

Drives and Determinants for Forming Farmer Producer Organization Developed by NGO – A Study in Dang District, Gujarat

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Abstract

The development of the agriculture sector has been India's top priority since the first five-year plan. Although agriculture's contribution to India's GDP has fallen below 15%, its importance remains significant due to the reliance of 75% of Indian families on rural incomes and the vast rural population of 770 million, 70% of whom live in poverty. Ensuring food security and meeting the needs of a growing population hinges on productive, competitive, diversified, and sustainable agriculture. Small and marginal farmers face production risks, and organizational models like Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) are emerging to integrate them into value chains, enhance their livelihoods and reduce transaction costs. This study addresses four objectives related to FPOs: discussing the concept, determining performance indicators, identifying factors contributing to effective FPOs, and recognizing traits of FPO leaders and members. The development process of FPOs is also explored. These objectives provide insights into comprehending FPO dynamics. The study draws on responses from NGO officials and members of Dang FPO in Gujarat, along with a review of relevant FPO studies, contributing to ongoing research on NGOs and FPOs in Gujarat.

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Introduction

The majority of farmers in Indian agriculture are small and marginal, comprising around 85% of cultivators. Among these holdings, approximately 66% are less than one hectare in size.¹ However, despite their significant presence, these farmers face severe challenges that impact their ability to survive. The escalating number of agricultural suicides among this group serves as a clear indication of their struggles.² While indebtedness is often mentioned as an immediate cause of suffering, the underlying issues are much more complex.^{3,4} Most problems stem from their vulnerability to risks in agriculture production, such as having a smaller scale of operation, limited access to crucial information, poor communication linkages with broader markets, and exploitation by intermediaries when procuring inputs and selling their produce. Additionally, there are difficulties in accessing affordable credit.⁵ and in some cases, aggressive loan recovery practices. contribute to their predicament.⁶ Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) is expected to improve the livelihood of farmers by collectivizing them to assess essential agriculture resources like seeds, fertilizers, credit, insurance, knowledge, and extension services through backward integration; and also facilitate collective marketing, processing, and market-oriented agriculture production through forward integration.⁷ It is important to sustain small and marginal farmers for the long-term success of agriculture sector in India.⁸ Such farmers should be organized and provided necessary support by FPOs. In this context, an analysis of FPO being attempted in this article has contemporary relevance and pragmatic usefulness.

Review of Literature

Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and Farmer Producer companies (FPCs) have drawn a lot of attention for their contributions in transforming India's landscape. Their emergence, impact and challenges have been discussed in research studies which emphasize both their revolutionary potential as well as the necessity for supportive policies and institutional structures.^{9, 10}

Concept of FPO

FPOs are collective entities formed by small and marginal farmers, pooling their resources to secure better prices for their products. These organizations purchase products from farmers at wholesale rates and sell to retailers or processors at higher prices.¹¹ FPOs are legally established entities composed of farmer groups, aimed at benefiting their members in their business endeavors.¹² These organizations are promoted by the State as a strategy for rural development.^{13, 14} An extensive review revealed the emergence, impact, significance, and problems encountered by FPOs in India.¹⁵ Through a detailed analysis of existing literature and empirical evidence, the significance of FPOs in transforming India's agricultural landscape as well as the importance of supportive policies and institutional frameworks for effectively resolving the challenges of FPOs have been highlighted.

Functional activities of FPO

FPOs offer farmers services like storage, transportation, and marketing support, aiming to reduce farming costs and risks.¹⁶ By integrating smallholder farmers into agricultural value chains, FPOs increase farmers' participation, boosting market access and providing equitable compensation.¹⁷ The FPOs have a revolutionary impact on contract farming, providing their ability to promote structural change and innovation in the agricultural industry.¹⁸ FPOs are pivotal in mitigating transaction costs for farmers and facilitating market access. Through collective action and collaboration, FPOs enable farmers to pool resources, share knowledge, and engage collectively in various activities ranging from production to marketing. The authors highlight how FPOs empower farmers to secure better product prices, access larger markets and foster innovation and sustainable agricultural practices.¹⁹ By pooling resources, sharing knowledge and engaging in collective decision-making, FPOs empower farmers to overcome common challenges and capitalize on opportunities in the agricultural sector. FPOs play an important role in promoting sustainable agriculture, including the adoption of environmentally

friendly technologies, conservation of natural resources and resilience to climate change, and developing of rural sector.²⁰ FPOs enable farmers to take collective action, promote sustainable agricultural practices, and contribute to rural lives and economic empowerment.^{21, 22} However, to maximize the impact of FPCs on rural life and agriculture sustainability and to ensure their proper operation, supportive policies and institutional structure are essential. FPOs contribute to farmers' socio-economic conditions and they have the potential to promote inclusive and sustainable rural development.²³ Research in Andhra Pradesh, India, reveals that factors such as farmers' education, experience, and income influence the performance of FPO. These FPOs connect farmers to markets and credit, boosting income, reducing debt, and enhancing overall economic well-being.²⁴ FPOs serve as crucial intermediaries in facilitating access to vital information and resources for farmers about policies and credit options from institutions like NABARD, RBI, and Public Sector Banks.²⁵ FPOs collaborate with various organizations, including marketing boards, NGOs, SHGs, Cooperate Societies, *Krishi Vigyan Kendras*, and other agricultural institutions to raise awareness, provide education, and enhance the technical skills of members of FPOs for agricultural and business development.²⁶ The FPO's aim to boost farmers' income and improve their economic status was analyzed.²⁷

Challenges of FPO

There are challenges like farmer migration and youth disinterest in farming due to limited access to credit and market information, which are addressed by FPOs.²⁸ The economic challenges pose the greatest barriers to FPO success.²⁹ Other challenges of FPOs include limited access to business information, comprehension of policy measures, reliance on middlemen for marketing, and the overall economic plight of small and marginal farmers.^{30, 31} The development of FPO is challenging and needs to be addressed from the community mobilization stage.³² Additionally, environmental uncertainties and the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 lockdowns have challenged the agricultural supply chain, impacting FPOs.³³

The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) are non-profit organizations that work for diverse causes, foster economic development, and align macro-level policies with grassroots beneficiaries.³⁴ The prominent role of NGO in society's development has been established.

Research Gap

It is revealed from the review of literature that studies have been conducted on issues and challenges of FPO, the importance of essentiality of technology for farmers for enhancing crop productivity, problems of small and marginal farmers, benefits of FPOs for farmers, advantages of FPOs collaboration with various organizations and the economic benefits of FPOs. However, there is a dearth of studies that the role of NGOs in developing FPOs along with the requisite traits of members for achieving the goals of FPO. The process and activities of NGOs in developing FPO, identifying various dimensions of FPO, determining its purpose, and the expected leadership traits of farmers as FPO members have been addressed in this study.

This paper is an outcome of the scholar's ongoing doctoral research and aims to bridge the research gap, providing new insights in the area of FPO.

Significance of the study

The role and activities of NGOs, along with the traits of farmers in developing FPO, have been addressed in this study. The outcome of this study shall be useful for policymakers in developing new guidelines on FPO and academicians in designing new models and insights enhancing existing knowledge in the field of FPO. Though the study is conducted on an FPO functioning in the '*Dang*' district of Gujarat, still the findings could apply to FPOs working in different regions of the country. The overall contribution of FPOs to the agriculture sector could also be explored in the future by taking insights from this study.

Scope and Objectives

The study focuses on '*Dang FPO*,' an organization in the Dang district of Gujarat, developed by *Sajeevan Foundation*,³⁵ a prominent NGO in the state. The objectives of this study are as follows:

RO 1: To identify the reasons behind farmers forming Farmer Producer Organization (FPO)

RO 2: To study the process followed by NGOs in developing Farmer Producer Organization (FPO)

RO 3: To explore the traits of farmers attributing towards the development of Farmer Producer Organization (FPO)

Research Methodology

This article is a qualitative study for which data were collected from primary and secondary sources. There are three hundred members (farmers) in a Farmer Producer Organization (FPO), out of which 12 are executive members and the remaining are general members. The study is conducted on an FPO developed by an NGO, namely the *Sajeevan Foundation*, which works in Rajkot. This NGO develops FPOs in different regions of Gujarat. The FPO being developed in the Dang district of Gujarat has been studied. Five NGO officials are associated with the development of the FPO being studied. An opinion survey was conducted by administering an open-ended_questionnaire to all the members of Dang district FPO, and 5 NGO Officials associated with the development of FPO. However, a total of 80 respondents comprising 75 members of FPO and 5 NGO Officials, participated in the study. There are six questions designed on various aspects of FPO to get the relevant information for this study as:

Question 1: Why are the farmers interested in forming the Farmer Producer Organization (FPO)?

Question 2: What benefits do the farmers get being members of the Farmer Producer Organization (FPO)?

Question 3: What is the role of NGO about development of Farmer Producer Organization (FPO)?

Question 4: What process does an NGO follow in developing FPO?

Question 5: What qualities (traits) are required from executive members and general members of FPO to achieve its goals?

Question 6: What are the measures suggested to strengthen the development of FPO in achieving its goals?

The questions have been translated from English to Gujarati to get responses from the participants and their responses have been transcribed manually. One of the authors is well versed in English and Gujarati language, whose expertise helped in transcription and subsequent analysis. The collected data have also been collated, tabulated, and analyzed. The response analysis enabled the authors in to develop six perspectives of FPO, which are vital in developing FPOs in the long run, discussed in the result and discussion part of this paper.

Result and Discussion

About the NGO developing FPO

An NGO, namely, *Sajeevan Foundation*, functioning in Rajkot, Gujarat, was included in this study. This NGO develops FPOs in different regions of Gujarat. A brief about this organization is as follows:

Sajeevan Foundation

Sajeevan Foundation, promoted by Nituben Patel, is involved in the promotion of organic farming encourages ecofriendly practices, and works for the welfare of women and children. The Government of Gujarat invited Nituben Patel to spearhead the establishment of 100 FPOs in Gujarat. Currently, it is

developing 25 FPOs (as of November 2023). This paper studies the development of FPOs in Dang district which has three FPOs, Subir village, Ahwa village, and Waghai village. The respondents of FPO, Subir village, participated in the study.

No. of FPOs developed: 25	No. of Female members in FPO: 2250
No. of FPO Members joined: 7,500	Total amount sanctioned for FPOs: 2 Cr. in Rs.
No. of FPOs having bank linkage: 2	No. of Women in Executive member: 11
No. of FPOs having bank linkage in process: 17	No. of Male Members withdrew from FPO: 0
No. of Male members in FPO: 5250	No. of Female Members withdrew: 0
No. of Male Members in Executive body: 11	No. of Total Member in Dang FPO: 300

Table 1: Data of FPO activities developed by Sajeevan Foundation as of 24.07.2023

Source: Self-compiled from secondary data

Opinion of the Respondents: The opinions of the respondents have been discussed under five headings as given below:

Drives for forming FPO

Around three-fourths (74%) of the respondents have opined that they showed interest to in forming FPO for economic benefits. Improvement in farmer's income, better lifestyle of family members, and getting loans for farming and agriculture-related activities have been indicated as the reasons to form FPO. Around one-fifth (19%) of the participants in the study have indicated that the future opportunity to link their agriculture activities with larger markets either at the regional or district level is the reason for forming FPO. Some respondents, comprising around 5% of the total participants, stated their future opportunity to improve their technical know-hows in cultivation is the motivation to form FPO. Few farmers have stated the importance of FPO as a collective body having ability to solve agriculture, business, and crisis-related problems, which is the reason for showing interest in FPO.

Determinants of successful FPO

FPO is an organization of farmers being formed to provide economic and technical benefits which have been stated by majority of the participants in the opinion survey. The organization helping improve the cultural and educational aspects of farmers has also been indicated by around one-tenth of the participants. It is interesting to mention that around five per cent of the respondents stated the importance of FPO in developing four aspects of farmers viz; educational, economic, cultural, and technical aspects of farmers. These four aspects should be considered as determinants ascribing the performance indicators of a successful FPO. The economic aspect includes improving farmer's standard of living, betterment in life status of family members of farmers, establishing market linkage for expanding agribusiness, and more bank linkage for getting agriculture loans. The cultural aspect emphasizes new farming norms, working styles & approaches, and social norms to be followed for enhancing crop productivity. The technical aspect includes new technology useful in agriculture, new cultivation patterns and crop rotation practices. The education aspect emphasizes informing farmers about changes in the agribusiness market, trends in agriculture enterprising activities, banking & financial norms, importance of collaborative farming and agriculture for sustainable development. The determinants of FPO are depicted in Figure-1. More studies on the performance of FPO shall help bring new insights for attaining the goals of FPO.

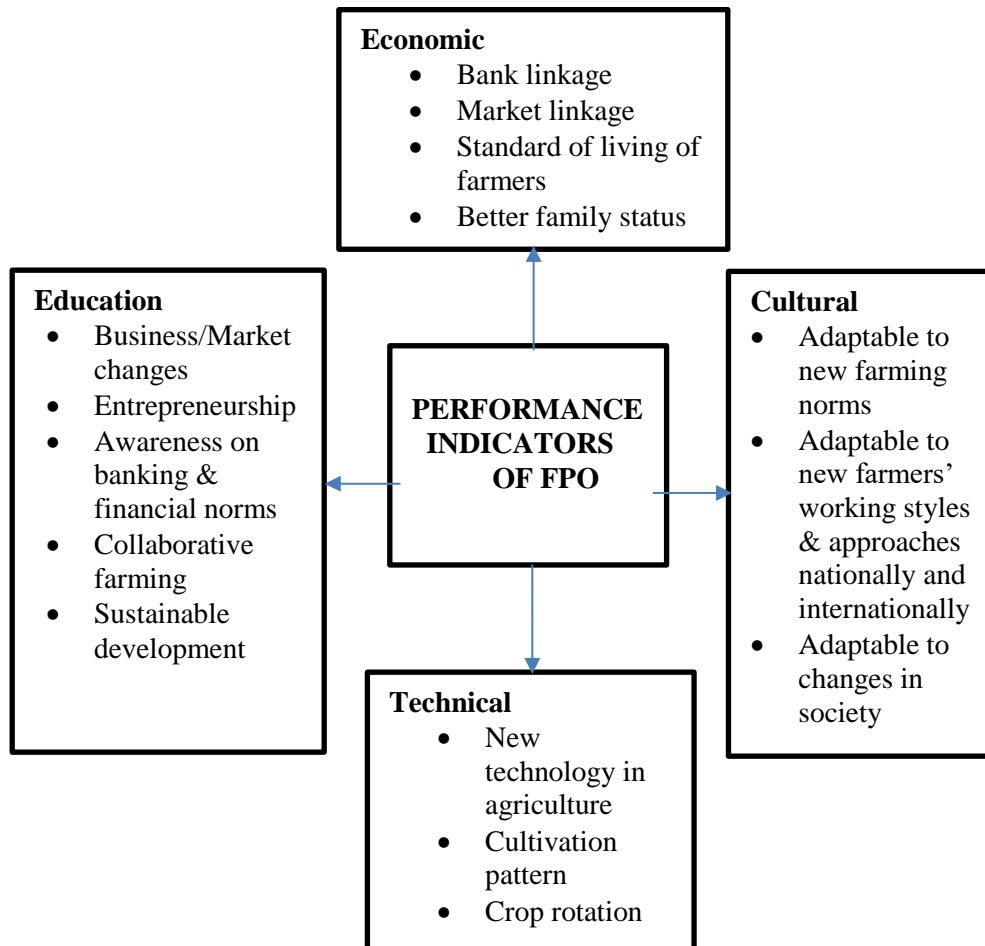


Figure-1: Determinants of Successful FPO

Source: Self-compiled based on the opinion of respondents

Role of NGO in Developing FPO

Almost all the respondents (95%) have highlighted the service motto of NGOs in developing FPO. The NGO Officials associated with the formation of FPOs motivate and educate farmers emphasizing the advantages of FPO. The NGO plays a catalytic role in developing FPO and orienting farmers regarding their responsibility of farmers in strengthening the agriculture sector. The NGO functions as a facilitator in the development of FPO. Some respondents stated

special mentions on the dedication of NGO Officials in solving problems among farmers, leading to the sustenance of FPO activities for the larger interest of farmers.

Process in Developing FPO

All the respondents opined on the efforts of NGO officials in developing FPO. The NGO follows a process for developing FPO. The NGO officials visit villages, approach farmers, and educate them regarding the imperativeness of FPO. An NGO follows the guidelines specified by NABARD in developing FPO (Figure 2). It generally takes 2 ½ to 3 years for an NGO to form an FPO. The NGO Officials go to the villages, identify the cluster, diagnose the farm-related problems, and conduct a feasibility analysis before forming an FPO. It is followed by an assessment of the socio-economic survey of the farmers, which provides insights into the problems and business opportunities for farmers considering the resources available in a cluster of villages. The NGO helps in identifying farmers who are interested in forming FPO, maintaining records and files of FPO, conducting FPO meetings at regular meetings, and assessing the extent of achievement of FOP goals. The NGO emphasizes developing a sustainable FPO ecosystem to be driven by farmers in tune with the changes and challenges in agriculture market.

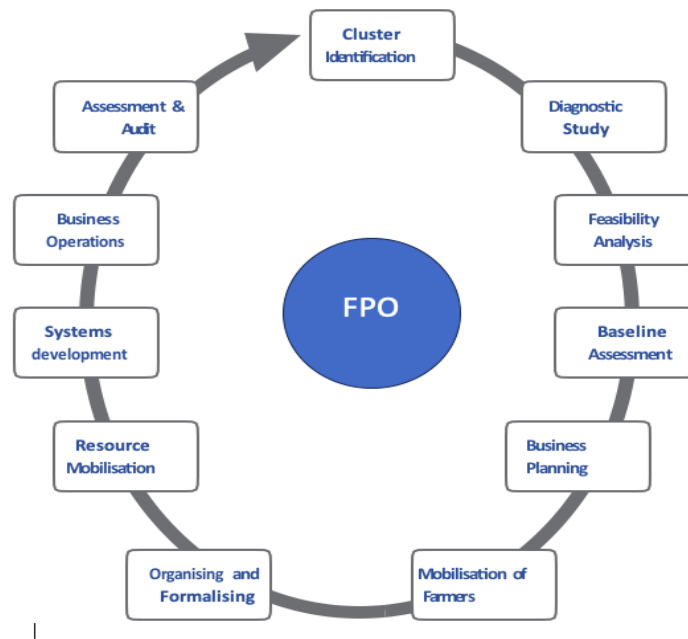


Figure 2: FPO Development Process

Source: NABARD Report on FPO, 2021

FPO Members and their Traits

The NGO Officials opined on the importance of certain traits of farmers in developing FPO. Participation, cooperation, collaboration, involvement in the decision-making process, ability to adapt, interest in sharing business ideas, honesty, commitment, discipline, and learning attitude are the traits required for farmers as general body members of FPO. Some specific traits of executive body members of FPO have been opined by all the NGO Officials and the majority of the farmers as respondents. Traits like positive attitude, agility, constructive approach, understanding of business dynamics, ability to initiate farm-based enterprising activities, ability to solve problems of farmers, adaptability, honesty, and ability to lead people are important for the executive body members of FPO. All the traits are depicted in Figure-3.

Executive Body Members	General Body Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach • Intention • Agility • Honesty • Understanding ability • Responsibility • Ability to lead people • Conflict resolution ability • Initiative • Adaptability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation • Cooperation • Collaboration • Involvement • Commitment • Adaptable • Readiness to share ideas • Learning attitude • Discipline • Honesty

Figure 3: Expected Traits of FPO Executive Body Members and General Body Members

Source: Self-compiled based on the opinion of respondents

Measures for developing successful FPO

The NGO Officials have provided measures for developing successful FPOs in the future. They have stated two sets of factors facilitating factors and inhibiting factors, responsible for strengthening the development of FPOs. All the measures like developing integrity and professionalism among farmers, developmental institutions like NGOs, Community Based Business Organizations (CBBOs), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), agricultural and banking institutions directly and indirectly associated with the development of FPOs. The farmers should create awareness and develop core values like commitment, technology, and adaptability to new agricultural tools and techniques. Efforts shall be taken to develop a vision, mission, and goals for farmers pertaining to their agricultural activities. The developmental institutions should also take measures to develop their vision, mission, and goals for providing their best services including the development of FPOs. The positive and negative factors are depicted in Figure-4 which are self-explanatory.

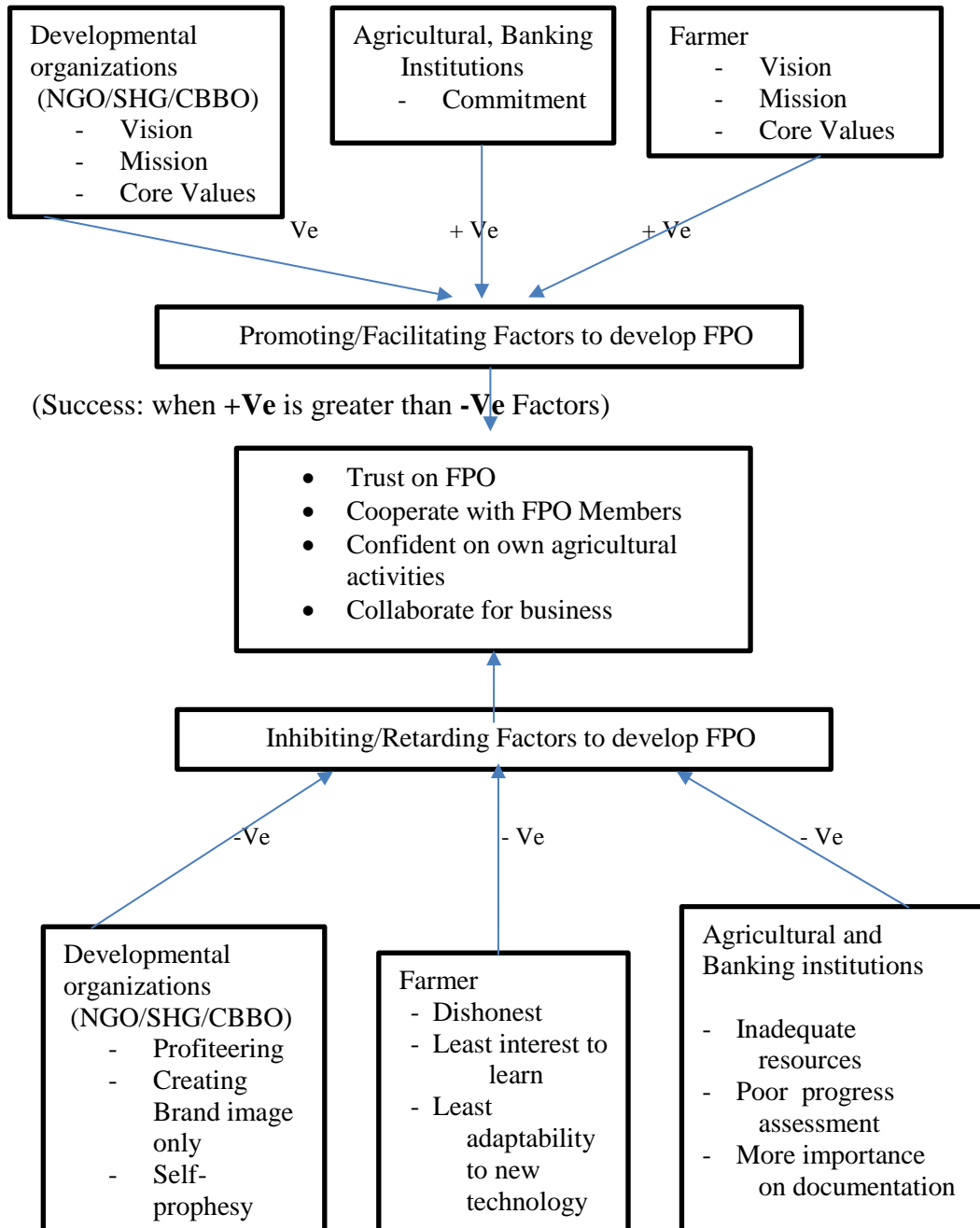


Figure 4: Factors attributing to development of FPO

Source: Self-compiled

Figure 4: Factors attributing to development of FPO**Source:** Self-compiled**Implications of the study**

The study has organizational and academic implications. Its findings aid in developing effective and efficient FPOs and offer valuable insights for developmental institutions like NGOs, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and other Community-Based Business Organizations (CBBOs) to understand the roles, functions, developmental processes, and operational complexities of FPOs. Additionally, the study provides insights that are beneficial to researchers, agricultural professionals and policymakers directly or indirectly involved in the agriculture sector.

Suggestions

The authors of this article have come out with the following suggestions for the development of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and the betterment of farmers:

Collaborative approach: Organizations creating FPOs should prioritize a collaborative approach to align FPOs with domestic and international markets, ultimately benefiting the agriculture sector. Instead of competing to establish numerous FPOs, they should commit to the honest development of farmer organizations and encourage FPOs to seek collaboration for better enterprising pursuits.

Ethics and human values: High ethical standards are essential. Everyone involved in FPO development must uphold strong human values, a positive work culture, and unwavering commitment. Leaders and members of the FPO should demonstrate exceptional dedication, placing collective interests above personal ones.

Goal congruence: The developmental organizations/agencies sow the seeds of FPOs. Field staff from NGOs should work diligently and align their roles and objectives with the overarching goals of their respective NGOs.

Sustainable development: The strategy, approach, and measures should prioritize global sustainable development. While FPOs aim for farmers' economic benefits, long-term sustainability must be their ultimate goal. NGOs play a critical role in guiding FPO members, with their efforts during the first two years significantly impacting the future of farmers and the broader agricultural economy.

Limitations

This qualitative study lacks hypotheses and the application of statistical tools in data analysis. However, the study can be useful in developing successful FPOs in the future. It can be a foundational exploration of FPOs and their various aspects for developing the agriculture sector. This study is not an end in itself. It shall provide insights for pursuing future research.

Conclusion

FPOs are crucial agricultural institutions that should actively support and promote their values for the benefit of farmers and the agriculture sector as a whole. FPOs are pivotal in guiding farmers to adapt to contemporary agricultural changes and challenges. Their performance hinges on various contextual factors, including market dynamics, technological advancements, and policy changes, as well as internal factors such as leadership, member participation, commitment, and the farmers' willingness to embrace change.

NGOs, involved in FPO development, play a vital role in motivating farmers, resource mobilization, skill development, and connecting FPO members with larger markets, ultimately contributing to farmers' overall development. The mere establishment of FPOs by NGOs may not garner significant attention, but enhancing both the quality and quantity of FPOs can substantially improve the socio-economic status of farmers, garnering global recognition for these collective farmer organizations and the NGOs supporting them. The success of an FPO depends on internal cohesion among its members

and their ability to embrace new technologies and innovative business opportunities, making spirited efforts and commitment from NGOs.

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