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Lalla Ram

Research Scholar, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture & Technology, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

HC Singh

Professor, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture & Technology, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

Virendra Pratap

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Agriculture Allied Science, United University, Jhalwa, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India

Dileep Vyas

Research Scholar, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture & Technology, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

D Singh

Professor (Chemistry), CAET, Campus Etawah, Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture & Technology, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

Milind Sagar

Research Scholar, Department of Agronomy, Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture & Technology, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author:

Lalla Ram

Research Scholar, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture & Technology, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

Constraints faced by the farmers and officials of FPOs and their suggestions to overcome the constraints

Lalla Ram¹, HC Singh², Virendra Pratap³, Dileep Vyas⁴, D Singh⁵, Milind Sagar⁶

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture has historically served as the cornerstone of human civilization and economic advancement and continues to occupy a pivotal position in the global economy. In recent years, the Central Plain Zone of Uttar Pradesh has witnessed a considerable expansion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), driven by increasing emphasis on farmer collectivization, collective action, and market-oriented agricultural development. The present investigation employed an ex-post facto research design, as the phenomena and variables under consideration had already occurred and could not be manipulated or controlled by the researcher. As stated by Singh (2006), ex-post facto research seeks to investigate probable cause-and-effect relationships by examining existing situations, conditions, and events. The study was undertaken in the Central Plain Zone of Uttar Pradesh, one of the prominent agro-climatic regions of the state. Uttar Pradesh is geographically located in the northern part of India, extending between 23°52' and 30°24' North latitudes and 77°05' and 84°38' East longitudes. The Central Plain Zone encompasses fourteen districts, namely Farrukhabad, Kannauj, Etawah, Auraiya, Kanpur Nagar, Kanpur Dehat, Fatehpur, Kaushambi, Prayagraj, Hardoi, Unnao, Rae Bareilly, Lakhimpur Kheri, and Lucknow. From these fourteen districts, four districts, namely Kanpur Nagar, Etawah, Lakhimpur Kheri, and Prayagraj, were selected randomly for the present investigation. The selected districts represent diverse geographical and agricultural conditions within the Central Plain Zone and possess a substantial presence of Farmer Producer Organizations. The findings of the study revealed that officials have a crucial role in the establishment, promotion, administration, and institutional strengthening of Farmer Producer Organizations. Their technical assistance, capacity-building initiatives, awareness programmes, facilitation of government schemes, development of market linkages, and regular supervision substantially contribute to the effective functioning and long-term sustainability of FPOs. The farmers associated with FPOs exhibited a predominantly favourable attitude towards these organizations and acknowledged the advantages of collective procurement of agricultural inputs, coordinated production and marketing, enhanced market accessibility, and improved bargaining capacity. Nevertheless, the findings also indicated the need for sustained capacity building, timely dissemination of relevant information, transparent organizational management, adequate financial assistance, and stronger and more reliable market linkages to further improve the effectiveness, participation, and sustainability of FPOs.

Keywords: Constraints, Farmers, Officials, FPOs, Overcome and Suggestions

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of human civilization, agriculture has played a fundamental role in sustaining livelihoods, supporting economic progress, and ensuring food security. Even in the contemporary global economy, the agricultural sector continues to be a major contributor to employment, rural livelihoods, and socio-economic development. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recognizes agriculture as a principal source of livelihood for rural populations and an important component of economic development in many countries. In a similar context, the World Bank (2021) highlighted that agricultural growth has considerable potential to alleviate rural poverty and may contribute more effectively to poverty reduction than growth in several other sectors. Sen (1999) viewed development as a process of expanding human capabilities and creating greater access to economic opportunities, particularly for socially and economically vulnerable sections of rural society.

The increasing integration of agriculture with markets has created a need for institutional arrangements that can strengthen the economic position of small and marginal farmers. In this regard, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) have emerged as an important collective institutional mechanism. According to Trebbin and Hassler (2012), FPOs provide an institutional platform through which small farmers can collectively engage with modern agricultural markets and improve their competitive position. Recognizing the importance of such collective organizations in agricultural development, the Government of India introduced the Central Sector Scheme for the Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations, supported by a financial outlay of ₹6,865 crore up to 2027–28. The principal objectives of the scheme include

strengthening the collective bargaining capacity of farmers, facilitating access to remunerative markets, encouraging value addition, and improving farm income through cluster-based business organizations. The scheme further promotes the “One District One Product” (ODOP) approach to encourage specialization in locally suitable agricultural products and facilitate the development of integrated agricultural value chains (Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, 2021). FPOs can provide farmers with several economic and institutional advantages by enabling collective purchase of inputs, aggregation of produce, access to technical services, improved marketing opportunities, and stronger negotiation with buyers. NABARD reports have indicated that such collective institutions can contribute to the transformation of traditional subsistence farming into commercially oriented and economically viable production systems through economies of scale and improved institutional efficiency. However, the potential of FPOs is often constrained by a range of organizational and operational difficulties. These include inadequate managerial expertise, insufficient financial resources, limited involvement of members, weak governance practices, inadequate physical infrastructure, poor market connectivity, and insufficient awareness among farmers. Singh *et al.* (2021) reported that a number of FPOs encounter difficulties due to inadequate professional management, ineffective coordination among stakeholders, weak business planning capabilities, and insufficient institutional mechanisms required for their long-term sustainability.

The Central Plain Zone of Uttar Pradesh has experienced a noticeable expansion of FPOs in recent years, largely in response to the growing emphasis on collective farming institutions, farmer aggregation, and market-led agricultural development. Nevertheless, the success and continuity of these organizations depend considerably on the extent to which farmers understand and participate in their activities. Farmers’ awareness, perceptions, attitudes, and willingness to participate are important determinants of the effectiveness of FPOs. In several rural areas, farmers may not possess adequate information about the objectives, organizational structure, functioning, advantages, and management procedures of these organizations. Moreover, socio-economic limitations, inadequate extension services, insufficient communication, limited training opportunities, and weak linkages with supporting institutions may further discourage active participation in FPO activities. Therefore, an empirical assessment of farmers’ awareness and attitude towards Farmer Producer Organizations is essential for understanding the extent of farmers’ knowledge, their perceptions of collective institutions, and their participation behaviour. Such an assessment can also help identify the major constraints influencing farmers’ involvement and the factors affecting the effective functioning of FPOs. The evidence generated through such studies can support policymakers, extension agencies, FPO-promoting institutions, and other stakeholders in developing targeted training programmes, strengthening institutional support, improving communication and market linkages, and enhancing the overall performance, participation, and sustainability of Farmer Producer Organizations.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Research design

The investigation was carried out following an ex-post facto research design, as the variables considered in the study had already occurred naturally and were not subject to manipulation or experimental control by the researcher. Singh (2006) stated that ex-post facto research is primarily concerned with examining existing situations and events to identify possible relationships between different variables. The adoption of this design was appropriate for the present study because the investigation focused on assessing the prevailing awareness and attitude of farmers towards Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and determining their association with selected socio-economic and communication characteristics of the respondents. For the collection of primary information, personal interviews were conducted with the selected respondents using a pre-structured interview schedule. The

information obtained through these interviews provided the basis for systematic analysis of the selected variables and their interrelationships. The resulting data were used to identify and interpret the factors associated with farmers’ awareness and attitude towards FPOs and to draw relevant conclusions regarding the functioning and acceptance of Farmer Producer Organizations in the Central Plain Zone of Uttar Pradesh.

2.2. Locale of the study

The investigation was carried out in the Central Plain Zone of Uttar Pradesh, which constitutes one of the prominent agro-climatic regions of the state. Geographically, Uttar Pradesh is located in northern India and extends from 23°52′ to 30°24′ N latitude and 77°05′ to 84°38′ E longitude.

2.3. Selection of the districts

The Central Plain Zone of Uttar Pradesh encompasses fourteen districts, including Farrukhabad, Kannauj, Etawah, Auraiya, Kanpur Nagar, Kanpur Dehat, Fatehpur, Kaushambi, Prayagraj, Hardoi, Unnao, Rae Bareilly, Lakhimpur Kheri, and Lucknow. From the total of fourteen districts, Kanpur Nagar, Etawah, Lakhimpur Kheri, and Prayagraj were selected through random sampling for the present investigation. The selected districts reflect varied geographical and agricultural conditions of the Central Plain Zone and have a notable presence of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), making them suitable for the objectives of the study.

2.4. Selection of the blocks

For the present investigation, four districts, namely Kanpur Nagar, Etawah, Lakhimpur Kheri, and Prayagraj, were selected. From each selected district, two blocks were purposively selected, resulting in a total of eight blocks. The selected blocks were Shivrajpur and Kalyanpur from Kanpur Nagar, Basrehar and Mahewa from Etawah, Mohammadi and Behjam from Lakhimpur Kheri, and Chaka and Bahadurpur from Prayagraj, respectively.

2.5. Selection of the respondents

To facilitate a comparative assessment, 15 farmers who were not members of any Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) were also randomly selected from the same villages or adjoining villages within the selected blocks. These respondents had no formal association or membership with any FPO. The sample was therefore constituted as follows:

- **FPO member farmers:** 15 respondents × 8 FPOs = 120 respondents
- **Non-FPO member farmers:** 15 respondents × 8 FPOs = 120 respondents

Consequently, the study comprised a total sample of 240 respondents, consisting of 120 FPO member farmers and 120 non-FPO member farmers. The inclusion of both FPO and non-FPO farmers enabled a meaningful comparison of their awareness, attitudes, constraints, and suggestions concerning Farmer Producer Organizations and provided a broader understanding of farmers’ perspectives towards FPOs.

2.6. Construction of interview schedule

The draft interview schedule was pre-tested with a group of respondents outside the selected sample area to examine its suitability, clarity, and relevance. Based on the observations and suggestions obtained during pre-testing, necessary modifications were incorporated to improve the quality and comprehensibility of the schedule. The final interview schedule consisted of both structured and scale-based questions relevant to the objectives of the study.

2.7. Procedure of data collection

The data for the present study were collected through personal interviews with the selected respondents using a structured and pre-tested interview schedule. The interview schedule was originally prepared in English and subsequently translated into Hindi to facilitate better un-

understanding of the questions by the respondents and to ensure accurate responses.

2.8. Statistical methods used

The data collected from the respondents were carefully scrutinized, coded, classified, and tabulated for appropriate statistical techniques were employed to interpret the data and draw meaningful conclusions in accordance with the objectives of the study. Both descriptive and

inferential statistical tools were used for analyzing the collected information. The statistical methods used in the present investigation are Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, Correlation Coefficient, Multiple Regression Analysis, Rank Order Method, Chi-square Test.

3. Result and discussion

3.1. Constraints faced by farmers in the functioning of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)

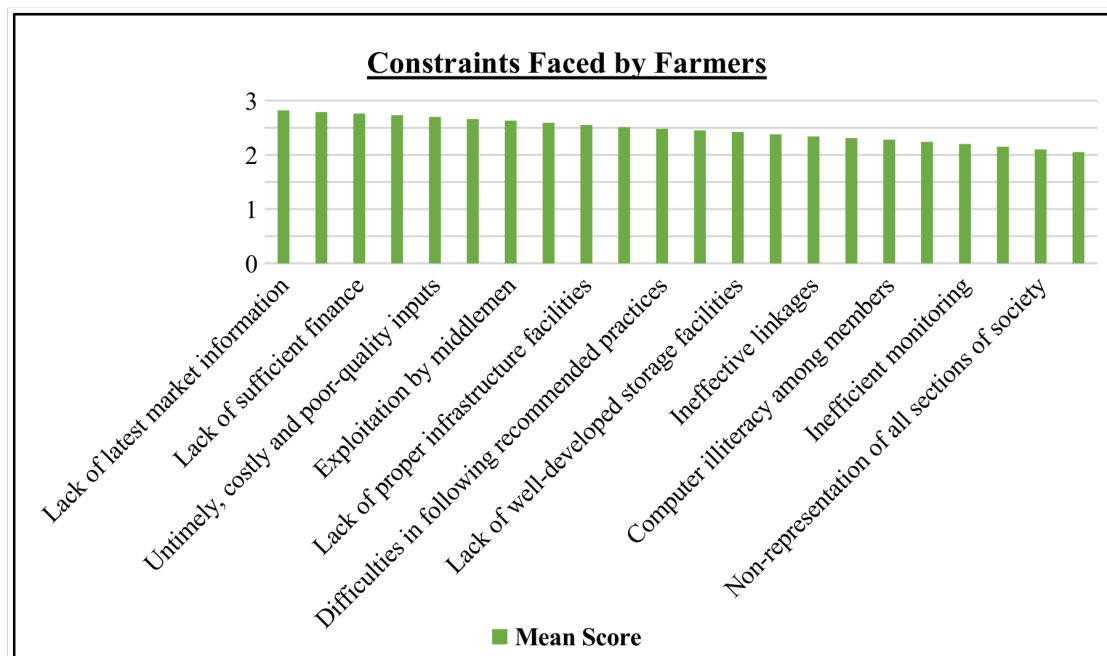


Figure 1. Constraints Faced by Farmers in the Functioning of FPOs

The findings presented in Table 03 revealed that lack of latest market information was the most prominent constraint perceived by farmers in the functioning of FPOs, recording the highest mean score of 2.82 and ranking I, followed by price fluctuation every year (2.79, rank II) and lack of sufficient finance (2.76, rank III). Lower price for produce and distress sale (2.73) and untimely, costly and poor-quality inputs (2.70) occupied IV and V ranks, respectively. Other important constraints included non-availability of timely credit (2.66, rank VI), exploitation by middlemen (2.63, rank VII), lack of awareness about grading and packaging (2.59, rank VIII), lack of proper infrastructure facilities (2.55, rank IX), and delayed payment for produce (2.51, rank X). Difficulties in following recommended practices (2.48, rank XI), high cost of labour (2.45, rank XII), lack of well-developed stor-

age facilities (2.42, rank XIII), lack of technical skill among labourers (2.38, rank XIV), and ineffective linkages (2.34, rank XV) occupied the subsequent ranks. Further, lack of coordination among group activities (2.31), computer illiteracy among members (2.28), labour shortage during peak season (2.24), inefficient monitoring (2.20), political affiliation of some members (2.15), non-representation of all sections of society (2.10), and predominance of part-time farmers (2.05) ranked XVI to XXII, respectively. Overall, the findings indicate that market information, price instability, financial constraints, input availability, and marketing-related difficulties were the major reported constraints, whereas organizational and social constraints received comparatively lower mean scores.

Table 01. Constraints Faced by Farmers in the Functioning of FPOs

Sr. No.	Constraints	Mean Score	Rank
1.	Lack of latest market information	2.82	I
2.	Price fluctuation every year	2.79	II
3.	Lack of sufficient finance	2.76	III
4.	Lower price for produce and distress sale	2.73	IV
5.	Untimely, costly and poor-quality inputs	2.70	V
6.	Non-availability of timely credit	2.66	VI
7.	Exploitation by middlemen	2.63	VII
8.	Lack of awareness about grading and packaging	2.59	VIII
9.	Lack of proper infrastructure facilities	2.55	IX
10.	Delayed payment for produce	2.51	X
11.	Difficulties in following recommended practices	2.48	XI
12.	High cost of labour	2.45	XII

(continued on next page)

Sr. No.	Constraints	Mean Score	Rank
13.	Lack of well-developed storage facilities	2.42	XIII
14.	Lack of technical skill among labourers	2.38	XIV
15.	Ineffective linkages	2.34	XV
16.	Lack of coordination among group activities	2.31	XVI
17.	Computer illiteracy among members	2.28	XVII
18.	Labour shortage during peak season	2.24	XVIII
19.	Inefficient monitoring	2.20	XIX
20.	Political affiliation of some members	2.15	XX
21.	Non-representation of all sections of society	2.10	XXI
22.	Predominance of part-time farmers	2.05	XXII

3.2. Suggestions offered by farmers and officials for strengthening Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)

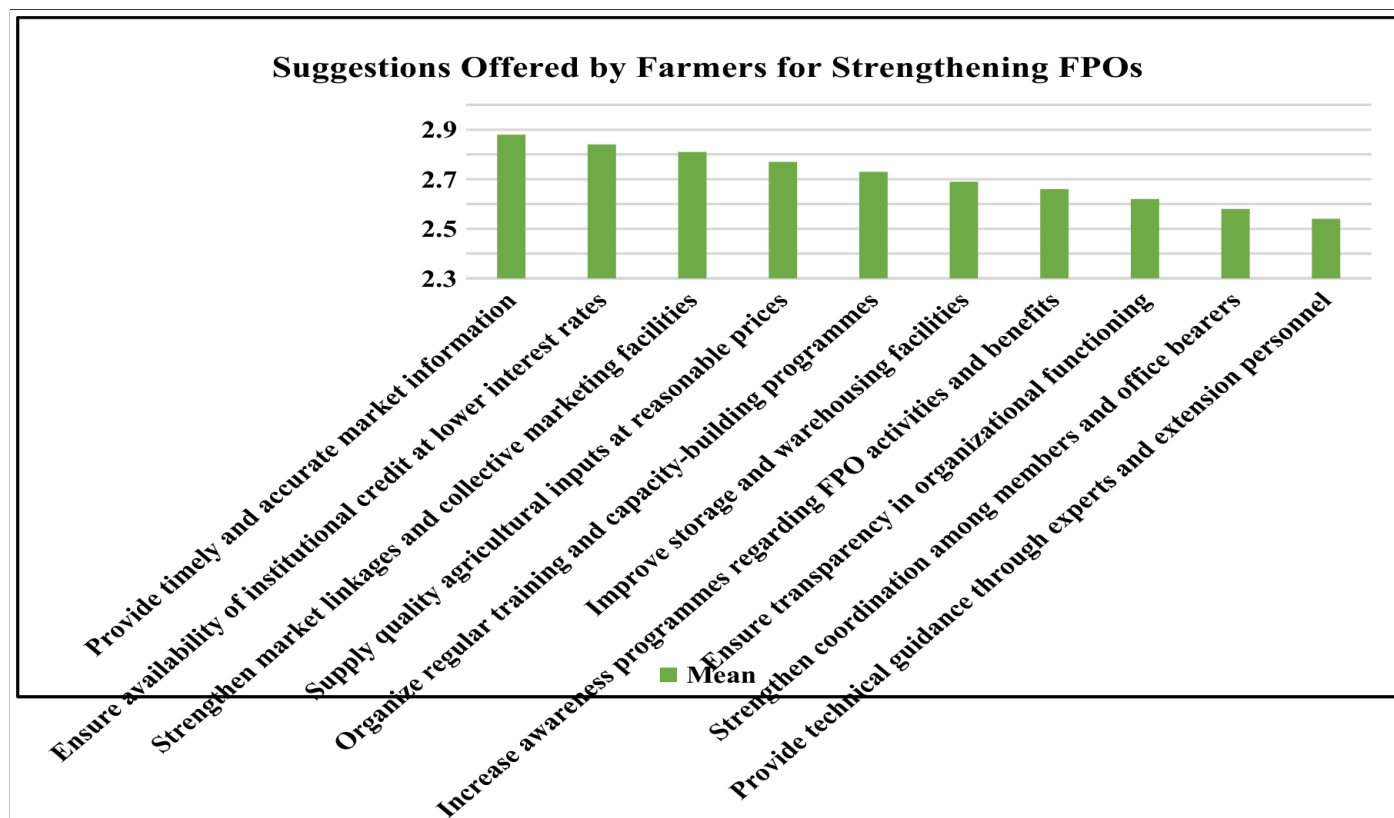


Figure 2. Suggestions Offered by Farmers for Strengthening FPOs

3.3. Suggestions offered by farmers

The table indicates that farmers identified providing timely and accurate market information as the most important suggestion for strengthening Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), with the highest mean score of 2.88 and Rank I. This was followed by ensuring the availability of institutional credit at lower interest rates (2.84, Rank II) and strengthening market linkages and collective marketing facilities (2.81, Rank III). Other important suggestions included supplying quality agricultural inputs at reasonable prices (2.77), organizing reg-

ular training and capacity-building programmes (2.73), and improving storage and warehousing facilities (2.69). Increasing awareness regarding FPO activities and benefits (2.66), ensuring transparency in organizational functioning (2.62), strengthening coordination among members and office bearers (2.58), and providing technical guidance through experts and extension personnel (2.54) occupied the subsequent ranks. Overall, farmers' suggestions mainly emphasized market access, financial support, capacity building, infrastructure, and organizational efficiency.

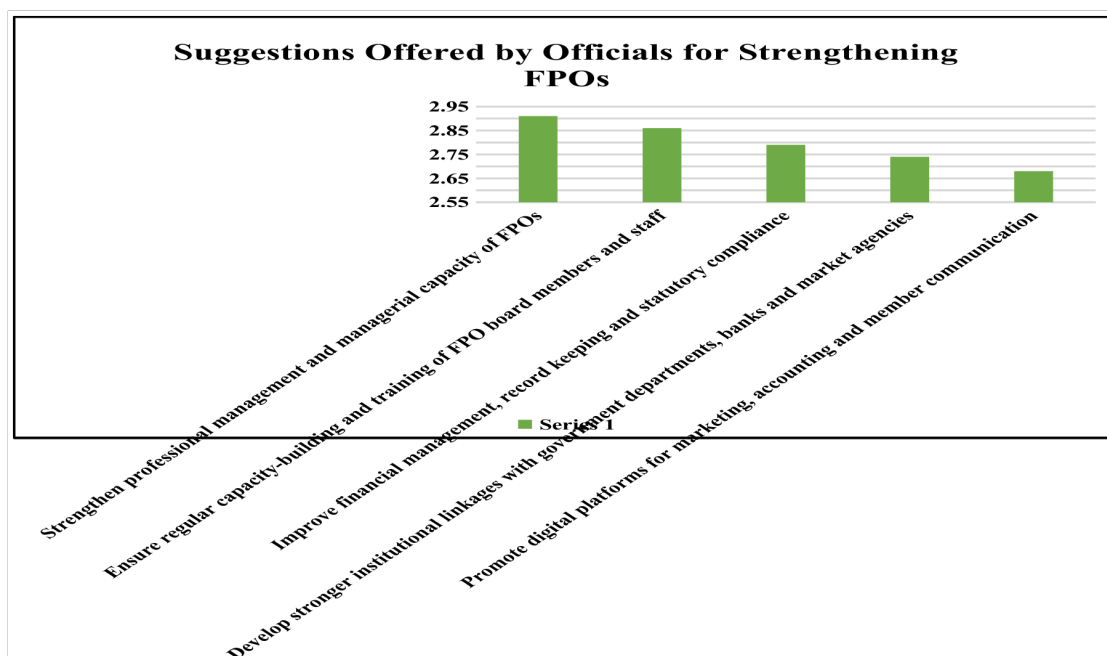


Figure 3. Suggestions Offered by Officials for Strengthening FPOs

Table 2. Suggestions Offered by Farmers for Strengthening FPOs

Sr. No.	Suggestions	Mean Score	Rank
Suggestions Offered by Farmers for Strengthening FPOs			
1.	Provide timely and accurate market information	2.88	I
2.	Ensure availability of institutional credit at lower interest rates	2.84	II
3.	Strengthen market linkages and collective marketing facilities	2.81	III
4.	Supply quality agricultural inputs at reasonable prices	2.77	IV
5.	Organize regular training and capacity-building programmes	2.73	V
6.	Improve storage and warehousing facilities	2.69	VI
7.	Increase awareness programmes regarding FPO activities and benefits	2.66	VII
8.	Ensure transparency in organizational functioning	2.62	VIII
9.	Strengthen coordination among members and office bearers	2.58	IX
10.	Provide technical guidance through experts and extension personnel	2.54	X
Suggestions Offered by Officials for Strengthening FPOs			
11.	Strengthen professional management and managerial capacity of FPOs	2.91	I
12.	Ensure regular capacity-building and training of FPO board members and staff	2.86	II
13.	Improve financial management, record keeping and statutory compliance	2.79	III
14.	Develop stronger institutional linkages with government departments, banks and market agencies	2.74	IV
15.	Promote digital platforms for marketing, accounting and member communication	2.68	V

3.4. Suggestions offered by officials

Officials placed the highest emphasis on strengthening the professional management and managerial capacity of FPOs, which received the highest mean score of 2.91 and Rank I. The second-ranked suggestion was to ensure regular capacity-building and training of FPO board members and staff (2.86, Rank II), followed by improving financial management, record keeping, and statutory compliance (2.79,

Rank III). Developing stronger institutional linkages with government departments, banks, and market agencies ranked fourth (2.74), while promoting digital platforms for marketing, accounting, and member communication ranked fifth (2.68). Thus, officials' suggestions mainly focused on strengthening the managerial, financial, institutional, and digital capacities of FPOs, highlighting the importance of professional governance and organizational systems for their effective functioning.

3.5. Constraints faced by officials in the functioning of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)

The findings presented in the table 05. reveal that inadequate financial support for FPO activities was identified by officials as the most prominent constraint, with the highest mean score of 2.78 and ranked first. This was followed by limited working capital for smooth functioning (mean score 2.72, Rank II) and lack of professional and skilled manpower (2.65, Rank III). Weak market linkages for FPO products (2.58) and poor participation and commitment of members

(2.54) were ranked fourth and fifth, respectively. Other constraints included delays in the release of government funds and schemes (2.49), inadequate storage, grading and processing facilities (2.43), lack of awareness among members about FPO objectives and benefits (2.36), difficulty in mobilizing farmers for collective action (2.30), and insufficient training and capacity-building programmes (2.25).

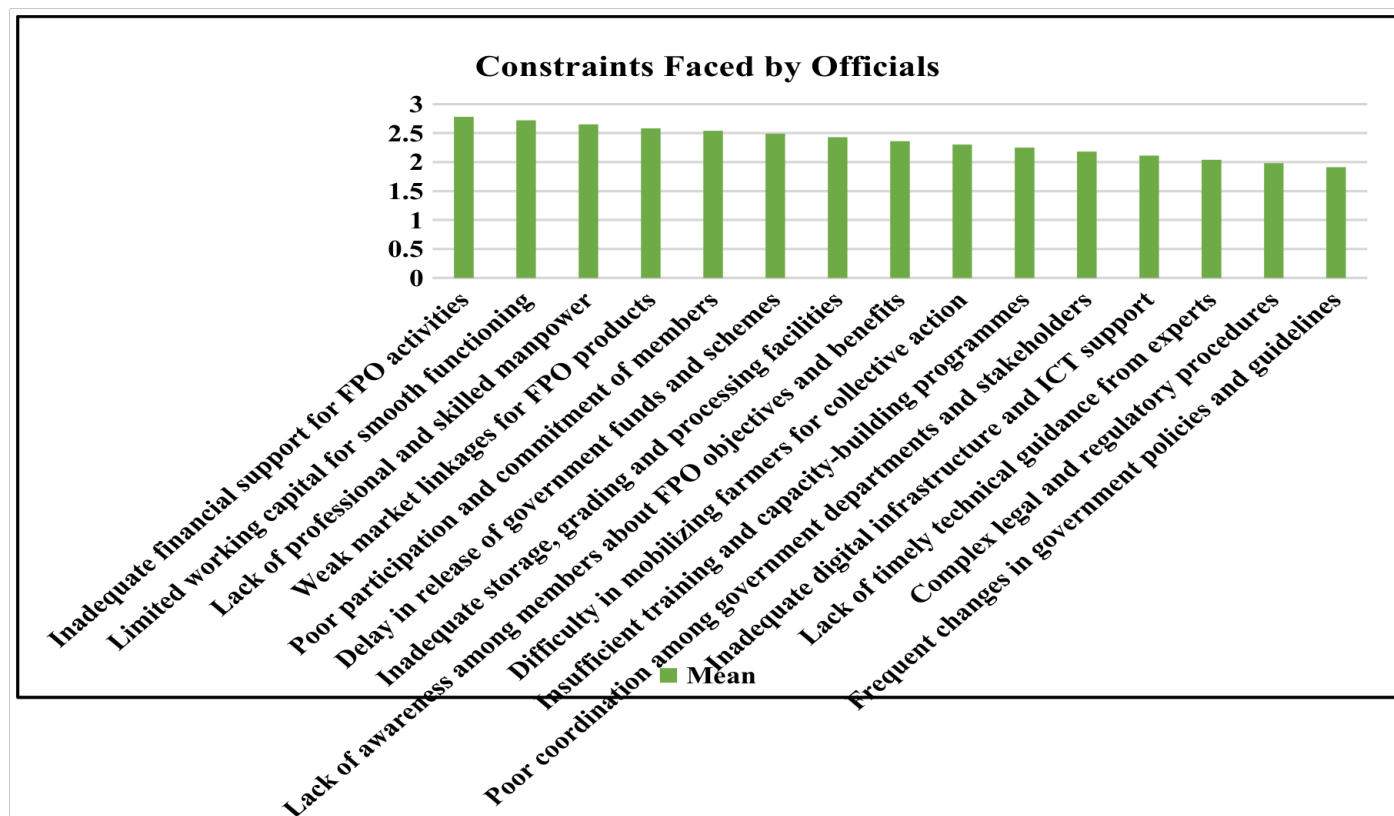


Figure 04. Constraints Faced by Officials in the Functioning of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)

Table 3. Constraints Faced by Officials in the Functioning of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)

Sr. No.	Constraints Faced by Officials	Mean Score	Rank
1.	Inadequate financial support for FPO activities	2.78	I
2.	Limited working capital for smooth functioning	2.72	II
3.	Lack of professional and skilled manpower	2.65	III
4.	Weak market linkages for FPO products	2.58	IV
5.	Poor participation and commitment of members	2.54	V
6.	Delay in release of government funds and schemes	2.49	VI
7.	Inadequate storage, grading and processing facilities	2.43	VII
8.	Lack of awareness among members about FPO objectives and benefits	2.36	VIII
9.	Difficulty in mobilizing farmers for collective action	2.30	IX
10.	Insufficient training and capacity-building programmes	2.25	X
11.	Poor coordination among government departments and stakeholders	2.18	XI
12.	Inadequate digital infrastructure and ICT support	2.11	XII
13.	Lack of timely technical guidance from experts	2.04	XIII
14.	Complex legal and regulatory procedures	1.98	XIV
15.	Frequent changes in government policies and guidelines	1.91	XV

The table 05. further indicates that poor coordination among government departments and stakeholders (2.18), inadequate digital infrastructure and ICT support (2.11), and lack of timely technical guidance from experts (2.04) were comparatively lower-ranked constraints. Complex legal and regulatory procedures (1.98) and frequent changes in government policies and guidelines (1.91) occupied the last two ranks. Overall, the responses of officials indicate that the major constraints affecting the functioning of FPOs were concentrated around financial resources, working capital, human resources, market connectivity, and member participation, while regulatory and policy-related issues received relatively lower mean scores.

4. Conclusion

The study concluded that FPO functioning was mainly constrained by lack of latest market information (2.82), price fluctuations (2.79), inadequate finance (2.76), and weak market-related support. Farmers

prioritized timely market information (2.88), affordable institutional credit (2.84), and stronger market linkages (2.81) for strengthening FPOs. Officials identified inadequate financial support (2.78), limited working capital (2.72), and lack of skilled manpower (2.65) as major constraints, while emphasizing professional management (2.91), capacity building (2.86), and improved financial management (2.79). Overall, strengthening market, financial, managerial, and institutional support is essential for improving the performance and sustainability of FPOs.

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