movement FPC sitting also hinders their revolutionary potential to offer poor grassroot farmers with inclusion and sustainability in the

domain of rural development and sustainable agriculture.

Gender-sustainability frameworks are missing in FPC policy and implementation guidelines. Development models for FPC are mostly focused on productivity, marketing linkages, and profitability rather than on gender-sensitive sustainability initiatives. In an absence of institutional mechanisms incorporating gender and environmental issues, Quisumbing et al. (2014), results are piecemeal and revolutionary change is lost. Without gender-sensitive measures such as participatory governance audits, disaggregated data monitoring, and gender-targeted capacity-building, FPCs can strengthen patriarchal norms.

How gender-inclusive governance influences FPC sustainability has yet to be fully researched. Little is known about how women's leadership affects the ecological practices, risk reduction, and innovation uptake of FPCs. This gap in part indicates that gender studies, sustainability science and institutional economics ought to be applied in the research on gender equality and agricultural sustainability.

Hence, this study investigates structural and cultural barriers to women FPC decision-making and presents a gender-embedded sustainability framework to address these challenges. Evaluating gender dynamics and sustainable farming practices this research contributes to policy and scholarly conversation on the manner in which FPCs can be made much more inclusive, egalitarian and future-ready.

2.0 Research Questions

1. How does gender equality in governance and resource access influence the sustainability and performance of Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs)?
2. What structural and cultural barriers hinder women's active participation and leadership in FPCs across different regions of India?
3. To what extent does female representation in leadership roles impact the institutional performance of FPCs in terms of profitability, sustainability, and member satisfaction?

2.1 Research Objectives

1. To analyze the link between gender equality and sustainable agriculture in Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs)
2. To examine the structural and cultural barriers limiting women's participation in FPCs
3. To evaluate the current status of gender representation and leadership in FPCs and their contribution to institutional performance

2.2 Significance of the Research

The research theme, entitled "Gender Equality: A Pillar for Sustainable Agriculture Future in Farmer Producer Companies in India" holds a lot of academic social and policy significance. It addresses the gap in understanding how gender-inclusive governance influences sustainability outcomes in Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs). To develop interdisciplinary knowledge and to build upon prior research into women and community based natural resource management, it integrates gender studies, sustainability science and rural development. The research will generate actionable information for policymakers to develop gender-informed FPC policies that are aligned with India's commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger).

Additionally, the research will emphasise that gender-inclusive practices that not only provide jobs, but also will cultivate more sustainable agricultural practices, such as organic farming and water conservation. Recognizing the need to remove the socio-cultural barriers restricting women's

engagement, the research puts forward that women's empowerment in FPCs will contribute to social inclusion and community resilience. The study will further evolve a gender-inclusive sustainability framework that is rooted in the socio-economic realities of rural India. All in all, this paper will conclude that gender equality should underlie the movement towards inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agricultural development in India.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) that assesses the nexus of gender, environment, and political economy especially in agrarian contexts. FPE foregrounds that access to natural resources and power over decision-making and benefits is gendered and influenced by wider socio-political and cultural structures. With respect to Farmer Producer Companies (FPC) in India, FPE aids in analysing how gendered power relations shape women's access to agricultural resources, markets and institutional support.

Agarwal (2021) elaborates on this perspective by demonstrating that although FPCs may act as a powerful mechanism of female empowerment and provide women with collective bargaining power and leadership spaces, they generally end up reproducing patriarchal patterns, unless proactive gender-sensitive action plans get implemented. FPE also articulates how intra-household and community-level power relations, including unpaid care work, owning land and mobility, have a role in limiting women's participation in FPCs. This theoretical framework enables the study to address how gender equality can act as a driver of sustainable agriculture, regarding not only economic relations but also agency, voice and structural inequalities within FPCs.

3.1 Social Capital Theory

This research incorporates Social Capital Theory, which explains that social networks, norms, and trust elevate people in marginalized contexts; and women are one of them. Social Capital is access to resources through social networks for collective goals as well as personal gain. Within the structure/ agency theory interface, this theory can help identify how we believe that FPCs empower and build on women's agency through collective action and networks, increased access to resources, better access to decision making and enhanced bargaining position in agricultural markets.

Research suggests (e.g. Fischer & Qaim, 2012) that solidarity gained through engagement in networks can boost cooperation, trust and knowledge-sharing, thus increasing empowerment, market access and political bargaining. The concept of social capital is effective, but only if networks are inclusive and the power relations within them are egalitarian. But social capital may strengthen existing inequalities if gender disparities in social capital remain. Hence, Social Capital Theory offers a lens to analyze the ways by which women can utilize network opportunities in Farmers' Producer Companies to enhance economic outcomes, address gendered power relations and finally sustainability in agricultural development.

3.2 Institutional Theory

This theory is prominent to explore how formal and informal rules in institutions shape societal behavior and govern the distribution of resources and opportunities, respectively, in the domain of gender inequality in agriculture. Specifically in the area of FPCs, it exposes the ways in which the policy framework and legal structures reinforce gender disparities, particularly as they pertain to land ownership laws and property rights. Patriarchal legal norms in many rural parts of India prevent women from inheriting, owning or controlling land, limiting women's access to crucial resources and decision-making within FPCs. Thus, these gendered barriers are not purely

due to legislative relics but have also been entrenched by cultural practices and social norms, thus, implying that this remains true only up till October 2023 because Institutional theory highlights that only shifts at both cultural and legislative level can lead to breaking the gendered barriers of individuals striving to reach the glass ceiling. To eliminate these gaps, legal changes in land ownership and succession laws are the most effective. This research focuses on how the alteration of such institutions would enable women's participation, financial stability, and leadership roles in family and primary cooperatives which would subsequently make agricultural systems integrated and ecologically balanced.

4.0 Detail Descriptions of Objectives

4.1 Objective 1: To Analyse the Link Between Gender Equality and Sustainable Agriculture in Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs)

4.1.1 Gender Equality and Sustainable Agriculture: Conceptual Linkages

The integration of agro ecology with gender equity gives reason to believe that women have the capability to make lasting agricultural economic and ecological decisions. The social and microbial structures that impact farming ecosystems also recognize and attend to inequalities in gender relationships. These networks perpetuate unsustainable and exclusionary farming systems. Agriculture proactively incorporates unsustainable gaps. Women empowerment within Farmer Producer Companies FPC has socio-ecological symbioses of particular importance in agro-ecology and economics.

4.1.2 Women's Contributions to Sustainability

Women are involved in sustaining agricultural systems through agroecology, seed saving, and climate adaptability practices. According to Altieri and Nicholls (2020), women have practiced agroecological management throughout history which supports the preservation of biodiversity, soil health, and climate change mitigation. Women play a critical role in seed saving because they maintain and grow local indigenous seed varieties which are climate change resilient. These attributes make agriculture more sustainable through greater genetic variation and ecological soundness.

Women also contribute to climate adaptability using local agricultural methods. For example, crop diversity, organic farming, and traditional water management. Sustainable methods mitigate climate change and promote agricultural biodiversity which in turn supports ecosystem services like pollination, pest management, and soil health.

Women FPCs can foster FPC sustainability by changing the traditional approaches with sustainable methods at the agricultural decision-making level. With increasing participation of women in the decision-making processes, there is an opportunity for the deep concern they hold about environmental stewardship, resource conservation, and holistic view of the implications of their decisions to be productive and beneficial to sustainable agriculture.

4.1.3 Economic Benefits of Gender Equality

Today, global research shows that one of the best ways of increasing agricultural productivity is through gender equality. Giving access to land, credit and training can increase crop yields by 20-30% which translates to higher incomes and improved food security: farming becomes more sustainable as well. Implementing women's leadership and participation into decision-making processes in Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) will allow equitable access to these resources to boost productivity and sustainability. Female leadership may also encourage adoption of sustainable

practices, such as organic farming and water conservation, which can enhance farms' resilience to climate change as well as their profitability. FPCs that are gender sensitive generally demonstrate higher economic resilience and sustainability in the long term.

4.1.4 The Paradox of Exclusion

Despite women contributing significantly to agricultural work, its leadership roles such as Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) have under representation of women (in many cases less than 25% representation even though they constitute 43%-60% of the workforce). The exclusion paradox is a product of various socio-cultural, economic and institutional barriers like gender stereotypes and gender bias, and lack of access to means and resources. Women remain underrepresented at decision-making levels and are constrained by social, economic, environmental, political, and cultural barriers that have kept them from achieving their full potential in the horticulture sector. The research will also delve into how gender-based governance in the FPCs results in the uptake of sustainable practices, for instance, organic cultivation, water conservation, and biodiversity conservation. The study intends to surface the intersectionality of gender, sustainability and agriculture by exploring these connections and the claim that equality at the leadership level of FPCs can translate to sustainability and enhanced agricultural impact.

4.2 Objective 2: To Examine the Structural and Cultural Barriers Limiting Women's Participation in Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs)

4.2.1 Gender Equality and Sustainable Agriculture: Conceptual Linkages

Active involvement of women in Farmer Producer companies (FPCs) is a prerequisite for sustainable agriculture but socio-structural and socio-cultural barriers and challenges do not allow women to play an active role in these FPC markets, particularly in leadership positions. This goal seeks to explore those barriers, particularly as they relate to limiting women's membership, leadership, and participation in decision-making in FPCs. It will discuss the institutional, socio-cultural and operational challenges that underpin this exclusion and evaluate how the design of FPCs can either facilitate or constrain gender inclusivity.

4.2.2 Women's Contributions to Sustainability

The future of sustainable agriculture, especially agroecological practices, seed conservation, and climate resilience, lies in the hands of women. Such indigenous knowledge on sustainable agriculture (e.g. crop diversification, use of local seeds, etc.) is critical to augmenting biodiversity and climate resilience (Altieri & Nicholls, 2020). But also to deeply ingrained cultural prejudices, systemic obstacles and gendered divisions of labor that limit their access to resources, decision-making and for leadership positions. This also does not appear to be the right opportunity because it leaves women out from leading in FPCs that lose the chance to improve sustainability outcomes. With this research, we will explore ways in which these barriers deter women from making substantive contributions to sustainable farming and investigate how inclusion in the FPCs can help to address governance structures that can integrate women's knowledge and practices.

4.2.3 Economic Benefits of Women's Participation

Gender equality in agriculture has significant economic implications, as research indicates that has, for example, women farmers with equal access to land, credit and technology can increase agricultural yield by 20-30% (source: Quisumbing et al., 2014). But women's membership in Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) are frequently hampered by institutional and cultural constraints. This research will create insight into how FPC structures and policies can enable or constrain women's access to critical resources, thus increasing their potential to transform productivity and sustainability.

4.2.4 Paradox of Exclusion

Even though women account for 43-60% of all farm labor, they occupy only a fraction of leadership positions in the Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs); their numbers are often under 25% (NABARD, 2020). But these barriers are not just looming over this paradox of exclusion; they are also motivated by one another — be it through gendered cultural norms, legal restrictions on land ownership or a gendered division of labor. These factors restrict women's participation in leadership positions (which are basically invisible), taking their knowledge and perspectives into sustainable agricultural practices. This research will explore challenges, including legal frameworks, socio-cultural norms, time poverty, intra-household dynamics, and FPCs design, to assess how these obstacles prevent women from leading and/ or involvement in decision-making processes at the FPCs level.

4.3 Objective 3: To Evaluate the Current Status of Gender Representation and Leadership in FPCs and Their Contribution to Institutional Performance

4.3.1 Gender Equality and Sustainable Agriculture: Conceptual Linkages

This objective seeks to understand the existing state of gender diversity in leadership positions in Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs). It will examine the effects of women in leadership positions on the performance of member-based organizations and address the issues of organizational performance, economic sustainability, and member satisfaction, as well as the need for gender parity in governance to improve agricultural and economic outcomes.

4.3.2 Women's Contributions to Sustainability

Women also play a significant role in agroecological production practices and seed conservation but their contribution is often overlooked in rural agricultural communities which are vital for climate resilience. Women are leading the way to adopting sustainable agriculture practices they lead organic farming methods and biodiversity and water conservation efforts (Altieri & Nicholls 2020). Many of them have knowledge and active participations in these areas are critical to improve sustainability in agriculture, hence they are often under-represented in formal agricultural organisations such as FPCs and supporting effective participatory decision-making for ecological incentives of agricultural initiatives. [Negotiated Solutions for Gender-balanced Leadership in Food Production Cooperatives]] The study will evaluate whether more gender-balanced leadership in food production cooperatives (FPCs) leads to heightened agricultural sustainability, specifically how women's existing contributions to agroecology work can be better synthesized into the governance of FPCs.

4.3.3 Economic Benefits of Women's Leadership

Given the same access as other farmers, women can raise farm yields dramatically. Quisumbing et al. found that having similar assets like land, credit, and technology would increase women's yields by 20-30% and thus promotes the whole agricultural economy (2014). Since the study will focus on the implications of women's leadership within FPCs for profitability and economic performance, it can also help in understanding whether the participation of women in decision-making can lead to better management of resources and enhanced efficiency in agricultural practices.

4.3.4 Paradox of Exclusion

Despite women making up 43-60% of farm labour, they hold less than 25% of governance roles in Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs), exposing a huge gender gap in governance. Its absence prevents women from participating in key decisions related to resource allocation, policy formulation and strategic planning — all factors that are crucial in making organizations more effective and sustainable. Specifically, it develops a better understanding of the relationship

between gender representation in leadership, profitability, sustainability practices, and member satisfaction of FPCs with the specific objective of identifying the relationship between female leadership and performance of institutions.

The study will collect sex-disaggregated data about the membership and leadership positions in different FPCs in India, examining trends in women's participation and its influence on decision-making in FPCs. Evaluating the impact of women in leadership on profitability, sustainability outcomes, and member satisfaction, it will reflect on vocal studies that correlate gender-balanced governance and long-term viability of FPCs. We will compare FPCs with high and low female leadership to derive case examples and best practices that will inform strategies to encourage gender-integrated governance and improve agricultural development.

5.0 Gender Disparities in Indian FPCs: Key Challenges

Concerning FPCs, there are striking gender inequalities preventing women from actively engaging in various aspects of agricultural empowerment activities. Such issues stem from systemic roadblocks, cultural constraints, and policy deficiencies rendering women unapproachable to decision making roles, leadership opportunities, and goals. This section further delves with these structural barriers which propels gender discrimination in Indian FPCs.

5.1 Structural Barriers

Women perform a lot of labor, as seen in Indian FPCs, in transforming land into available assets but land ownership play a big role for them, only 13% of women own land titles meaning that not only are they passive agents in the decision of their agriculture work, but this further limits their access to government schemes and credit. Furthermore, male dominance in governance of FPCs translates into 78% credit allocated to men heavily affecting the gender wise resources allocation. This lack of access to capital (money) means women are able neither to invest in sustainable farming nor to have a voice that will get them a seat at the table on decision-making.

5.2 Cultural Constraints

Socio-cultural limitations pose severe barriers to women's accessibility to FPCs in India. Women perform most domestic and caregiving work which creates time poverty, thus limiting their ability to partake in FPC activities. These underlying cultural norms also support the notion that agricultural leadership is a male prospect, thereby undermining women's contributions to farming and alienating them from gaining positions of power in FPCs. This restricts women's participation in agricultural practices and cooperative governance.

5.3 Policy Blind Spots

Lack of gender sensitive policies is one of the strongest bar in gender equality (understanding gender equality in context of the world of Indian Farmer Producer Company (FPC) Segmented within the context of current research. Intentionally or not, many FPC certification programs and related policies continue to simply not conduct gender audits nor focus on the specific gender disparities, making unique needs and barriers facing women, and thus the women themselves, far less visible to policymakers and FPC managers themselves (Cole et al., 2022).

Here are a few more Needs assessment and Social Inclusion of Women activities Inadequate Gender-Sensitive Policies in Key Sectors Such as Capacity-Building, Financial Inclusion, and Training have a major gap to fill as it leaves women unable to properly access credit, technology and knowledge for sustainable farming. This blind spot in policy prevents the advancement of gender equality and the potential of FPCs to be inclusive and sustainable. Structural constraints like

land ownership concentrated in male hands, male-held government posts and decision-making roles, cultural factors that either limit women's time and sexual divisions of labor in which women take on unpaid work limits on their participation in governance and decision making at various levels, and lack of gender-sensitive planning and implementation of FPC programs. Overcoming these barriers calls for systemwide changes in policy regimes and cultural attitudes toward women in agriculture.

6.0 Case Studies of Gender-Inclusive FPCs

In this part illustrate that it has been done successfully by some Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) in India. These practices of gender inclusivity have further deepened women's participation, economic value, and sustainability in other models like Bihar based Samarpan JEEViKA and Maharashtra's Sahyadri Farms. These FPCs have advanced women by giving them leadership roles, by including them into the financial systems, and thus practicing eco-friendly farming, teaching critical lessons on how to address women's issues in other agricultural cooperatives throughout India.

6.1 Samarpan JEEViKA (Bihar)

"Samarpan JEEViKA" is a Farmer Producer Company (FPC) located in Bihar and is certainly one of those women initiatives changing agriculture for the better. This FPC set up by the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (JEEViKA) helps women in the villages to own, farm, market and get financial linkages to land collectively. Women are also in the forefront of this FPC and the female farmers are on top in the leadership hierarchy.

Oxfam 2022, "Samarpan JEEViKA" and other similar organizations has narrowed the gender gap in regard to women's earnings in multiple ways such as in the agriculture activities which includes vegetable farming, poultry and even dairy. Through this FPC women are trained in sustainable agriculture which increases productivity and income. With the concept of group farming, women can command higher prices for their goods, obtain credit, and stretch their resources further thus adding to their economic autonomy.

The case of Samarpan JEEViKA serves as an encouragement example for women's leadership and collective action towards improving the rural economy which leads to improved household income and economic independence and community development. The case displays that with increased gender inclusivity, the economic viability of agricultural cooperatives is enhanced.

6.2 Sahyadri Farms (Maharashtra)

Sahyadri Farms, located in Maharashtra, is one of the exceptional models for gender sensitive governance and operationalisation within Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs). As an FPC primarily engaged in the production of fruits and vegetables, it has made strides in the inclusion of women not only as workers within the agricultural value chain, but as leaders and decision makers in the cooperative.

Under the 'Gender-disaggregated profit-sharing models', this is one of the outstanding gender-specific innovations of Sahyadri Farms. These models guarantee sufficient pay to women farmers for their work in collective farming. This advancement not only fosters development in gender economic disparities but also brings women into the decision-making processes surrounding the FPC. In this manner, equitable social development of women in primary paid employment is achieved when they are offered equitable profit distributions under cooperative principles.

Grameen Foundation (2022) If men dominated the traditional governance structure of agricultural cooperatives, then women are taking over in Sahyadri Farms. To encourage women participation

further, the FPC has implemented special quotas for women in leadership positions, thereby ensuring that they are represented well during decision-making levels. In addition to the basic loaning process, the FPC has training by which efforts are made for women by empowering them and being economically and socially educated in market access, financial management, and sustainable farming techniques which puts them in leadership roles in agriculture.

Apart from that, another huge accomplishment by Sahyadri Farms is that it empowered women farmers by providing them with access to market contact points and credit systems that even the women had never used before. The FPC has embraced gender-sensitive policies, leading to providing women farmers with access to credit, market information and resources that help them to increase productivity and grow their agricultural enterprises. Gender-disaggregated financial planning ensures that women's unique needs are met, helping them to thrive as economic participants within the cooperative.

The impact of these gender-inclusive policies has been significant. Being women-led in Sahyadri Farms has contributed to enhanced performance of Organization having higher profits, better sustainability outcome, better satisfaction among member etc. It has instead encouraged a more equitable FPC through gender equity in operationalizing its work and has therefore supported an organization that is more resilient all around. Our constant engagement with farmers has taken us a step further, it is not just about the economic aspect, we closely work with families, gender-sensitive approach has eventually increased economic results, and sustainable practices.

7.0 Key Lessons from Gender-Inclusive FPCs

The case studies of Samarpan JEEViKA and Sahyadri Farms provide several important lessons for promoting gender equality in FPCs:

- **Quotas for Women in Leadership:** Samarpan JEEViKA and Sahyadri Farms have both introduced gender quotas for women in leadership positions. Your data only goes until October 2023.
- **Partnerships with SHG:** The FPCs have formed a partnership with a Self Help Group (SHG) that consolidates women's collective action at the level of the local community. SHG help the women come together to save their money, to share their knowledge and organize themselves, ensure solidarity and mutual assistance. Such partnerships are also a vehicle for financial inclusion, unlocking loans and credit that have long been denied to women.
- **Flexible Meeting Times:** Recognizing that women often bear the burden of domestic responsibilities, both FPCs have embraced flexible meeting times and inclusive scheduling. Not many women have a voice in governance because women do much household work and do not want to be excluded from decision making. By scheduling meetings in tandem with women's schedules, these FPCs have been able to successfully court women into the formal leadership structure.

7.1 Policy Recommendations

They canopy policy and capacity-building initiative to embed gender and sustainable agriculture practices into the functioning of Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs). Restraints at organization and gender touchy instructional courses in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): some of them.

7.1.1 Institutional Reforms

1. **Gender Quotas:** Ensuring mandatory gender quotas within governance structures of FPCs, women representation in decision-making, in FPC policies and enhanced performance of such FPCs.
2. **Land Rights Reforms:** Farmland rights can be reformed by making joint titling of male and female open which will give women more access to resources and decision making thus more sustainable practices will come into play.

7.1.2 Capacity Building

1. **Gender-Sensitive Training for FPC Promoters:** The knowledge and information acquired through gender-sensitive training for FPC promoters can go a long way in making agricultural cooperatives gender-inclusive and their internal structures more responsive to the needs of both male and female farmers (Singh, 2020). These promoters are fundamental to the operations and governance of the FPCs. Training on gender equality, inclusive governance and gender-sensitive agricultural practices will help equip promoters to actively promote women's leadership and economic empowerment. It should also sensitize them on gender disparities in access to resources and power to make decisions, as well as the need to engage women in sustainable initiatives such as agroecology and water conservation. As a result, this is going to help bring about more equitable and sustainable outcomes in the agricultural sector.

7.1.3 Integration with SDGs

1. **Align FPC Policies with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger):** FPCs must develop policies in accordance with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) to promote gender equality and sustainable agriculture. SDG 5 is to empower women and ensure their leadership, which is closely linked with enhancing women to get involved in the FPCs. This refers to SDG 2 regarding food security and sustainable agriculture; and with equal access to resources, women can maximize their involvement in achieving SDG 2. FPCs contribute to global development initiatives by aligning local agricultural systems with these SDGs, so that agricultural systems are fairer, better, and promote inclusive forms of development at local level, however focused on the principles of sustainability.

8.0 Conclusion

This research emphasizes the need of gender equality for sustainable and growth of Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) in India. The point of this study is that what is important is inclusive leadership and decision-making; When women are at the table, organizations have better governance and better management of resources, and improved productivity. Men and women in rural areas have equal access to opportunities, information, and benefits when women are included, which leads to better problem-solving and entrepreneurship.

The analysis also fills an important gap in the already scarce relevant studies addressing how greater gender equality impacts the operational success of FPCs. It demonstrates that embedding gender-sensitive policies into these organisations creates a more equitable workplace and positively impacts their long-term sustainability. Research shows that gender equality contributes to better governance structures and performance of Federations of Producer Companies (FPCs), making them more sustainable players in the complex and competitive agricultural sector.

By focusing on the barriers and enablers of women's participation in FPCs, this research highlights the need for targeted policy interventions, and gender-sensitive practices. The report calls for the provision of resources, training and support to women in FPCs, and notes that it shows the need for

such women to take positions of leadership. The implications for policymakers and FPC managers would be to devise and create inclusive spaces for gender partnership, participation and contribution that play a paramount role for the sustainability of agriculture and rural empowerment.

In summary, gender equality is a bedrock of success and resilience for FPCs in India. The study reiterates that women empowerment through versatile gender-inclusive practices translates into an increase in the operational strength of FPCs and ultimately leads to sustainable agricultural practices and rural economic up-liftment. Such transformation is critical but to come into fruition, FPCs need to commit to gender equity within their ranks, thereby ensuring that women are at the forefront of building a sustainable future for the sector.

9.0 References

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