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Knowledge of farmers regarding farmer producer organizations and their services: An ex-post-facto study in Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have emerged as an important institutional mechanism for strengthening collective action, improving access to agricultural inputs and services, enhancing market participation and improving the economic position of small and marginal farmers. However, effective participation in FPO activities largely depends upon farmers' knowledge regarding their structure, functions, services and institutional provisions. The present study was conducted to assess the knowledge of farmers regarding Farmer Producer Organizations and their services in Jaunpur and Ghazipur districts of Uttar Pradesh. The study followed an ex-post-facto research design. The districts were purposively selected based on the concentration of FPO activities. A multistage sampling procedure was followed, wherein blocks were selected purposively, two FPOs were randomly selected from each selected block, and 60 farmers were selected from each FPO, resulting in a total sample of 480 respondents. Data were collected through a structured interview schedule and analyzed using frequency, percentage and mean scores. Farmers' knowledge was assessed across 15 statements using a three-point continuum of complete, partial and no knowledge. The findings revealed that the overall mean knowledge score was 31.87 out of 45, with a knowledge index of 70.82 per cent, indicating a moderate level of knowledge. Statement-wise findings revealed comparatively higher complete knowledge regarding the essential features of FPOs, benefits to members, registration under relevant institutional provisions and membership-related aspects. However, substantial knowledge gaps were observed regarding the FPO registration website, organizations responsible for promoting FPOs, the distinction between FPOs and cooperative societies, and the role of NGOs in FPO promotion. The findings highlight the need for focused extension and capacity-building programmes to improve farmers' understanding of the institutional, procedural and functional dimensions of FPOs.

Keywords: Farmer producer organization, FPOs, farmers, knowledge, collective action, extension education, Uttar Pradesh

Introduction

Indian agriculture is predominantly characterized by small and fragmented holdings, which often limit the bargaining power of individual farmers, restrict access to quality inputs and technologies, and increase the transaction costs associated with marketing agricultural produce. In this context, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have emerged as an important institutional mechanism for promoting collective action among farmers. FPOs enable producers to aggregate their resources, undertake collective procurement and marketing, access services and technologies, and establish stronger linkages with markets and other value-chain actors. Their collective nature can improve economies of scale, bargaining power and market access, particularly for small and marginal farmers (Nikam *et al.*, 2019) [3].

The importance of producer organizations has increased with the changing structure of agricultural markets. Producer organizations can serve as an interface between farmers and external institutions by facilitating backward and forward linkages, market access, capacity building, financial services and agricultural advisory support. Evidence from India indicates that producer organizations can improve market access, marketable surplus and bargaining power and can contribute to improved service delivery to participating farmers (Cherukuri & Reddy, 2014) [1].

The Government of India has accorded considerable importance to the development of FPOs. The Central Sector Scheme for "Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations" provides an institutional framework for promoting FPOs and supporting their development through implementing and facilitating agencies. The scheme

includes operational guidelines, support mechanisms and provisions for convergence with other government programmes.

Although the institutional expansion of FPOs has created opportunities for farmers, the benefits of collective organizations depend substantially on the ability of members to understand their structure, functions, services, registration provisions, membership rules and potential benefits. Knowledge is therefore an important prerequisite for effective participation. A farmer who is aware of the purpose, functioning and services of an FPO is more likely to understand the opportunities available through collective action and make informed decisions regarding participation and utilization of FPO services.

Previous research has established that FPOs can strengthen farmers' position in agricultural value chains; however, the performance of FPOs is not uniform and organizational, managerial and capacity-related constraints continue to influence their functioning (Trebbin, 2014; Kumar *et al.*, 2023) ^[4, 2]. Thus, assessing farmers' knowledge of FPOs is important for identifying specific areas where information and capacity-building interventions are required.

Against this background, the present study was undertaken to assess the statement-wise knowledge of farmers regarding Farmer Producer Organizations and their services in selected districts of Uttar Pradesh. The study specifically focused on farmers' knowledge concerning the concept of FPOs, membership, registration, organizational features, promotion, activities, member benefits and other institutional aspects of FPOs.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted using an ex-post-facto research design, as specified in the approved synopsis. The design was considered appropriate because the characteristics and experiences of the respondents had already occurred and were not manipulated by the researcher.

The study was conducted in Jaunpur and Ghazipur districts of Uttar Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh was purposively selected, followed by purposive selection of Jaunpur and Ghazipur districts based on the concentration of FPO activities. According to the approved synopsis, Jaunpur had 92 FPOs, whereas Ghazipur had 68 FPOs.

A multistage sampling procedure was followed. Blocks were selected purposively, followed by random selection of two FPOs from each selected block. From each selected FPO, 60 farmer respondents were selected, resulting in a total sample of 480 farmers.

Primary data were collected through a structured interview schedule developed in accordance with the objectives of the study. Farmers' knowledge regarding FPOs was assessed through 15 statements covering the concept and membership of FPOs, registration, organizational features, promotion, support agencies, activities, member benefits and institutional provisions. Responses were classified into complete knowledge, partial knowledge and no knowledge. The data were coded, tabulated and analyzed using frequency and percentage.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Statement wise distribution of respondents

S. N.	Knowledge statement	No knowledge		Partial knowledge		Complete knowledge	
		f	(%)	f	(%)	f	(%)
1	Do you know what is FPO?	21	4.4	417	86.9	42	8.8
2	Do you know how many farmers can join in an FPO?	21	4.4	83	17.3	376	78.3
3	Do you know the registration website of FPO?	417	86.9	42	8.8	21	4.4
4	Do you know what is the need of FPO?	42	8.8	396	82.5	42	8.8
5	Do you know what are the essential features of FPO?	21	4.4	63	13.1	396	82.5
6	Do you know who can promote FPO?	83	17.3	376	78.3	21	4.4
7	Do you know who can provide support for promotion of FPO?	62	12.9	376	78.3	42	8.8
8	Do you know the difference between FPO and Cooperative Society?	375	78.1	84	17.5	21	4.4
9	Do you know the important activity of an FPO?	42	8.8	63	13.1	375	78.1
10	Do you know how an FPO would help the members?	21	4.4	63	13.1	396	82.5
11	Can an NGO promote FPO?	396	82.5	63	13.1	21	4.4
12	Can an FPO be registered under Acts governing non-profit institutions?	42	8.8	42	8.8	396	82.5
13	Is registration mandatory for an FPO?	63	13.1	42	8.8	375	78.1
14	What are other benefits for the members of an FPO?	63	13.1	375	78.1	42	8.8
15	Can a person become member of more than one FPO?	42	8.8	396	82.5	42	8.8

The statement-wise distribution revealed considerable variation in farmers' knowledge regarding different aspects of Farmer Producer Organizations. The findings indicate that farmers possessed relatively high knowledge about certain structural and functional aspects of FPOs, whereas their knowledge was comparatively weak regarding registration procedures, promotion and institutional distinctions.

The highest proportion of farmers possessing complete knowledge was observed for the statement concerning the essential features of an FPO, where 396 respondents (82.5%) demonstrated complete knowledge. An identical proportion, 396 respondents (82.5%), had complete knowledge regarding how an FPO helps its members. Similarly, 396 respondents

(82.5%) possessed complete knowledge regarding whether an FPO could be registered under Acts governing non-profit institutions. These findings indicate that the respondents were comparatively familiar with the fundamental organizational characteristics and member-oriented functions of FPOs.

A high level of complete knowledge was also observed regarding the number of farmers who can join an FPO, with 376 respondents (78.3%) reporting complete knowledge. Further, 375 respondents (78.1%) possessed complete knowledge regarding the important activities of an FPO, while the same proportion (78.1%) demonstrated complete knowledge regarding whether registration of an FPO is mandatory. The relatively high knowledge on these aspects

suggests that farmers had acquired considerable information about the operational and membership-related characteristics of FPOs.

However, substantial gaps were evident in several areas. Only 21 respondents (4.4%) possessed complete knowledge regarding the registration website of an FPO. Similarly, only 21 respondents (4.4%) had complete knowledge concerning who can promote an FPO, the difference between an FPO and a Cooperative Society, and whether an NGO can promote an FPO. These results point towards a substantial information gap concerning the institutional and procedural dimensions of FPOs.

The results further showed that only 42 respondents (8.8%) possessed complete knowledge regarding what an FPO is, while 417 respondents (86.9%) had partial knowledge of the concept. Similarly, 396 respondents (82.5%) had only partial knowledge regarding the need for FPOs, and 375 respondents (78.1%) had partial knowledge regarding other benefits available to FPO members. With respect to membership in more than one FPO, 396 respondents (82.5%) fell in the partial knowledge category.

A similar pattern was observed regarding the role of institutions in promoting FPOs. For the statement concerning who can promote FPOs, 376 respondents (78.3%) had partial knowledge, while only 21 respondents (4.4%) had complete knowledge. Likewise, 376 respondents (78.3%) possessed partial knowledge concerning organizations that can provide support for FPO promotion.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that farmers were relatively knowledgeable about the basic organizational features, activities, membership provisions and benefits of FPOs, but their knowledge was considerably weaker concerning registration procedures, institutional promoters, supporting agencies and the distinction between FPOs and cooperative societies. This finding is important because the effectiveness of FPOs depends not only on their formal establishment but also on the capacity of members to understand and utilize the institutional and economic opportunities available through them.

The findings are consistent with the broader literature emphasizing that FPOs can provide farmers with market access, economies of scale, bargaining power, technology and advisory services, but that organizational capacity and knowledge remain important determinants of effective functioning (Nikam *et al.*, 2019; Trebbin, 2014) ^[3, 4]. The present findings therefore suggest a need for targeted farmer education programmes, particularly on FPO registration, institutional support mechanisms, organizational structure, promotion agencies and the specific rights and benefits of members.

Overall mean knowledge score = 31.87 out of 45

Mean knowledge index

Knowledge Index = $45 \times 31.87 \times 100 = 70.82\%$

Thus, the respondents' aggregate knowledge score was 31.87/45, corresponding to a 70.82 per cent knowledge index.

Conclusion

The study concluded that farmers possessed a moderate

overall level of knowledge regarding Farmer Producer Organizations, as reflected by the mean knowledge score of 31.87 out of 45 and a knowledge index of 70.82 per cent. Farmers were comparatively more knowledgeable about the basic organizational features, activities and benefits associated with FPOs. However, considerable gaps existed in their knowledge of institutional and procedural aspects, particularly FPO registration, promoting agencies, supporting institutions, the distinction between FPOs and cooperative societies, and the involvement of NGOs.

The findings indicate that merely establishing FPOs may not be sufficient to ensure effective utilization of their services. There is a need to strengthen the knowledge component of FPO development programmes through systematic extension interventions. Regular awareness campaigns, farmer training programmes, exposure visits, orientation programmes and locally relevant information materials should be organized to improve farmers' understanding of FPO structure, registration, governance, membership provisions, government support and available services. Particular emphasis should be placed on areas where farmers demonstrated partial or inadequate knowledge. Strengthening farmers' knowledge in these areas can facilitate more informed participation, better utilization of FPO services and ultimately contribute to the effective functioning and sustainability of FPOs.

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