



THE BUSINESS OF AGROBIODIVERSITY

Tapping Farmer Producer Organizations





THE BUSINESS OF AGROBIODIVERSITY

Tapping Farmer Producer Organizations

Research direction: Vibha Varshney

Research: Shimali Chauhan

Editor: Archana Shankar

Cover and design: Ajit Bajaj

Production: Rakesh Shrivastava and Gundhar Das



The Centre for Science and Environment is grateful to Misereor for their support.



© 2026 Centre for Science and Environment

Material from this publication can be used, but with acknowledgment.

Maps used in this document are not to scale.

Citation: Vibha Varshney and Shimali Chauhan 2026, *The Business of Agrobiodiversity: Tapping Farmer Producer Producer Organizations*, Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi

Published by
Centre for Science and Environment

41, Tughlakabad Institutional Area

New Delhi 110 062

Phone: 91-11-40616000

Fax: 91-11-29955879

E-mail: cse@cseindia.org

Website: www.cseindia.org

CONTENTS

1. Introduction P7

2. Methodology P11

3. Survey P13

ORGANIZATIONS P14

Thirunelly Agri Producer Company Ltd., Wayanad, Kerala **P14**

Pragati, Koraput, Odisha **P18**

Sahaja Samrudha, Mysore, Karnataka **P21**

Himotthan Society, Uttarakhand **P24**

Prem Samridhi Foundation, Bundi, Rajasthan **P29**

Professional Assistance for Development Action,
West Bengal **P34**

HimRRA Network of Farmers, Himachal Pradesh **P37**

Sampark Samaj Sevi Sanstha, Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh **P40**

Switch On Foundation, West Bengal **P43**

Accion Fraterna—Ecology Centre, Andhra Pradesh **P47**

EXPERT OPINIONS P49

C. Shambu Prasad, Professor, Institute of Rural Management, Anand, Gujarat **P49**

Narasimha Reddy Donthi, Independent Researcher and Advocacy Specialist, Telangana **P51**

Satyasovan Das, State Head, Foundation for Ecological Security, Madhya Pradesh **P53**

Rajnikant Prasad, CEO, UPPRO Kisan Producer Company Ltd. **P55**

Pawan Kumar, Principal Lead, Agricultural Development and Extension Project Management
at S.M. Sehgal Foundation **P56**

Sachin Oza, Executive Director, DSC Foundation, Gujarat **P59**

Nitin Puri, Founder, KisaanSay Agtech Pvt Ltd., direct-from-farm brand, Haryana **P61**

4. Discussion P65

5. Recommendations P67

6. References P71

7. Annexure P73



1

INTRODUCTION

India has a unique situation with regard to food. For one, agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries-based activities are the backbone of the Indian economy, and these three sectors together make up 18 per cent of India's GDP.¹ Two, the country has a treasure of landraces and traditional crop varieties, which can be a solution to the environment and health problems that the country faces. Three, small and marginal farmers grow these traditional foods. Currently, they grow primarily for personal consumption and sell the surplus at a small profit.

India needs to find a way to leverage this ground reality.

The ideal way to do this would be to involve small and marginal farmers in the cultivation of traditional crop varieties. Supportive policies would help farmers earn more and make healthy, nutritious food more widely available. More importantly, traditional varieties are better adapted to changing climate. There is groundwork in the country that can help cultivate, promote and consume good food. These include a focus on Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), promotion of organic farming and support to sustainable and resilient food systems.

Over the last two decades, efforts to support small and marginal farmers—including farmer collectives modelled on cooperative societies formed in the early twentieth century for dairy and sugar—have enabled them to market their produce and increase their income.

In the year 2000, to promote such farmer-producer companies, the Government of India set up a committee under the chairmanship of economist and Union Minister Y.K. Alagh. In 2002, the committee recommended creating an organization that would combine the cooperative spirit with modern business principles.² Based on these recommendations, the government amended the Companies Act, 1956, and in 2003 introduced the concept of Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs). This marked an important shift from traditional cooperatives to a more business-oriented farmer organization model. A Farmer Producer Organization (FPO), a kind of FPC, is a legal entity formed by primary producers or farmers and may be registered under the Companies Act, Cooperative Societies Act, Societies Registration Act or Indian Trusts Act as a producer company, cooperative society, trust or non-profit company.

The first Farmer Producer Organization was formed in Kerala in 2004.³ The pace of establishment of such bodies was, however, slow and, in 2020, the Central Sector Scheme for the Formation and Promotion of 10,000 FPOs was launched. This scheme aimed to establish and support 10,000 FPOs till 2027–28, with each FPO receiving structured handholding support for five years.⁴

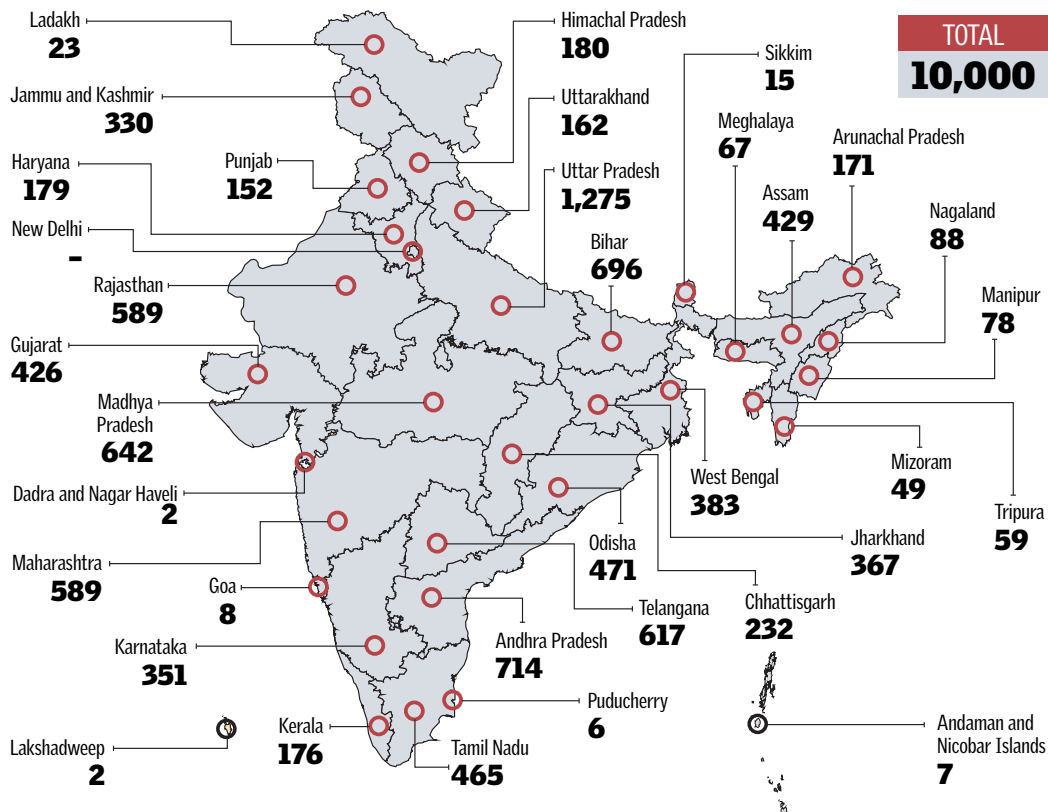
In 2024, a draft National Policy on Farmer Producer Organizations was discussed and under this, the number of FPOs to be established was increased to 50,000. This policy is, however, on hold, with the period of handholding for the existing 10,000 FPOs extended to 2030–31.^{5, 6}

Under the Central scheme, financial and institutional support is provided at different stages of an FPO's growth. A dedicated Credit Guarantee Fund of Rs 1,500 crore has been created, with Rs 1,000 crore managed by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and the remaining by the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) to reduce lending risks and encourage banks to finance FPO activities such as working capital, aggregation, processing and marketing.⁷

Implementation of the scheme is carried out through a network of nine Implementing Agencies, including the Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC), National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED), North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Limited (NERAMAC), Tamil Nadu-Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium (TN-SFAC), Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium Haryana (SFACH), Watershed Development Department (WDD)-Karnataka, and Foundation for Development of Rural Value Chains (FDRVC)-Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD).⁸ The 10,000 FPOs were registered in Khagaria district, Bihar, in February 2025 (see *Map 1: Number of FPOs registered under Central scheme*).

India is also seeing a rise in organic farming supported by schemes such as Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) in all the states (except the Northeastern states) and Union territories and Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER). Under PKVY, assistance of Rs 31,500 per hectare for a period of three years is provided to promote organic farming. Of this, assistance of Rs 15,000 per hectare for a period of three years is provided to farmers adopting organic farming through Direct Benefit Transfer for on-farm/off-farm organic inputs. Under MOVCDNER, assistance of Rs 46,500/hectare for three years is provided for creation of an FPO, support to farmers for organic inputs etc. Of this, assistance at the rate of Rs 32,500/hectare for three years is provided to farmers for off-farm/on-farm organic inputs under the scheme, including Rs 15,000 as Direct Benefit Transfer to the farmers.⁹

Table 1 : Number of FPOs registered under Central scheme



Source : https://sansad.in/getFile/loksabhaquestions/annex/185/AS137_3GNOfI.pdf?source=pqals

The increase in the number of FPOs and emphasis on organic farming provides an opportunity to ensure that indigenous varieties of food are cultivated and made available to consumers. Schemes such as the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture, Millet Missions and state livelihood missions also could help. In the absence of a specific policy just for indigenous varieties, however, these foods are simply piggybacking on wider programmes on biodiversity conservation, millets and nutrition programmes, organic and natural farming, and climate-resilient agriculture.

We were not able to find any consolidated data on the number of FPOs in the country and whether the FPOs are working with indigenous seed varieties. To gauge what kind of interventions and policy support are needed to help FPOs formed by small and marginal farmers working on indigenous food varieties, we spoke to a few FPOs and organizations working with farmers to understand the issues they face and identify gaps that a new policy can plug.

2

METHODOLOGY



This study followed a qualitative, case study-based approach to understand how Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) work with indigenous varieties of crops and whether they have any specific focus on the protection of landraces and indigenous crop varieties. The study also aims to identify operational challenges and policy gaps, and to highlight areas where support for FPOs can be strengthened.

Case studies were selected to reflect regional and agro-climatic diversity, differences in crops and commodities, and varying levels of organizational maturity. FPOs from different states were included to understand how state-specific policies, institutional support systems and local challenges shape the functioning of FPOs. Selection was purposive and based on clear criteria, including the year of formation, type of commodity handled, size of membership and level of business activity. Priority was given to FPOs that had been operational for at least two to three years and were actively involved in production, aggregation, processing or marketing, especially those adopting sustainable or biodiversity-friendly practices. Benefits to the farmers were also documented. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires distributed to NGOs supporting FPOs across regions (see *Annexure*).

We also talked to seven experts to get a more holistic picture and recommendations on possible policy interventions

3

SURVEY



ORGANIZATION

THIRUNELLY AGRI PRODUCER COMPANY LTD (TAPCo)

WAYANAD, KERALA

TAPCo, formed in 2017, works with traditional seed purification, multiplication and distribution, as well as organic crop management practices such as soil analysis, biological pest and disease management and weather-based advisories. The overall approach emphasizes ecological sustainability, climate resilience and organic cultivation systems. The FPO works on traditional and farmer-saved seed varieties.

TAPCo offers variety-based pricing for traditional crops, fixes prices before sowing based on cost of cultivation, and pays prices above MSP and prevailing market rates, indicating a distinct and structured market approach for traditional varieties. They have played an important role in popularizing some rice varieties. For example, red rice variety Wayanadan Thondi has become popular among farmers and consumers over the last few years and even large non-organic rice brands in Kerala use the name of the variety to market their produce. This is significant because rice is usually sold generically, but here the specific variety name has brand recognition.

TAPCo procures the paddy at Rs 34 per kg. For comparison, the Central government buys at MSP of Rs 23.50; Kerala state procures at Rs 30. As the purchase is at the farm gate, the farmer saves on transport cost. Overall, farmers receive Rs 5–6 more than government procurement and Rs 8–9 more than the open market. If a farmer receives Rs 34/kg, they earn about Rs 68,000 per acre from grain. The hay is sold too and overall earning is around Rs 75,000 per acre. Cultivation costs average around Rs 40,000 per acre, providing a net income of roughly Rs 35,000 per acre.

Another variety is Mullen Kayama, an aromatic rice. It has a distinctive spike on the paddy, which helps deter wildlife. It is sturdy and one of the highest-yielding among aromatic varieties. Previously, it had only cultural value—it was offered to local deities and used at weddings. TAPCo introduced it to the market. Now farmers receive Rs 60 per kg for the paddy. It has revived significantly and gained popularity for its flavour. Rice flour, used for breakfast foods, is also made from it. Farmers earn approximately Rs 65,000–70,000 from grain per acre, plus hay, totalling around Rs 80,000.

The third rice variety is a medicinal rice called Valia Chennellu (tall red paddy). It had nearly disappeared due to lack of market demand and because it is tall and prone to lodging, making machine harvesting difficult. Traditionally, it was consumed during pregnancy and postpartum periods. Since it didn't sell well as rice, poha (flattened rice) was produced from it. That product became highly popular, selling around 4–5 tonnes. This encouraged farmers to cultivate it again. This variety is procured at Rs 47 per kg.

TAPCo is working with Gandhakasala and Jeerakasala, two popular small-grain aromatic varieties of Wayanad. However, Bengal varieties—such as Gobindobhog—have flooded the market at lower prices and are often sold under similar names, creating competition and confusion.

Overall, the model ensures that farmers earn roughly similar returns per acre—around Rs 70,000–80,000 gross—regardless of which variety they grow. This income stability encourages diversification and conservation.

INTERVIEW



RAJESH KRISHNAN, CEO

Q. 1. Which traditional/indigenous crops or seed varieties are being promoted, and why were these chosen?

Ans. We are promoting traditional and indigenous crop varieties of paddy, along with tubers, vegetables, coffee and pepper. These are major crops of Wayanad. With paddy being the focus, we are promoting traditional table-rice varieties such as Wayanadan Thondi and Paal Thondi, aromatic varieties like Gandhakashala, Jeerakasala and

Mullankaima as well as medicinal varieties like Valia Chennellu and Njavara. These crops are promoted using traditional agricultural knowledge, including lunar-cycle-based farming calendars. The focus is on climate resilience, suitability to local agro-climatic zones, farmer-owned seeds, and conservation of traditional varieties that are well adapted to changing climate conditions.

Q. 2. What type of markets do you sell your produce to? Is there a distinct market for indigenous varieties? Do value-added products prepared using traditional varieties have a market?

Ans. TAPCo operates across multiple market channels, including wholesale, retail and overseas markets as well as direct-to-consumer sales. Marketing also happens through melas, exhibitions, home deliveries and initiatives such as 'Wayanad Organic on Wheels' for local markets.

Q. 3. Are there any existing policies or schemes that support FPOs working with traditional or indigenous crops?

Ans. There is no policy specifically targeting FPOs working on promoting indigenous varieties. There are some schemes that generally support them. For example, FPOs are mentioned in schemes promoting programmes on value addition. FPOs are also mentioned in the Kerala Climate Resilient Agri-Value Chain Modernization Project (KERA), launched recently in 2024–25 with support from the World Bank. The initiative plans to transform Kerala's agriculture and targets 400,000 smallholder farmers. It aims to enhance climate resilience via sustainable farming, modernize value chains, boost market access and promote climate-smart agriculture.

Q. 4. What are the challenges FPOs face in promoting indigenous or traditional varieties? What specific policy changes or new support mechanisms would most help?

Ans. The problem with the schemes that I've seen so far is that they are based on a certain idea and imagination of FPOs, which is not the reality on ground. For instance, while we have been recognized as the best FPO by the state government, we don't qualify as an agency that can be part of KERA [Kerala Climate Resilient Agri-Value Chain Modernization Project]. They have set a minimum number of farmers in the FPO to be more than 200 and this excludes small FPOs that are actually working with people who are protecting indigenous varieties. The idea they're pushing is something called 'productive alliance', which is about creating supply chains for big players in the market. They are trying to form tripartite contracts between, let's say, a big supermarket chain or food brand and an FPO that can provide raw material and government will support both the FPO and the brand financially. This scheme doesn't create a level playing field for FPOs and at best the FPO is shackled as a junior partner in an unequal partnership.

This obsession around numbers needs to go. Running a company with even 100 farmers is a huge challenge. As a farmer I know that we don't have the kind of time and abilities required to manage that kind of institution and a business of that scale. For this, you need to hire professionals, but to hire even a youngster from a village you need to give a decent salary. Where is the money for that?

Then there is an issue with the availability of working capital. Absence of working capital has killed most FPOs in this country. Of all the 10,000-plus FPOs that these schemes would have registered, you would hardly have 1 per cent that is functioning viably. For example, in Wayanad, of the 32 FPOs that were formed we are probably only one of the few functioning in a viable manner and that is because we don't limit ourselves to government schemes alone. Our working capital came from people who believed in the idea and from a very novel approach to managing finances.

FPOs are supposed to be buying products produced from the farmer and then traded in the market. This requires a good amount of liquidity, which is not available. None of the banks—at least in Kerala—look at FPOs as non-performing assets and are quite cautious when engaging with farmer collectives. They don't even consider extending loans, even though the government has announced a credit guarantee of up to Rs 2 crore. There is also an RBI circular classifying this as priority sector lending.

But this is not the ground reality. Interestingly, our self-help groups (SHGs) are considered more bankable than we are. In our case, we mobilized funds from like-minded individuals who placed their fixed deposits (FDs) in our bank. The bank then gave us an overdraft (OD) against those FDs. That's how we finance our working capital, and we renew it every year.

Essentially we are left to manage on our own, and this is true for most FPOs. Working capital is almost entirely absent. If you look at successful FPOs—including some of the large ones—you'll notice that there is usually a separate business entity attached to them. They are not the kind of FPOs the government had envisioned, where small and marginal farmers come together independently to form and run a business. If you examine the origins of many successful FPOs, they typically evolved from civil society organizations that were already working with SHGs and gradually federated them. The idea that farmers will organically come together on their own to form FPOs—that's simply not happening.

Currently, government plays a hands-off approach. FPOs are told to form organizations, and then the government steps back. The government shouldn't just be a regulator or distant mentor—it should function like a coach and a social investor. A coach understands each organization's unique strengths and provides ongoing guidance. Having that kind of support builds confidence and sustainability. As a social investor the government should have a longer term engagement with FPCs with timely capital infusion. We should not absolve the government of responsibility. It is our government—elected by us.

ORGANIZATION

PRAGATI, KORAPUT, ODISHA

Formed in 1992, Pragati supports six FPOs: Jaivik Sri, Nageswari, Chitridora, Dangardei, Maa Nishanimunda and Deomali. Together, these had 8,669 members and a total turnover of more than Rs 38 million in 2024–25.

The FPOs work on the production, conservation and marketing of indigenous seeds of paddy, millets, pulses, ginger, coffee, tamarind, turmeric, etc. Pragati is also the Regional Council for natural farming. Jaivik Sri Farmer Producer Company Limited (JSFPCL) was established in 2016 and has led to a long-term change in farmers' lifestyles in the Koraput district. Its shareholders are spread across more than 70 villages. Before the intervention of FPOs, farmers sold their agricultural outputs in local haats for small amounts of money. Sometimes they faced heavy losses due to the unavailability of marketing for perishable goods. Farmers were unaware of agricultural machinery and their operation, and were unfamiliar with new agricultural technologies and improved agricultural practices. After the formation of the FPO, the scenario changed. The board of directors has taken active leadership in mobilizing members through awareness and cluster-level meetings. The Company now has 1,024 shareholders from seven blocks of the Koraput district and a share capital of Rs 15,01,600. It had an annual turnover of Rs 5,19,24,877 in 2024–25.

Pragati has a diverse range of business activities, including selling inputs such as seeds, organic manure and small farm equipment, and the aggregation and sale of produce such as paddy, millets, pulses, coffee, and spices. It owns an agro-service centre with equipment and farm machinery, such as tractors, power tillers, sprayers, chain-fencing machines and millet threshers. It also has a community management seed centre from which nearly 800–900 farmers have purchased seeds and other farm machinery. The FPO has also been monitoring and managing business plans with other community-managed seed centres, which were supported under the Shree Anna Abhiyan, government of Odisha, and facilitated by Pragati.

Jaivik Sri is implementing the Special Programme for Promotion of Millets in tribal areas of Odisha, supported by the government of Odisha under the Shree Anna Abhiyan in Nandapur block of Koraput district since June 2017. This programme promotes millet intensification and the marketing of millets at a minimum support price by organizing mandis through the Tribal Development Co-operative

Corporation. Specifically, the FPO facilitated the sale of millets, ginger and coffee, totalling 3,300, 300 and 10 tonnes in raw form respectively, with additional quantities processed through value addition. It has also intervened in marketing black pepper, arrowroot, rajma and turmeric.

The company has all legal compliances such as Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), and has also registered itself under the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) for export of products such as millets, ginger, rice, coffee etc. It has mobilized an equity grant from the Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) and a working capital loan from NABKISAN, a subsidiary of NABARD and Samunnati, a private agri-value chain enabler, for its business operations. The company, with the support of Pragati, Koraput, has promoted the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) in Koraput district and Kosagumuda Block of Nowrangpur district. Farmers are provided with input support, such as seeds (including indigenous and stress-tolerant varieties, black rice and red rice), organic manure kits and weeders. The company has helped farmers with the aggregation and collective marketing of aromatic and medicinal rice varieties through value addition.

Due to the value added by aromatic and medicinal varieties of rice, farmers earned an additional 40 per cent above the government's minimum support price. The company has also mobilized support from the Horticulture Department and established a farm pond to rear the spawn as fingerlings. JSFPCL has received the Krushi Alert Awards, the Brand of Odisha and Pride of India Awards, and the Best FPO Award on the occasion of the 62 Foundation Day of OUAT on August 24, 2023. Most importantly, Jaivik Sri has the GI tag of Koraput Kalajeera Rice.

INTERVIEW



MURALIDHAR ADHIKARI, CEO, JAIVIK SRI FPC LTD.

Q. 1. Which traditional/indigenous crops or seed varieties are being promoted, and why were these chosen?

The FPOs are conserving paddy varieties such as Kalajeera, Basubhoga, Jhilli, Gobindabhoga, Haldichudi, Basantichudi, Samudra Bali and Lalbalsa. Jaivik Sri FPC has got the GI tag of Kalajeera rice. In the case of millets, seven varieties

of finger millet and other minor millets, including foxtail millet, little millet and barnyard millet are being conserved. Among pulses, green gram, black gram and broad beans are being conserved. The varieties chosen for conservation are part of their food systems, are climate-resilient and have good market demand. The communities, especially small and marginal farmers, practise conserving indigenous varieties.

Q. 2. What type of markets do FPOs mainly sell their produce to? Is there a distinct market for indigenous varieties? Do value-added products prepared using traditional varieties have a market?

Ans. The FPOs sell their produce in different markets: local, direct-to-consumers, and institutional buyers. Indigenous rice and pulses are also supplied to the Jagannath Temple, Puri. Indigenous rice, millets and pulses are value-added and marketed. Indigenous and organic produce has also been in demand in international markets. Four FPOs have export licenses provided by APEDA.

Q. 3. Do any existing policies or schemes support FPOs working with traditional or indigenous crops? How have they helped?

Ans. In Odisha, the Scheme of Indigenous and Aromatic Rice is implemented through FPOs with the support of the government of Odisha, Department of Agriculture and Farmers Empowerment. It has helped in promotion, value addition and marketing. Recently, the state also launched the Amruta Anna Yojana under which indigenous varieties are promoted organically for supply to the Puri Jagannath Temple.

Q.4. Are there any challenges FPOs face in promoting indigenous or traditional varieties? What specific policy changes or new support mechanisms would help most?

Ans. Lack of working capital for procurement and marketing is a big challenge. Policy support for indigenous and organic varieties through promotional measures such as incentives for farmers, subsidies for organic inputs instead of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and support for branding and marketing will help.

ORGANIZATION

SAHAJA SAMRUDHA (A COLLECTIVE OF ORGANIC FARMERS)

MYSORE, KARNATAKA

Sahaja Samrudha is a people's movement that began in 2001 to preserve India's traditional farming practices and conserve the rich biodiversity of indigenous crop varieties. The organization supports two FPOs—Sahaja Samrudha Organic Producer Company Limited (SOPCL) established in 2010 and Desi Seed Producers Company Limited (brand name Sahaja Seeds), established in 2014—with 350 shareholders. These shareholders are spread over various districts in Karnataka such as Mysuru, Dharwada, Shivamogga, Yadgiri, Koppal, Mandya, Chamarajanagar and Haveri; Assam; Maharashtra; Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Desi Seed Producers Company Limited works exclusively with indigenous (desi) seed varieties of rice, millets and vegetables. Seed production is done in a purely organic way. Sahaja Organics works with organic farmers and promotes natural/organic farming practices and grows these indigenous varieties.

Among the farmers involved with the FPO is 32-year-old farmer Lokesh of Arepally village of Chamarajanagara taluka, Chamarajanagar district. He is a classic example of a complete transformation from a practitioner of chemical farming to organic farming to a desi seeds producer. When Savayava Bhagya Yojana was launched in Karnataka state in 2013–14 to promote organic farming, Lokesh participated from his village along with other villagers. Sahaja Samrudha was facilitating this transformation journey for all participating farmers and helping them learn practices of organic farming. The programme ran for three years, but only six farmers remained till the end to take this further in their farms. Lokesh was one of them, who, though hesitatingly, decided to give it a try. Not taking much risk on his total 4 acres of land, he started piloting with 10 gunthas and grew the kukmum kesari variety of tomatoes. But luck didn't favour him that year and there was no produce. In 2018, he again showed courage and sowed same tomato variety and organically produced 20 kg of seeds from 10 gunthas. Elated with this bounty, he sold seeds to Desi Seeds Producers Company at a very good rate. The FPO allows farmers to decide their own seed rates, so they grow happily.

In 2019, Lokesh decided to use his entire 4 acres of land for growing seeds. He produced seeds of multicolour maize, green okra, Madanapalli tomatoes, kumkum kesari tomatoes, bottle gourds, bitter gourds and ridge gourds. As he

has transformed and grown, a few more farmers from the village have approached Sahaja to join this movement to save and multiply indigenous varieties of Indian desi seeds. Now, Lokesh has become a completely organic farmer and, looking at his commitment towards the use of the desi seeds movement, Sahaja has supported his setting up a seed drier machine and solar fencing for his farms.

INTERVIEW



ANANDATEERTHA PYATI, FOUNDING MEMBER, SAHAJA SAMRUDHA

Q. 1. Which traditional/indigenous crops or seed varieties are being promoted, and why were these chosen?

Ans. Desi Seed Producer Company Limited is working on indigenous seed varieties of rice, millets, vegetables and flowers. They have been chosen as they are of indigenous origin; are locally adapted and conserved; some varieties show climate adaptability; and they have high market

demand, especially okra, chilli and tomato seeds. We support farmers who grow climate-sensitive varieties and promote seed sovereignty and reduce dependence on hybrids. The farmers and seed savers have also conserved 800 varieties of rice, 160 varieties of millets, 23 Indian cotton varieties, 32 wheat, 56 eggplant, 52 pulses, 182 vegetables and many traditional fruit varieties.

Q. 2. What type of markets do FPOs mainly sell their produce to? Is there a distinct market for indigenous varieties? Do value-added products prepared using traditional varieties have a market?

Ans. There is a distinct and growing market for organic products, indigenous seeds and value-added products prepared with traditional varieties, especially through organic retail networks. Sahaja Seeds sells indigenous vegetable seeds in bulk and has identified around 60 seed producers who earn better incomes than regular farmers. Seed production provides assured income even on small landholdings. There is strong demand for desi varieties of okra, chilli, tomato and other indigenous crops.

Sahaja Organics mainly operates in B2B markets, supplying bulk produce to more than 400 organic retail shops. Products are sold under the Sahaja Organics brand

as well as through retail partners' private labels. The organization offers 280–400 products, including grains, pulses, oilseeds and various value-added items. Sahaja Organics has been profitable for over 10 years, with an annual turnover of around Rs 28–32 crore, despite having only Rs 60 lakh as share capital. This has been made possible due to strong farmer networks, trust-based relationships, and assured market linkages.

Q. 3. Are there any existing policies or schemes that support FPOs working with traditional or indigenous crops? How have they helped?

Ans. There is support under the Central government's 10,000 FPO scheme, but there are several concerns with it. Many FPOs are set up by NGOs mainly to access initial government support which includes CEO salary (~Rs 25,000/month for three years) and accountant support (~Rs 15,000/month). However, after three years, most FPOs collapse. Banks are not sensitised about FPO structures, and there is difficulty in accessing loans for genuine farmer companies. There are no tax or GST exemptions for FPOs, and capital investment support is inadequate. As a result, very few FPOs remain financially healthy in the long term. Sahaja Samruddha Organic Producer Company Limited prefers autonomy and has not taken government support.

Q. 4. What are the challenges FPOs face in promoting indigenous or traditional varieties? What specific policy changes or new support mechanisms would most help?

Ans. The biggest challenges include a lack of capital investment support. Banks lack awareness about the FPO model and it is difficult for them to access loans. Despite the important role that FPOs play, they do not get any GST or income tax exemptions. Indigenous seeds face competition from conventional chemical-based traders. Also, indigenous varieties are sensitive to climate change.

To tackle these issues, FPOs should be provided with investment grants and soft loans to support working capital needs. For this, there is a need for sensitization and training programmes for bank officials on the FPO model. There should be long-term handholding and institutional support beyond three years. Other than this, there should be incentives for profit-sharing models that directly benefit farmers. Universities and agricultural institutions should be encouraged to work on indigenous crop varieties. Policies for village-level indigenous seed production and block-level distribution of desi seeds to strengthen conservation efforts should be designed. Finally, GST and income tax and APMC cess exemptions should be provided for genuine Farmer Producer Companies.

ORGANIZATION**HIMMOTTHAN SOCIETY (AN ASSOCIATE ORGANIZATION OF TATA TRUSTS)
UTTARAKHAND**

The Himalayan region is characterized by fragile ecosystems, small and fragmented landholdings, limited market access, and a predominance of subsistence agriculture. Farming communities in these hilly areas rely heavily on traditional knowledge systems and indigenous crop varieties, yet they face persistent challenges, including low productivity, poor market linkages, high transaction costs, and outmigration. Strengthening community institutions and creating sustainable livelihood opportunities has therefore become essential for improving rural resilience and economic stability. Therefore, Himmotthan Society, established in 2007, initiated the approach of building community institutions and currently supports 33 FPOs, collectively representing 13,549 shareholder members across multiple blocks in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh.

These FPOs have been established as community-owned, professionally managed institutions to strengthen small and marginal farmers' access to markets, inputs, services and value-addition opportunities. The FPOs work with indigenous and traditional crop and seed varieties, which are well adapted to the Himalayan agro-ecological conditions. These crops are recognized for their unique regional identity, traditional cultivation practices, and superior nutritional and ecological value. They are climate-resilient, nutritionally rich, and require less external inputs, making them suitable for sustainable hill agriculture.

Munsyari, a small region in the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand, is known as the home of the Munsyari Rajma (kidney bean). So popular is this variety of bean that it has a Geographical Indication (GI) tag—a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin—much like Darjeeling Tea or Guntur Chillies. And these beans are transforming the lives of thousands of cultivators with small plots of land.

Himmotthan works with marginalized communities in Uttarakhand, and under the project Mission Pulses they have set up a farm-to-market chain that reaches nearly 30,000 households in 500 villages. These are mostly small farmers earning a meagre livelihood, with an average farm size of less than an acre. The FPO, Trishulii Producer Company Ltd, has an annual turnover in excess of Rs 20 million and has evolved into a recognized brand, with its products being sold to local retailers,

institutional buyers and e-commerce sites (in August 2024, Trishulii launched its Munsyari Rajma on Amazon).

Among the beneficiaries is Dhani Devi, a 55-year-old farmer from Nirtoli village in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district, who has doubled her income over the last five years. She grows rajma, amaranthus, potatoes and other vegetables on 2 acres of land. She was trained in better production practices such as bio-composting to improve soil fertility, sourcing superior onion seeds, and using vertical nets for rajma cultivation to optimize space and yield. Since joining the programme in 2018, her annual earnings have doubled from Rs 75,000–1,50,000.

'We have been able to educate our children in better schools,' she says. 'Two of our children have graduated and our daughter is married. Also, we have opened a small store in our village.'

INTERVIEW



RAJENDRA S. KOSHYARI, COORDINATOR- AGRICULTURE AND AGRI ALLIED (CENTRAL AND WESTERN HIMALAYAS)

Q. 1. Which traditional/indigenous crops or seed varieties are being promoted, and why were these chosen?

Ans. The FPOs supported by Himmotthan Society promote a diverse basket of traditional and indigenous crops and seed varieties that are locally conserved, climate-resilient and culturally significant to the Himalayan region of Uttarakhand. These include foxtail millet (*Setaria italica*), proso millet (*Panicum miliaceum*), finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*), barnyard millet (*Echinochloa frumentacea*), grain amaranth (*Amaranthus spp.*), Munsyari Rajma (local common bean landrace), black soybean (*Glycine max*), horse gram (*Macrotyloma uniflorum*), Riyans bean (traditional local bean landrace), and red rice (traditional pigmented rice landrace). Apart from foxtail and proso millet, all other traditional crops are GI-tagged products of Uttarakhand, recognized for their unique agro-climatic adaptation, traditional cultivation practices and regional identity. From a scientific perspective, these indigenous varieties exhibit higher genetic diversity, which enhances their resilience to biotic and abiotic stresses while reducing dependence on external inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides. They also contribute to improved soil

health through better nutrient cycling and are aligned with low-input sustainable agricultural systems. From a livelihood and market perspective, the GI status of these crops provides significant opportunities for value addition, branding and access to premium and niche markets. The increasing consumer demand for traditional, nutritious and sustainably produced foods further enhances their economic viability. Overall, the promotion of these indigenous crops strengthens agro-biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, sustainable food systems and farmer livelihoods in the Himalayan region.

Q. 2. What type of markets does FPOs mainly sell their produce to? Is there a distinct market for indigenous varieties? Do value-added products prepared using traditional varieties have a market?

Ans. FPOs primarily market their produce through a combination of local mandis, local buyers, bulk aggregators and emerging direct-to-consumer channels. In recent years, there has been a discernible growth in niche and differentiated markets for indigenous crop varieties, driven by increasing consumer awareness regarding nutrition, food safety and sustainability. These markets often include urban health-conscious consumers, organic food segments and speciality outlets that value traceability and traditional production systems. The FPOs are directly linked to Trishulii Producer Company Limited (TPCL), which functions as the central aggregation, branding and marketing platform for farmer produce across India. Currently, 24 FPOs of the Uttarakhand mountain region are shareholders of TPCL. Through this linkage, FPOs access pan-India markets via both Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Consumer (B2C) channels. Earlier, farmers were largely dependent on local traders and middlemen to sell their produce, which often resulted in distress sales, limited market access, low price realization and weak bargaining power. Following the establishment of Trishulii Producer Company Limited, this dependency has significantly reduced.

Trishulii provides a structured and transparent market linkage, enabling farmers and FPOs to participate directly in organized value chains. In the B2B segment, produce is supplied to institutional buyers, wholesalers, processors and organized retail networks, while the B2C segment involves direct sales to consumers through branded products, exhibitions, retail outlets and digital platforms managed by Trishulii.

This integrated model ensures quality assurance, traceability, branding and better price realization for farmers. There is a distinct and expanding market for indigenous and traditional crop varieties, particularly GI-tagged products from Uttarakhand. Value-added products prepared from traditional crops, especially

finger millet flour and dehusked barnyard millet, exhibit high and sustained market demand, which is actively coordinated and scaled by Trishulii. A few FPOs are also engaged in processing and diversifying millets into bakery products like cookies, biscuits, muffins and rusk.

Overall, the transition from middleman-driven sales to a producer-owned company model has strengthened market access, enhanced farmer incomes and improved the economic viability of indigenous crops and their value-added products at the national level.

Q. 3. Are there any existing policies or schemes that support FPOs working with traditional or indigenous crops? How have they helped?

Ans. There are quite a few schemes that help our work. These include the following:

- Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, a sub-scheme of the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture, supports FPOs working with traditional and indigenous crops by enabling cluster-based organic production, promoting indigenous farming practices, facilitating PGS-Organic certification and creating foundation for collective marketing and value-chain integration.
- The National Food Security Mission supports FPOs working with traditional and indigenous crops such as millets, pulses and oilseeds by promoting production, productivity and value-chain development of these crops through a cluster-based approach.
- The Central Sector Scheme for Formation and Promotion of 10,000 FPOs complements the National Food Security Mission (NFSM) by providing institutional strengthening, equity grants, credit guarantee and capacity building, allowing FPOs engaged in indigenous crops to access finance, infrastructure and markets.
- Millets Promotion Programmes at the national and various state levels support strengthening the entire millet value chain from production to consumption.
- The Uttarakhand government has introduced a State Millets Policy (Millets Promotion & Procurement Policy) that supports procurement and promotion of traditional millet crops such as mandua (finger millet), jhangora (barnyard millet), ramdana (amaranth), kauni and china (foxtail millet) and strengthens value chains that can include FPOs as key partners. Under this policy, the government provides subsidies on inputs, per-hectare incentives for millet cultivation and incentives to groups (such as FPOs or farmer groups). In addition, the government's millet procurement plan, approved by the Centre, allows direct purchase of millets (like finger millet) from farmers through cooperative and similar centers, which enables FPOs and producer groups to participate in procurement and benefit from MSP-linked sales and improved

market access. The state government has declared MSP for finger millet (Rs 49 per kg), which is being procured through FPOs across the state and direct payment transfers being done to farmers' accounts.

- The National Mission on Natural Farming is a cluster-based scheme of farmers to adopt traditional natural farming methods (e.g., biomass recycling, mulching, cow dung–urine preparations) with financial assistance and handholding support, enabling them to organize into groups or FPOs that collectively manage production and certification of indigenous crops.

4. Do FPOs face any challenges in promoting indigenous or traditional varieties? What specific policy changes or new support mechanisms would most help?

Ans. FPOs do face several challenges in promoting indigenous and traditional crop varieties, despite their strong ecological and nutritional advantages. There is limited availability of quality seed and planting material of traditional landraces, as these are largely farmer-conserved and lack formal seed system integration. Initially, productivity is lower and there is a variability in yields compared to improved or hybrid seeds, especially during the transition phase from conventional practices to scientific and natural farming methods. There is inadequate post-harvest infrastructure, such as cleaning, grading, dehusking, and storage facilities, which is particularly critical for millets and pulses. Other than this, there are gaps in market awareness and consumer perception, where traditional crops are still viewed as 'minor' or subsistence crops in some markets. There is limited access to working capital and risk mitigation instruments for FPOs engaged in value addition and aggregation of indigenous crops.

Policy changes and support mechanisms that would be most helpful include strengthening community-based seed systems and formally recognizing farmer-conserved germplasm through seed banks and participatory varietal selection programs. There should be targeted financial and infrastructure support for FPO-owned post-harvest and primary processing units, particularly for millet processing and value addition. It would be easier to ensure markets and bring in price stability if there is dedicated procurement and price support mechanisms for indigenous and GI-tagged crops. Efforts are needed to build capacity on quality standards, branding, traceability, and GI compliance. Finally, consumer awareness and demand-generation initiatives, including the inclusion of traditional crops in public nutrition programmes and institutional procurement, are needed.

ORGANIZATION

PREM SAMRIDDHI FOUNDATION BUNDI, RAJASTHAN

Prem Samriddhi Foundation supports one FPO, Samriddhi Mahila Crop Producer Company Limited (SMCPCL), which has 2,500 women-member shareholders. The FPO works actively with indigenous and traditional crop and seed varieties and strongly promote natural and regenerative farming practices. Through our community seed bank and farmer-led conservation efforts, we preserve and promote indigenous varieties of paddy, wheat, millets, maize, pulses, vegetables and spices. Farmers are encouraged to use these locally adapted seeds due to their resilience, lower input costs and better nutritional value. In parallel, we actively promote natural farming by training farmers in practices such as seed and soil treatment (beejamrut), use of jivamrut and bio-tonics, green manuring, Azolla, bio-pesticides, and on-farm input preparation through Bio Resource Centres. These practices reduce dependence on chemicals, improve soil health and sustainably enhance farmers' incomes.

The FPO has successfully multiplied three wheat varieties and two pulse varieties at scale, enabling wider adoption among farmers. SMCPCL supported farmers through collective procurement of bio-inputs, technical handholding and aggregation of produce, which lowered cultivation costs and improved both quality and consistency.

The FPO also facilitated market access for chemical-free and traditional produce, helping members secure 15–25 per cent higher prices compared to conventional markets. In addition to selling whole grains, the FPO developed value-added products such as split pulses, wheat flour, solar-dried products (turmeric chips and powder) and cold-pressed oils. These products were marketed to local consumers as well as established ethical and organic buyers such as Organic Farmers Market (Chennai), Bio Basics (Coimbatore), and OOO Farm (Rajkot). The FPO also runs a mobile vegetable van and sells indigenous and chemical-free organic vegetables to urban consumers at Bundi.

The FPO also plays a critical role in seed dissemination, supplying indigenous seeds to more than 200 farmers. Indigenous vegetable seeds are additionally sold to urban gardeners and NGOs for the promotion of nutrition gardens. In FY 2024–25, SMCPCL achieved a total turnover of Rs 4.65 crore, of which around Rs

10 lakh came directly from the organic and indigenous seed and grain business. Further, farmer-to-farmer seed and grain sales worth approximately Rs 6 lakh took place outside the formal FPO balance sheet, reflecting strong informal exchange and trust within the community.

The beneficiaries include Tasvir, a 29-year-old woman farmer who used to cultivate conventional crops using chemical inputs and earned low returns. On a small plot of around 300 square metres, her seasonal income was only Rs 5,000–7,000. She sold wheat at Rs 25–27 per kg and faced high cultivation costs due to purchased seeds and fertilizers. After joining the FPO in 2020, Tasvir shifted to indigenous seeds and regenerative agriculture. She now cultivates desi wheat on one bigha (about 0.4 acre) and grows indigenous vegetables such as desi wheat varieties like paigambari, bansi, kalibali, srijana and indigenous vegetables such as panchdhari tamatar (tomato), kantewala baigan (brinjal) on 300–350 square metres. She first sells the vegetables for household income and later allows some plants to mature fully so she can collect and sell seeds. Through the FPO's seed system, she also sells high-quality seeds to other farmers, creating an additional income stream. As a result, her income from the small vegetable plot increased from Rs 5,000–7,000 to Rs 35,000–40,000 per season. On her wheat plot, she now sells wheat at Rs 80–83 per kg instead of Rs 25–27 earlier. She also saves Rs 3,000–4,000 per crop on paddy and get additional income of Rs 15,000–18,000 on wheat due to reduced input costs and better prize realization. Altogether, she earns an additional Rs 35,000–40,000 per season, while improving soil fertility and reducing dependence on external inputs

Overall, the Samriddhi Mahila FPO demonstrates how a women-led FPO can simultaneously strengthen seed sovereignty, conserve agrobiodiversity and enhance farmer incomes by integrating indigenous seeds, natural farming, value addition and ethical market linkages into a sustainable business model.

INTERVIEW



PADAM JAIN, FOUNDER, PREM SAMRIDDHI FOUNDATION

Q. 1. Which traditional/indigenous crops or seed varieties are being promoted, and why were these chosen?

Ans. We support promote a range of traditional and indigenous crops and seed varieties, selected through farmer consultations and local experience. These varieties are primarily locally conserved, climate-resilient, aligned with local food habits, and increasingly linked to market demand. The crops and varieties were chosen because they are well adapted to local agro-climatic conditions, perform better under low-input natural farming systems, support household food and nutrition security and offer better price realization through niche and organic markets while conserving agrobiodiversity.

SMCPCL has established a strong community seed-bank system through which it has conserved over 200 native paddy varieties, 36 indigenous wheat varieties, three maize varieties, one jowar variety, three pulse varieties, one bajra variety and around 12 varieties of indigenous vegetables and spices. Women farmers were trained in seed selection, natural farming practices and on-farm seed production, which significantly reduced dependence on costly hybrid seeds and chemical inputs.

The FPO has promoted indigenous paddy varieties chosen for their tolerance to drought and erratic rainfall, lower input requirements, and suitability for natural farming. Wheat and millets varieties have been selected for heat tolerance, low water needs and strong relevance to local diets. Maize and pulses (urad, gram, moong) are promoted for soil fertility improvement, short duration, and compatibility with mixed and intercropping systems. Traditional vegetables (local gourds, leafy greens, brinjal, okra, etc.) are conserved for household nutrition and kitchen garden promotion. Spices and rhizomes such as turmeric and ginger are chosen for good local adaptability, high value, and growing market demand, and green manure crops like dhaincha to improve soil organic matter and nitrogen content.

Q. 2. What type of markets does FPOs mainly sell their produce to? Is there a distinct market for indigenous varieties? Do value-added products prepared using traditional varieties have a market?

Ans. The FPOs mainly sell their produce through a mix of local markets, wholesale buyers and institutional channels, with growing efforts toward direct-to-consumer sales. Staple crops are largely sold in local and wholesale markets, while inputs and select produce are marketed through the FPO network. There is a distinct and emerging market for indigenous and traditional varieties, especially among health-conscious consumers and organic buyers. Value-added products such as traditional rice, turmeric, spices and naturally produced inputs prepared from indigenous varieties are gaining demand in niche, organic and local markets, offering better price realization and improved incomes for member farmers.

Q. 3. Do any existing policies or schemes support FPOs working with traditional or indigenous crops? How have they helped?

Ans. As per our knowledge, there is currently no dedicated national policy specifically designed to support FPOs working exclusively with traditional or indigenous crops. However, there are a few government schemes that indirectly support such FPOs and can be effectively leveraged for promoting indigenous cropping systems. Key among these are the National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF) and the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY). Through these schemes, FPOs link their member farmers to natural and organic farming programmes, even when the focus is on traditional crops. In this process, FPOs and supporting NGOs often play a critical role by providing indigenous seeds, facilitating access to scheme benefits and offering continuous handholding support such as training, technical guidance and on-field mentoring. While these schemes are not crop-specific, they help create an enabling ecosystem for farmers cultivating indigenous varieties by reducing dependency on external inputs, strengthening farmer capacity and supporting a transition towards sustainable, traditional farming practices.

Q. 4. What are the challenges FPOs face in promoting indigenous or traditional varieties? What specific policy changes or new support mechanisms would most help?

Ans. Indigenous seeds give low yields so farmers also hesitated to adopt them on a large scale. There is limited market access and value-chain support and small, niche traditional varieties often lack reliable buyers or premium markets, making sales difficult for FPOs. Many FPOs struggle with weak direct market linkages and dependency on intermediaries, reducing prices farmers receive. There are also financial constraints and FPOs often lack capital for seed production, storage,

processing and certification of traditional varieties, and face barriers accessing institutional credit.

Policy changes and support can help. For example, a dedicated market support ensuring government procurement and premium pricing for indigenous crops, inclusion in e-NAM and MSP frameworks, and promotion through public nutrition programmes would create demand. There should also be financial instruments such as tailored credit, seed system finance and subsidies for seed banks and processing units to reduce financial barriers.

ORGANIZATION

PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR DEVELOPMENT ACTION

WEST BENGAL

Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) was formed in 1983 and works with Farmer Producer Organizations across India, with a strong focus on women's collectives. Currently, the organization supports 84 FPOs across India, with a total of 119,332 women shareholders.

PRADAN follows a regenerative agriculture approach, with a gradual transition model. Chemical inputs are reduced step by step while organic inputs are increased. In some locations, chemical inputs have reached zero, while in others the transition is ongoing. The broad approach is to restore soil health and biodiversity while ensuring farmers do not face sudden income shocks.

One FPO supported by PRADAN is Aamon Farmer Producer Company Limited in Nayagram block, Jhargram district, West Bengal. This has 3,035 women shareholders and around 2,400 more applications are pending. Formed in 2020, the core focus of the FPO is indigenous rice conservation and marketing, supporting women's economic leadership, promoting regenerative/sustainable agriculture, setting up local processing enterprises and activities, turmeric cultivation and processing, millet cultivation and processing, sal-leaf plate-making, and creating a market linkage with institutional and retail buyers.

The region has over 30 per cent forest cover, with 90 per cent lateritic soil and only 10 per cent alluvial soil. Almost all the households grow rice during the kharif season. The land lies in the Chota Nagpur Plateau and is uneven. Farmers classify fields as upland, midland, medium lowland and lowland, and select varieties accordingly.

Nayagram block witnessed extreme Maoist activity until 2011, which disrupted public life and forced migration. The entire paddy cycle was controlled by traders. Seeds and inputs were sold at high prices, and paddy was bought back at low prices of Rs 11–12 per kg. Input costs rose every year while farmer incomes fell. Women, often the last to eat in households, felt the burden most. They organized to seek alternatives and began growing indigenous, non-toxic paddy, which improved soil health and reduced dependence on middlemen. However, market access remained essential for success. This led to the formation of the women-led Aamon Farmer Producer Company Limited, which was guided by the principle 'eat better, feed better'.

Aamon sells aromatic black rice, red rice and brown rice. To diversify income, it also entered turmeric cultivation, which allows even landless or homestead farmers to participate. Four processing units have been set up for rice, turmeric and millet and sal-leaf plate-making. These are managed by women of whom 139 are employed as mill managers, turmeric processors, sal-leaf moulders, stitchers and in boiling activities.

Turnover and profits have steadily increased, from a Rs 45 lakh turnover and Rs 2.27 lakh net profit in FY 22–23 to a Rs 223 lakh turnover and Rs 1.35 lakh net profit in FY 24–25. More than 71 per cent of shareholder households now earn over Rs 1 lakh annually. Some women who have been participating for three years earn an average of Rs 1.53 lakh per year. About 54 per cent of household incomes now comes from agriculture, livestock and forest produce, indicating livelihood diversification.

INTERVIEW



SOURANGSHU BANERJEE, TEAM COORDINATOR, WEST BENGAL

Q. 1. Which traditional/indigenous crops or seed varieties are being promoted, and why were these chosen?

Ans. Across India, around 12 indigenous rice varieties are promoted. In West Bengal alone, six indigenous paddy varieties are actively encouraged, including black rice, Sathiya, Mallifulo, Kalichampa, Badshabhog, Kabiraj sal, Kerala Sundari and Bhut muri. These were chosen because they are climate-

resilient, suited to local conditions, give good yields, carry cultural importance, and some have significant market demand, especially black, red and aromatic rice.

Q. 2. What type of markets do FPOs mainly sell their produce to? Is there a distinct market for indigenous varieties? Do value-added products prepared using traditional varieties have a market?

Ans. FPOs sell in diverse markets. Bulk sales are mainly to institutional buyers across India, while retail sales are mostly local and in nearby towns. There is no distinct or stable market yet for indigenous varieties, but there is growing consumer readiness. Value-added products from traditional varieties do not yet have a ready market, though customers show interest and acceptance.

Q. 3. Are there any existing policies or schemes that support FPOs working with traditional or indigenous crops? How have they helped?

Ans. There are no specific policies or schemes from which these FPOs have benefited in relation to traditional or indigenous crops.

Q. 4. Are there any challenges FPOs face in promoting indigenous or traditional varieties? What specific policy changes or new support mechanisms would most help?

Ans. Markets exist, but demand is irregular, often leaving FPOs with slow-moving stock. Another challenge is that declared MSPs for other grains creates competition for landraces and similar varieties, encouraging farmers to shift away from indigenous crops. The best policy change would be to create a circular chain in which the government procures from farmers and uses the produce in schemes such as the Midday Meal Scheme. If this happens, farmers do not have to look for new markets. The government also needs to fix a minimum support price for the produce and this should be higher than the one set for high-yielding varieties. The government should also set up a system for providing seeds for these traditional varieties. Generally, farmers get it by exchanging amongst themselves and if we want to scale up cultivation, there is never enough available. Scaling up can take years to implement.

ORGANIZATION

HIMRRA NETWORK OF FARMERS HIMACHAL PRADESH

The network, established in 2018, is associated with two FPOs, Karsog Natural Farmers Producer Company Limited, Mandi, and Shri Dharan Farmer Producer Company Limited, Bilaspur. Karsog Natural Farmers Producer Company Limited was formally established in 2022. Work on traditional seeds had, however, begun much earlier, starting in 2016, but even before that, from 2009, seed-conservation activities were underway.

The FPO has 106 members. When work began in 2009, the farmers observed that local seeds were of very good quality and approached village elders to collect small quantities of old traditional seeds. They sometimes received only a handful. These seeds were first multiplied through a crop diversity programme. In the second year, they were shared with other farmers. Only seeds that showed good germination and production were further distributed. In this way, traditional seeds from old sources were tested, strengthened and gradually reintroduced into farming systems. The FPO purchases these seeds from farmers and continues this cycle of seed conservation, multiplication and use. It works with indigenous and traditional crops, especially traditional seeds, landraces and lesser-known local varieties. They use only natural farming methods and do not use of fertilizer, pesticides or chemicals.

Som Krishan, the main functionary of KNFPCL, has a seed bank and provided millet seeds, such as ragi and foxtail millet, to 50–60 farmers in 2022. Since then, he has given millet seeds to 1,854 farmers, many of whom help in saving the traditional seeds besides getting the benefit of domestic use, some sale and further free distribution. There are seed saviours and millet fellows and hence there is an increase in the number of farmers every year. There is a very small increase, if any, but the gains are offset as more seeds are given to farmers free of charge. The FPO retains 10–30 per cent of the sale value, depending on the product. Some farmers sell small quantities independently, but most of the produce is sold through the FPO.

INTERVIEW



D.K. SADANA, FOUNDER, HimRRA WITH INPUTS FROM SOM KRISHAN, FARMER PANGNA, MANDI, HIMACHAL PRADESH

Q. 1. Which traditional/indigenous crops or seed varieties are being promoted? Why were these chosen?

Ans. KNFPCL promotes a wide range of indigenous and traditional crops, including cereals, millets, pulses, oilseeds and vegetables. Key landraces include maize (shathu), valued for its high nutritional value; wheat varieties such as Khapli, Madnka, Awla and Madlehoon perform well under natural farming conditions; and paddy varieties such as Roda, Hansraj and Anani, which are gluten-free, nutritionally rich and help improve soil organic carbon. The FPO also promotes horse gram (kulth) and rajma (red and yellow kidney beans) for their medicinal value and good yield; kuttu (bhresa), a 100 per cent sugar-free traditional crop used locally to manage joint pain; ragi (kodra) and kangni (foxtail millet), important sources of calcium and iron for household nutrition; and kakri (traditional cucumber), known for medicinal use, especially in treating urinary problems. Farmers also grow barley, oilseeds and various traditional vegetables. In addition, they cultivate barley and several other vegetables. For many of these crops they maintain their own seeds (traditional) and use these year after year.

Q. 2. What type of markets do FPOs mainly sell their produce to?

Ans. We sell mostly locally, directly to the consumers. Some come from other villages to purchase. Some procure online. We have sold value-added products like cleaned and packaged 'ready-to-prepare' millets from farms. We are not selling the items wholesale yet.

Q. 3. Are there any existing policies or schemes that support FPOs working with traditional or indigenous crops? How have they helped?

Ans. There is no special scheme from the government for traditional seeds or crops. We received encouragement and support from civil society.

Q. 4. Are there any challenges FPOs face in promoting indigenous or traditional varieties? What specific policy changes or new support mechanisms would most help?

Ans. KNFPCL faces several challenges unique to its location and scale. Due to difficult terrain and distance, members who live far, in hilly areas, find it difficult to gather the required number of directors to pass resolutions. We feel that the requirement of 10 members being present to pass resolutions should be reduced, considering local conditions.

Legal and registration systems are expensive and time-consuming for small FPOs operating in remote areas. There is lack of recognition for natural produce. This makes it difficult to convince new consumers that the produce is genuinely natural and chemical-free. Although repeat customers regularly return once they understand the quality of the products, the FPO lacks guidance and institutional support to expand marketing while handling small production volumes.

ORGANIZATION

SAMPARK SAMAJ SEVI SANSTHA JHABUA, MADHYA PRADESH

Sampark Samaj Sevi Sansthawas, established in 1992, works in Jhabua, Alirajpur, Ratlam and Dhar districts of Madhya Pradesh and supports one FPO, Dungrachal Seed and Agricultural Producer Cooperative Society Limited, which has 460 members. The FPO provides training and supplies indigenous seeds to 3,500 small farmers.

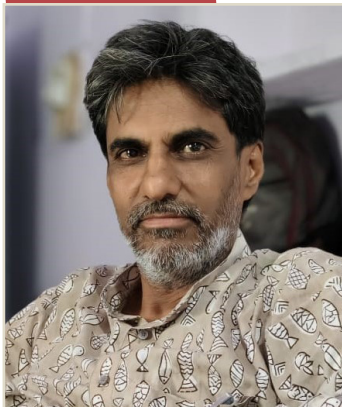
The seed conservation groups, indigenous seed user groups, committed individual seed producers, and women collectors are actively working to preserve the biodiversity of indigenous seeds. The bio-input production centre established by us also plays a crucial role in this effort. We are also working with marginal farmers to revive traditional knowledge of organic farming and the community's ancient agricultural practices and tools in the region. The members of the Dungranchal Community Seed Bank are organic and marginal farmers residing in Bakhatpura village, Petlawad tehsil, Jhabua district. By joining the FPO, they are not only practising organic farming but are also successfully conserving and propagating rare traditional indigenous varieties, thereby earning profits.

During the 2025 rabi season, farmer Sakru Damar planted 35 kg of Sona Moti wheat variety on 2 bighas of land. Initially, he treated the seeds with pond silt and a mixture of cow urine and jaggery. He then sowed the seeds in his field using bullocks. After germination, he applied Jeevamrut solution with each irrigation and sprayed Shad-ras periodically. He also controlled weeds in the crop using a hand hoe and a cycle-driven hoe. At the time of crop maturity, he ensured the physical purity of the crop by separating off-type plants. During flowering, he used Kudma manure, Ghanjeevamrut and Bilvarasaayan (a bio-fertilizer) for better grain development.

After taking good care of the crop for 120 days, he harvested and threshed it on time. In this way, he obtained a yield of 10 quintals and 15 kg from 2 bighas, which the Dungranchal Community Seed Bank Committee purchased directly from his threshing floor at a rate of Rs 35 per kg.

Farmer Sakru Damar is enthusiastic about his hard work and the resulting returns. He believes that this organic farming method has provided not only economic benefits but also environmental advantages. Soil fertility has also been preserved. The farmer says that he will continue his efforts in this direction.

INTERVIEW



HARISH PANWAR, DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR, SAMPARK

Q. 1. Which traditional/indigenous crops or seed varieties are being promoted, and why were these chosen?

Ans. Farmers are engaged in conserving and promoting various traditional crop varieties, such as wheat, gram, maize, urad, moong, groundnut, sesame, pigeon pea, millets and indigenous vegetables. These include rare and endangered varieties of wheat (Banshi, Sona Moti, P.C. Kalibali, Sharbati, Gujrati, Wanjhiya, Munda PC—a total of 34 varieties); gram (Desi Kanta, Bhura, Kala Chana, Hara Chana, Desi Badami), groundnut (Hadmachi, Dungri), maize (Dudh Mogar, Khokhadi, Satpani, Sathi, Hawad) and vegetables (Jhumki Turai, Satdhari Bhindi, Lal Bhindi, Naudhari Bhindi, Bhongli Bhindi).

Q. 2. What types of markets do FPOs mainly sell their produce to? Is there a distinct market for indigenous varieties? Do value-added products prepared using traditional varieties have a market?

Ans. Our products are purchased by local consumers as well as through outlets located in Indore, Ratlam, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Pune, Bangalore, etc., where a segment of consumers buys organic, natural and indigenous products. Some value-added products of these items, such as turmeric powder, chili powder, maize and wheat porridge, pulses like pigeon pea, chickpea and mung bean, groundnut and sesame oil, etc., are also exported.

Q. 3. Are there any existing policies or schemes that support FPOs working with traditional or indigenous crops? How have they helped?

Ans. Yes, the government undertaking NABARD bank provides financial assistance to such FPOs, but we have not yet availed of that assistance.

Q. 4. Do FPOs face any specific challenges in promoting indigenous or traditional varieties? What specific policy changes or new support mechanisms would most help?

Ans. Farmers have to put in more effort to cultivate traditional and indigenous varieties. Seed savers require more labour for nutritional management, pest and disease control, and the production of organic inputs for these traditional crops.

In addition, the yield of indigenous varieties is lower than that of hybrid seeds. As a result, farmers are often reluctant to plant these varieties and require significant encouragement to do so.

There should be a special platform in mandis, where such produce can be sold. The farmer should be provided with monetary compensation for each variety conserved and for the amount they conserve. There should also be a policy or scheme to help farmers store these varieties.

ORGANIZATION

SWITCH ON FOUNDATION

WEST BENGAL

The organization, formed in 2008, supports 60 FPOs across India with a total membership of around 25,000 farmers. The FPOs work with indigenous and traditional crop and seed varieties. They promote climate-resilient agriculture practices and sustainable farming approaches, though natural farming is not explicitly mentioned as a strict model. The focus is collective input supply, output marketing, climate-resilient agriculture, livelihood improvement and women's participation. Key activities include agri-input supply, output aggregation and marketing, trading in vegetables and seeds, capacity building and financial literacy, and the promotion of climate-resilient and sustainable farming practices.

Matir Kotha Farmer Producer Company Limited is based in Joypur Block of Bankura district, West Bengal. The FPO was formed on March 23, 2023 and is registered under the Companies Act, 2013. It is supported by the Environment Conservation Society of India and implemented with support from NABARD. It has 413 shareholder farmers (as of 2024–25) and 12 board of directors.

The FPO began with the basic aim of helping farmers get fair prices for their produce and access to quality agricultural inputs. Farmers earlier depended heavily on local traders for both buying inputs and selling produce, often at unfavourable prices. Through the FPO, members started purchasing seeds, fertilizers, and bio-pesticides collectively at affordable rates. This reduced input costs and improved access to reliable, good-quality materials, which in turn supported better crop productivity.

Matir Kotha FPO also worked towards development of strong market linkages. The FPO procures farm produce such as sweet potato, potato, cucumber, onion and paddy seeds directly from farmers and sells them in bulk markets. This collective marketing helped farmers reduce dependence on middlemen and ensured fairer and more transparent prices. As a result, both income stability and bargaining power of farmers improved.

The impact of these linkages is visible in the FPO's business performance. In FY 2024–25, the FPO achieved a total business turnover of Rs 19,72,991, while the cumulative turnover since inception reached Rs 29,83,338. From trading commodities like sweet potato, potato, cucumber, paddy seeds and onion, the FPO earned a net profit of Rs 29,525 during the year.

Although the profit margin is still modest, it clearly shows that organized marketing and aggregation can convert farmers' small surpluses into a viable collective enterprise and is steadily improving the financial base of the FPO. The FPO has placed emphasis on sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture. Farmers were encouraged to adopt eco-friendly farming methods, water conservation practices and organic inputs. To further enhance farmer incomes, the FPO plans to expand into value addition and processing. Proposed initiatives include setting up mini-processing units for potato chips, paddy seeds, and dehydrated vegetables, as well as establishing cold storage to reduce post-harvest losses. This will enable farmers to shift from raw produce sales to higher-value processed products.

When Gaynamoni Murmu in Bankura district practised conventional farming using chemical fertilizers and pesticides, her average input cost per season was around Rs 25,000–28,000 per acre. As crop productivity was low, her seasonal income was limited to approximately Rs 35,000–40,000. After joining Matir Kotha FPC, Gaynamoni began purchasing agricultural inputs from the FPC's input shop at reasonable prices. She also received training on preparing bio-inputs such as organic fertilizers and sprays. Using this knowledge, she now prepares bio-inputs at home and applies them on her land. In addition, she shifted to indigenous seeds promoted by the FPO. As a result of adopting bio-inputs and indigenous seeds, her overall input cost reduced by at least 30 per cent, decreasing to around Rs 17,000–19,000 per acre per season. This led to direct savings of Rs 8,000–9,000 per season. Improved soil health and better crop management practices also contributed to increased productivity. With support from Matir Kotha FPC, Gaynamoni now sells her produce in larger markets instead of relying on local traders, enabling her to receive better prices. Due to reduced input costs and improved market access, her seasonal income increased by around 30 per cent, reaching approximately Rs 50,000–55,000.

INTERVIEW



**RAJU MONDAL,
DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER**

Q. 1. Which traditional/indigenous crops or seed varieties are being promoted, and why were these chosen (locally conserved, climate resilience, local food habits, market demand, etc.)?

Ans. The FPOs promote millets, traditional rice, pulses and vegetables. These crops were chosen because indigenous varieties are locally adapted, climate-resilient, require fewer inputs, reduce dependence on fertilizers and pesticides, ensure stable yields, and strengthen food security. They also align with local food habits and emerging market demand.

Q. 2. What type of markets does FPOs mainly sell their produce to? Is there a distinct market for indigenous varieties? Do value-added products prepared using traditional varieties have a market?

Ans. FPOs mainly sell in local and wholesale markets and also sell directly to consumers to ensure volumes and quick payments. Some FPOs are gradually moving towards direct-to-consumer channels for better prices. There is no strong, distinct market yet for indigenous varieties, but value-added products such as processed grains, pulses, spices, millets, cold-pressed oils and pickles are being developed, with small to mid-level FPOs achieving annual turnovers ranging from Rs 20 lakh to Rs 1 crore.

Q. 3. Are there any existing policies or schemes that support FPOs working with traditional or indigenous crops? How have they helped?

Ans. India has policies such as the Central Sector Scheme for Formation & Promotion of 10,000 FPOs, which support FPO formation, capacity building, equity grants, credit guarantees and market access. Institutions such as SFAC and NABARD provide equity and working capital support, and platforms such as e-NAM improve market access and price transparency.

Promotion of indigenous varieties is indirectly supported through biodiversity schemes and the PPVFR Act (Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001), which allows farmers to save, use, exchange and sell seeds and recognizes conservation of indigenous varieties.

Q.4. Are there any challenges FPOs face in promoting indigenous or traditional varieties? What specific policy changes or new support mechanisms would most help?

Ans. FPOs face challenges such as low initial demand, weak market linkages, and lack of quality seed availability, certification hurdles and limited consumer awareness. Strict seed regulations, absence of assured MSP for most indigenous crops, limited procurement, and high certification costs further reduce incentives.

Policy changes that would help include assured procurement or MSP for indigenous crops, simplified seed registration and certification norms, targeted subsidies for processing and branding, support for niche markets, GI/organic certification, and dedicated schemes for conservation-based value chains. To scale up FPO models, strong support is needed in the form of affordable finance, professional management, and robust market linkages. Investment in infrastructure, technology adoption, capacity building, and supportive policies will help FPOs grow sustainably.

ORGANIZATION

ACCION FRATERNA—ECOLOGY CENTRE ANANTAPUR AND SRI SATYA SAI DISTRICTS, ANDHRA PRADESH

Small and marginal farmers in Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai in Andhra Pradesh face frequent failure of rain, poor soil fertility and rising costs. To address these challenges, Accion Fraterna—Ecology Centre (AF-EC) was formed in 1982 and has been working in the region for several decades, focusing on building farmer institutions that can reduce risks, lower costs and improve access to markets. AF-EC has been promoting Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) as farmer-owned enterprises that strengthen collective bargaining, transparency, and inclusion, particularly of women.

The organization supports 17 FPOs, which work on indigenous/traditional crops and promote natural farming. These FPOs have built a strong institutional base of 8,107 shareholder farmers, 77 per cent of whom are women.

The FPOs are still struggling with problems in marketing of the produce as well as value-added products. There are no success stories yet.

INTERVIEW



Y.V. MALLA REDDY, DIRECTOR

Q. 1. Which traditional/indigenous crops or seed varieties are being promoted? Why were these chosen?

Ans. We promote all five types of minor millets, i.e. foxtail millet, proso millet, barnyard millet, kodo millet and little millet. These crops are well suited to local dryland conditions, require less water, are more drought-resilient, and are part of traditional food systems. Farmers are encouraged to combine

millet cultivation with natural farming practices, which help reduce input costs, improve soil health, and strengthen nutritional security.

Q. 2 What type of markets do FPOs mainly sell their produce to? Is there a distinct market for indigenous varieties? Do value-added products prepared using traditional varieties have a market?

Ans. The produce is sold mostly in local markets to primary processors as there is no distinct market for these millets. We also prepare and sell value-added products prepared from these millets.

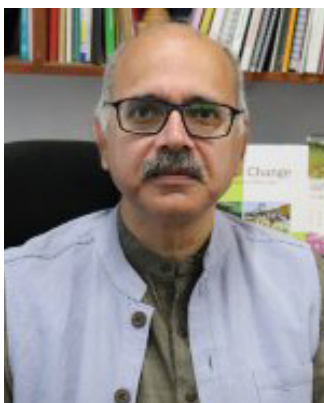
Q. 3. Are there any existing policies or schemes that support FPOs working with traditional or indigenous crops? How have they helped?

Ans. There are no such policies.

Q.4. Are there any challenges FPOs face in promoting indigenous or traditional varieties? What specific policy changes or new support mechanisms would most help?

Ans. Policy changes needed include setting MSP to include production cost and an additional 50 per cent, and government to procure the produce when prices fall below the MSP. Government should also procure and serve millet-based food in government programmes like ICDS, Midday Meals Scheme, PDS, government-run hostels, government hospitals etc.

EXPERT OPINIONS



C. SHAMBU PRASAD

**Professor, Institute of Rural Management,
Anand, Gujarat**

The question is no longer whether FPOs should move toward sustainability—it is whether the enabling conditions exist for them to do so. There is not much evidence available yet. Our research through our book, *Farming Futures*, and beyond was to understand from existing FPOs where they are in this journey towards sustainable transition and can FPOs play the role of sustainable transition intermediaries? Can they go beyond selling agrochemical inputs? Sahaja Samrudha has been able to do so because of the civil society networks it has built over years; Jaivik Sri FPO incubated by similar networks in Odisha has managed a tie-up with the Jagannath Temple, which has become a significant source of value and identity. There are a few others working with indigenous seeds, but they are barely surviving—not for lack of effort, but for lack of a market that recognizes and rewards their work.

The transition to sustainability requires consistent support over time. Currently, there is no coherent policy that would move FPOs in that direction. Farmers practising natural farming are encouraged, sometimes expected, to form FPOs, yet the markets for their produce remain underdeveloped. Policy cannot mandate transformation without building the infrastructure that makes it viable.

There is also a structural challenge: can an FPO effectively work with dispersed farmers while also managing aggregation and marketing? Farmers growing indigenous rice varieties are often scattered, five or ten in a village, making even basic coordination a significant effort. Aggregation at scale may require a different kind of entity altogether; a social enterprise with the mandate and investment capacity to bridge production with distant markets. FPOs alone often cannot carry this load. Organizations like KisaanSay in Haryana, which has focused specifically on indigenous seeds and built its market proposition around provenance and story, or Safe Harvest, which has anchored its brand on non-pesticide management for over a decade, offer instructive models of what focused, mission-driven enterprises can achieve.

FPOs can create markets through their own networks—TAPCo is a good example—but reaching distant, premium markets requires a different set of skills and a different level of investment. The honest acknowledgement is that marketing is hard, and most FPOs are not yet equipped for it. In Andhra Pradesh, having built strong production-side capabilities, the conversation is now rightly shifting to markets—including pilots with agri-entrepreneurs at the regional level who can sell directly in local markets.

The most underutilized opportunity may be the state itself as a buyer. If the government is serious about nutrition—and the policy signals suggest it is—then strengthening local procurement is an obvious lever. Even a modest commitment, such as sourcing indigenous varieties for the midday meal scheme one day a week, could create meaningful and predictable demand. In tribal areas, if anganwadis and local institutions source even occasionally from nearby farmers, it creates both livelihood and cultural continuity. The state does not need to solve the entire market problem—it needs to anchor it.

There are encouraging signs. The agriculture minister, at a National Coalition for Natural Farming meeting, saw indigenous varieties on display and suggested dedicating stalls in two mandis for direct farmer sales. In Andhra Pradesh, Rythu Bazaars could provide the kind of trusted public marketplace that indigenous variety farmers need. These are good instincts. What is needed now is follow-through and institutionalization, not one-off gestures. An organic bazaar placed inside an agricultural university campus, accessible only to insiders, misses the point entirely. These products need a public face—in weekly bazaars, in neighbourhood markets, in places where promotion and habit-formation can actually happen.

There has been recognition of seed savers through Padma Shri awards and Beejotsavs, as well as genuine momentum on the production side. A global precedent also exists: Lotus Foods successfully exported indigenous rice varieties to the US market, demonstrating that under the right agronomic principles—SRI and organic farming—these varieties perform well and command value. The gap is not in the seed or the farmer. It is in the collation, marketing, and policy will to make indigenous varieties part of everyday Indian diets. That is where focused government intervention—sustained, visible, and market-facing—is most urgently needed.



NARASIMHA REDDY DONTI
Independent Researcher and Advocacy Specialist, Telangana

Natural farming, which relies on indigenous crop varieties and local ecological knowledge, faces significant challenges due to fragmented landholdings and the economic reality that rural families need a minimum income of at least Rs 20,000 to sustain themselves. These constraints make it difficult for individual farmers to absorb the transition costs and risks that natural farming entails. Collectivization through FPOs offers a practical path forward—inputs can be locally developed as independent livelihoods, drawing in marginal and smallholder farmers, who are otherwise excluded from mainstream agricultural value chains.

Beyond economics, natural farming is fundamentally an ecological practice that cannot thrive within the boundaries of isolated landholdings. It requires a living landscape—local biodiversity, functioning ecosystems and ecological relationships that span entire villages. Yet, common lands, which once served this purpose, are rapidly shrinking. FPOs can collectively own or manage such lands, restoring them as biodiversity zones and ecological niches that provide the services modern farming has quietly depended on all along. Bird habitats within these areas offer natural pest control; tree cover moderates microclimates; and waterbodies and vegetative buffers support rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge. No single farmer has the means or incentive to create and maintain these systems alone—but a collective can.

These shared landscapes also yield more than ecological services. They can supply diverse, nutritious foods beyond what any single crop harvest provides, strengthening community food security across seasons. Indigenous seed production and multiplication, too, finds its rightful home in such community spaces—conserved, governed and shared by the FPO, ensuring that genetic wealth remains in the hands of the village rather than disappearing into the market.

For this vision to materialize, targeted policy support is essential—and it must begin with rethinking how FPOs are structured and recognized.

Territorial coherence is perhaps the most foundational requirement. FPOs must be geographically anchored, with member farmers forming contiguous landholdings

within a defined village or watershed boundary. This is not merely administrative convenience—territorial integrity is what makes shared ecological management, common land stewardship, and collective input development practically possible. Current FPO promotion policies are largely agnostic to geography; this needs to change.

Financial and institutional prioritization of natural farming FPOs through banking credit, government schemes and input subsidies would significantly reduce the risks borne by transitioning farmers. Preferential access to working capital, lower collateral requirements and scheme convergence—where MGNREGS, horticulture missions and watershed programmes align around FPO boundaries—can multiply impact considerably.

Marketing infrastructure and value chain support are equally critical. FPOs must be empowered to play an active marketing role, aggregating the small, diverse produce from many tiny and marginal farmers into volumes that are viable for buyers. Small-scale primary processing machinery—cleaning, grading, drying, milling—should be made available to FPOs as common assets, reducing post-harvest losses and improving price realization. Where feasible, support for secondary and tertiary processing can further capture value that currently leaks out of farming communities.

Natural farming, when practised well, can produce a complete supply chain from seed to fork. When individual farmers have painstakingly built such chains, the burden of managing procurement, processing, branding, and sales simultaneously is unsustainable over time. FPOs, with the right support, can absorb and institutionalize these functions—freeing farmers to focus on cultivation while ensuring that the value of their labour and ecological stewardship is not lost.

Finally, indigenous seed sovereignty must be explicitly protected in policy. FPO-managed community seed systems should receive legal recognition, and regulations around seed certification should be flexible enough to accommodate locally adapted varieties that may not meet the uniformity standards of formal seed systems.



SATYASOVAN DAS

State Head, Foundation for Ecological Security, Madhya Pradesh

FPOs can be the custodians of indigenous crop varieties. To revive and scale traditional seeds, FPOs can identify, co-design, co-promote and multiply indigenous and locally adapted crop varieties that are culturally relevant, nutrient-rich and resilient to local climatic stresses. FPOs can establish and manage seed banks to conserve rare and traditional varieties, ensuring that farmer communities retain control over their genetic resources and go for GI tag of the rare variety for larger acceptance. FPOs can facilitate farmer-to-farmer exchange of seed knowledge, cultivation practices and experiences, strengthening community memory and empowerment around diverse crops.

FPOs can act as decentralized knowledge and innovation hubs that support farmers in transitioning towards natural and agro-ecological farming. By collaborating with research institutions, NGOs and government extension systems, FPOs can facilitate on-farm trials to test practices such as bio-inputs, indigenous seeds and diversified cropping systems. They can also promote local entrepreneurship around bio-input production and ensure timely access to ecological inputs. By aggregating produce and building market linkages and establishing local weekly haats or organic/uncultivated corner, FPOs can create economic incentives for natural farming and minor forest produce and uncultivated food.

As stewards of biodiversity conservation, they can use landscape-level planning to work beyond individual farms to promote mosaic landscapes that integrate crops, trees, waterbodies and habitats—supporting ecological functions and biodiversity. They can partner with research institutions, NGOs and government programmes to monitor and protect pollinators, soil biota, beneficial insects and watershed health.

They can enhance access to good, healthy food by strengthening local food systems. This can be through valorizing traditional grains, pulses, millets, vegetables and legumes and uncultivated food. This can help revive local diets and nutritional diversity and create larger evidence-based campaign around local, safe food with a feeling of pride, like Apna Khan Paan Apna Samman.

FPOs can support nutrition-sensitive marketing and brand and market their produce around nutrition and ecological benefits, raising consumer awareness and demand for good food. They can establish direct market linkages with consumers (e.g., farmer markets, community-supported agriculture, retail partnerships), which improve producer incomes and make fresh, healthy food more accessible.

There is a need to relook at the current policy assumption that FPOs can become operationally and financially sustainable within three years, for which the government provides supports. Transitioning from promoter dependence, building governance systems, achieving business viability and earning farmer trust is a long-term process. Policy must therefore recognize FPOs as long-term institution-building efforts, not short-term projects. This requires sustained financial support, direct funding to FPOs, investment in professional staffing, and clear graduation pathways from promoter control. A structured five- to seven-year policy support framework is essential to enable FPOs to emerge as independent, farmer-owned institutions capable of delivering economic, ecological and food system outcomes. We can consider implementing performance-based incentives for the FPOs.

There is a strong need to establish FPO shareholders as the owners of the organization, brand champions of the organization, producers and, at the same time, consumers. There is a need to recreate the narrative of Farmer Producer Organizations as an institution to support the climate action plan by shortening the value chain and promoting local varieties in the landscape.

At a systemic level, there is a need for formal policy recognition of FPOs as partners in achieving national priorities, including biodiversity conservation, climate resilience and nutrition security. This includes integrating FPOs into government programmes related to natural farming, public procurement, biodiversity missions and local food systems.

There is a major gap is the absence of a dedicated professional cadre to support FPOs. Running an FPO requires expertise in business planning, financial management and value-chain development, yet most operate without trained professionals. There are successful examples in which state governments have created village-level volunteer cadres, often linked to university programmes such as BSW/MSW, to strengthen grassroots institutions. A similarly structured cadre and training ecosystem is needed for FPOs to build professional capacity, reduce dependence on promoters, and ensure long-term sustainability.



RAJNIKANT PRASAD

CEO, UPPRO Kisan Producer Company Ltd., state-level federation of FPOs of Uttar Pradesh, promoted by Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC), New Delhi

As natural farming expands beyond pilot clusters, input availability in adequate volume and assured quality becomes a systemic requirement rather than an individual responsibility. Farmer Producer Organizations can serve as structured platforms to institutionalize bio-input production, standardization and distribution. While natural farming encourages on-farm preparation of inputs such as Jivamrit, Ghanjivamrit or Dashparni, farmers consistently highlight the need for backup systems especially during peak seasons or when limited labour is available. Establishing community-managed units—Bio Resource Centres, which can be owned and managed by FPOs—can play an important role. The role of FPOs can be strengthened in ensuring availability of inputs, adoption of practices, and maintaining quality and authenticity.

One of the most critical inputs for promoting natural farming at scale is the availability of indigenous seed in adequate purity and volume. While natural farming reduces dependency on external chemical inputs, it simultaneously increases the importance of locally adapted, resilient seed systems. FPOs can play important role by establishing community-level seed banks, community-led seed production and/or multiplication system. Other than this, they have a role in creating awareness, preservation and conservation of traditional seed varieties, promote participatory seed multiplication, certification and marketing for premium prices. Overall, FPOs role can be viewed in accelerating innovation, improving extension services, and strengthening farmer linkages.

To enable and strengthen this role, we need to ensure that the government declares separate MSPs for the produce. To support long-term market development, digital traceability systems can authenticate supply chains from farm to consumer and prevent misuse. Building this trust infrastructure is essential for long-term market development. Market support includes procurement pathways, organic and natural produce markets, certification, promotion of soil testing, creation of local bio-input manufacturing and distribution channels.

Demonstrations, peer learning and visible success stories are far more effective compared to formal training sessions. Adoption accelerates only when farmers see natural farming working in their own village. Demonstration-based scaling should ensure at least one successful model per village cluster. The policies should encourage and incentivize SHGs and FPOs while promoting natural farming. Local identity should be strengthened, where SHG- and FPO-led processing can add value at the block and district levels. Additionally, there should be concerted efforts to develop productive partnerships with relevant stakeholders. Trained professionals, especially women, are needed at scale at KVKs, FPO and SHGs. Finally, the government should have provision for opening or giving a space in mandis for natural farming products.



PAWAN KUMAR
**Principal Lead, Agricultural Development
and Extension at S.M. Sehgal Foundation**

FPOs have the potential to play a transformative role in promoting indigenous seed systems, natural farming and biodiversity conservation. Their effectiveness, however, depends on sustained and structured support. Many FPOs, particularly those promoted under the Cluster-Based Business Organization (CBBO) model, are often formed primarily to meet numerical targets, rather than long-term viability goals. Once the project period ends—typically after one or two years—and financial support to the promoting agency ceases, the FPOs are often left to fend for themselves. Without continued mentoring, most lack the managerial, financial and technical capacity to survive independently.

For FPOs to play a meaningful role in conserving and promoting indigenous seeds, certain conditions are critical. First, they require long-term hand-holding support from experienced NGOs, technical institutions or government agencies. Second, there must be economic incentives for farmers who conserve and produce indigenous germplasm. Third, sustained technical support from local research institutions is essential. Indigenous seed varieties offer multiple advantages. They are often more nutritious, better adapted to local agro-climatic conditions, and more resilient to drought, pests and diseases. However, many indigenous varieties produce lower yields compared to hybrid or high-yielding varieties, which discourages farmers from cultivating them at scale. This creates a trade-off between resilience and productivity.

One policy innovation that could support indigenous varieties is the recognition and branding of their geographical origins. A Geographical Indication (GI) tag can help identify and protect traditional crops linked to specific regions. For example, makhana (fox nut), cultivated in India for centuries, has gained recognition for its high calcium content and nutritional value. With dedicated institutional support such as the Makhana Board, efforts are being made to improve productivity, mechanize processing and expand exports. As global demand increases, farmers are indirectly incentivized to continue cultivation. A similar approach could be adopted for indigenous seeds—linking conservation with branding, research and market development. This also enhances price realization for farmers.

FPOs could play a central role in obtaining GI tags and promoting region-specific indigenous crops. The government might prioritize such FPOs by offering certification support, technical guidance and marketing assistance. These bodies could register traditional varieties, facilitate research collaboration and promote domestic and international marketing platforms. India's hills and tribal regions—including parts of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Odisha and the Konkan region—still harbour rich pockets of traditional seed diversity. Identifying and supporting these clusters should be a policy priority.

At the research level, collaboration with local agricultural universities and research institutions is essential. Although institutions like the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) are mandated to conserve plant genetic diversity, their seeds are not easily accessible to every farmers. Many traditional seeds remain undocumented and are not yet conserved in formal repositories. If such varieties are not scientifically documented and periodically regenerated, they risk extinction. Research institutions can also support systematic seed selection and improvement. While indigenous germplasm naturally evolves over time, structured selection practices—such as identifying superior plants, improving seed storage systems and ensuring quality multiplication—can gradually enhance productivity. Over a period of four to five years, improved indigenous open-pollinated varieties could potentially compete more effectively with hybrids.

The broader experience with FPOs across India suggests significant systemic challenges. Despite ambitious national schemes, the overall success rate of FPOs remains low—arguably less than 5–6 per cent if measured by sustained growth and profitability. FPOs are formed in a target-driven manner and agencies focus on meeting formation numbers rather than ensuring viability. The ground reality is that these FPO are rarely monitored. Targets have been given to departments like horticulture and even soil conservation to form FPOs, sometimes without

clarity of purpose. In the future the government should review what FPOs are actually doing and what the success rate is.

The absence of a clear objective is perhaps the most serious weakness. An FPO formed without a specific commodity focus, practical business and market plan or value-addition strategy is unlikely to survive. Moreover, institutional roles are sometimes misaligned—departments with limited expertise in enterprise promotion are assigned FPO formation targets, diluting accountability.

Sehgal Foundation supports many FPOs across the country. One FPO is working on mango. For instance, one FPO focuses on mango value chains. We are building their capacity on the value chain, especially to ensure export quality produce and reduce residue levels so produce is not rejected. Dropped unripe mangoes are converted into achaar, and overripe B- and C-grade rejected mangoes are converted into pulp and supplied to pulp companies. The same FPO has a nursery so they also provide quality saplings at affordable prices and mango seeds after the pulp is dried in solar dryers and mango power is made. They are connected with Big Basket, Mother Dairy and Safal for mango procurement. Other FPOs are engaged in ragi processing. They have started packaging and selling in local markets. They have initiated processing of dehusked and polished ragi, which commands a better market price, and are producing value-added products such as ragi flour, ragi cookies, and ragi ladoos, which are packaged and sold in local markets. They are connected with platforms like Flipkart and NinjaCart. Some FPOs are into the input–output business, and some are into processing like dal and other products. We have set up solar dryers and small masala grinding units. But, even after four years of working with them, if we leave today, six out of ten will shut down or revert to their previous levels. They require long-term support of eight to ten years. The majority of FPOs operate in input–output business models, while some are engaged in the pulses value chain, undertaking processing activities such as dal, besan and related products. A portion of these products is marketed under their own brand, while the rest is sold as white-label products. We have also supported them by setting up solar-based cold storage units, solar dryers, and small masala grinding units. However, even after four years of engagement, if support is withdrawn today, a few may struggle to break even or revert to their earlier state. This highlights the need for sustained handholding support for a period of eight to ten years. This underscores the need to redesign FPO support programmes with a longer incubation period and phased withdrawal strategy.

A stronger policy framework, supported by coordinated efforts from government agencies, NGOs and other key stakeholders, is critical for ensuring the long-term

sustainability of FPOs. Accessing existing government subsidies and schemes—particularly for infrastructure, processing units, and working capital—needs to be systematically explored and streamlined. Many FPOs remain unaware of these provisions or face procedural challenges in availing them, underscoring the need for facilitation support from NGOs and ecosystem partners. Simplifying access, improving awareness and strengthening last-mile handholding can enable FPOs to effectively leverage these benefits. Aligning FPO development initiatives with relevant government schemes, with active involvement from all stakeholders, will reduce dependency on external funding and enhance long-term viability.



SACHIN OZA
Executive Director, DSC Foundation, Gujarat

We can consider indigenous crop varieties as part of natural farming. The transition from conventional farming to natural farming requires at least three to five years. There are several challenges such as the need for additional labour, lack of availability of organic inputs (fertilizers and pesticides), availability of desi seeds, awareness and knowledge of natural farming methods, vermicomposting units, and protection for farmers to

tide through production losses in the initial years.

There are about half a dozen roles that an FPO can play. First and foremost is awareness and capacity building of its members—why this transition is important, what the challenges are, and the pros and cons. Agriculture extension and enterprise go hand in hand. Often, extension is taken care of by the incubating CSO, but once the CSO withdraws, the FPO must take up that responsibility.

The second major role is input supply. We talk about desi seeds but they are available in very few places. FPOs can play a major role in promoting desi seeds and nurseries for desi varieties. For bio-inputs, there is a scheme for Bio-Input Resource Centres (BRCs), and many FPOs sell vermicompost and bio concoctions such as as Beejamrut, Jeevamrut and Agniastra, produced by women members. BRCs facilitate the sale of IPM (Integrated Pest Management) tools, including yellow sticky traps and pheromone traps. Another key area is mechanization where FPOs can provide small tools like improved sickles and weeders to address labour constraints.

FPOs can also help in value addition and processing. Millets, for example, are not easy to process and processing activities like flouring ragi, cleaning, grading and packaging can be done effectively by FPOs.

They can also provide storage because desi varieties often do not have a long shelf lives and storage and cold storage is required. As storage infrastructure is expensive, it would help if FPOs stepped in. In Odisha, FPOs have their own storage units of varying capacities.

FPOs can also support certification to assure consumers that produce is natural. Then, of course, there is marketing of the produce. Another aspect is crop insurance. There is often a drop in production, and climate change is a reality.

The Central scheme for 10,000 FPOs was not specifically designed for natural farming FPOs. The National Mission on Natural Farming promotes indigenous seeds. Every state also has its own policies to support natural farming, but most of these policies are for organic or natural farming, and there are no specific standalone policies for indigenous seeds. If we want to promote indigenous seeds, the first step would be to completely map the available varieties. Women farmers are already preserving wide varieties of paddy and other crops, but the question is how to integrate this into the system. Several CSOs have promoted indigenous seed banks. However, there is need to scale up these initiatives and recognize innovative farmers. Innovative women farmers also need to be recognized and mainstreamed. Policies must have feedback loops; they cannot be static. This is a layered issue, and strengthening research, documentation and knowledge flow within the system is essential. There is greater drudgery in natural farming than in conventional farming, but there is no specific incentive or recognition for natural farming FPOs. For example, if an FPO with 2,000 members obtains organic certification, there should be some incentive or commission. There is currently no such targeted incentive. There has to be positive reinforcement. Similarly, the fertilizer subsidy can be passed to FPOs promoting natural farming albeit after due verification.

Another issue is size. Small FPOs with 500 farmers are often suboptimal. Fewer than 2,000 members is not economically viable. We need federations at the cluster level. There should be federation structures—Tier 1 primary FPOs, Tier 2 cluster-level bodies, and possibly Tier 3 federations at a higher level. However, federations often lack policy support. Small FPOs are created but not adequately supported for sustained hand-holding.

If the government wants to promote this seriously, its own extension staff must align with the objective. Currently, there is confusion: on one hand, hybrid seeds and high-yield varieties are promoted while on the other, natural farming is encouraged. This creates a contradictory environment at the village level.

We must also be clear that FPOs have to be financially viable institutions. After five to eight years of incubation, they must be able to cover their operational, compliance and staff costs. An FPO needs turnover and profit. It cannot survive by focusing only on seeds. Seeds account for only about 5–7 per cent of the total business portfolio in conventional agricultural input distribution. We have to look at the entire crop life cycle. After seeds, there are issues of water, moisture conservation, irrigation support and animal husbandry for bio-inputs. In places such as Dang, irrigation coverage is only about 30–40 per cent. Without adequate irrigation or moisture conservation, seeds alone will not ensure crop success. We are not saying FPOs should ignore seeds, but they should not focus only on seeds. They must consider the whole life cycle of the crop, including niche marketing.



NITIN PURI
Founder, KisaanSay Agtech Pvt. Ltd, direct-from-farm brand, Haryana

We follow a partnership model based on 3 Cs—the first C stands for co-curate, the second stands for co-brand and the third for co-profit.

We build commercial partnerships with Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) based on complementary strengths. They contribute what they do best at the farm and production level, while we contribute our strengths in market access, branding and distribution. Together, we co-curate the entire process—from sourcing to the final product that reaches consumers.

The second pillar of our model is co-branding. Every product carries both the farmer's identity and the logo of the FPC that packed it prominently displayed on the front of the pack. This means that when a consumer shops on platforms such as Zepto, Blinkit and Amazon in grocery stores or in our own retail outlets, they can clearly see the FPC logo on every pack.

It assures them of the product's origin—for example, that the Kalajeera rice truly comes from Koraput, or that the walnuts are genuinely from Kashmir. For farmers, this approach creates a strong sense of ownership, pride and belonging. The product carries their brand, their name and their identity. It is not just something they have produced—it is something they are recognized for. In this way, farmers are not merely part of a transactional buy–sell relationship. Instead, they become partners and stakeholders in the supply chain, sharing visibility, recognition and value creation.

The third tenet of our partnership is co-profit. FPCs incur the costs involved in creating the product—this includes raw materials, processing, packaging, labour and logistics. On our side, we invest in marketing and distribution, which includes taking these products to online and offline platforms, running campaigns and advertisements, and promoting them across different channels. In essence, FPCs manage the production side of the value chain, while we take responsibility for market access and brand building. Once the product is sold in the market, we combine the total costs incurred by both sides. From the resulting revenue, the remaining profit is shared equally—with 50 per cent of the profit going back to the Farmer Producer Company. This co-profit model ensures that farmers are not just suppliers but true partners in value creation, sharing directly in the success of the products they help bring to market.

It is a very unique model in which farmers become co-owners of the supply chain. The farmer producer companies are involved in processing and packaging the products, while we focus on selling and distributing them in the market. Through our co-profit partnership, the proceeds of the business are also shared.

To identify the producer groups we use our networks and relationships with institutions such as the Ministry of Agriculture, NRLM, SRLMs, MOFPI, NABARD and non-state actors—such as Tata Trust. These organizations have played an important role in forming FPCs, building their capacities, and developing infrastructure. The point where their work typically stops is where ours begins. We help farmers monetize their efforts by helping them sell and market their products.

Our team visits these FPCs, interacts with them and assesses their technical and commercial capabilities. Where necessary, we support them with capacity building, food safety compliance, training, and hand-holding. Once the systems are ready, we begin commercial shipments.

Many FPCs have tried for years to access markets on their own but have struggled. Individually, they often lack bargaining power with large retailers. For example, approaching a major retail chain as a single FPC rarely yields favourable terms. Similarly, selling on commercial platforms requires professional expertise in marketing, branding, logistics, and digital operations—capabilities that many FPCs currently do not have.

There are very few models similar to ours. Our approach benefits not only farmers but also consumers. We focus on authentic, natural products that come from specific regions known for their quality. For instance, consumers should know that cardamom from Idukki, walnuts from Kashmir, or Kalanamak rice from Gorakhpur are distinctive and superior products because of their origin.

A lot of good work has already been done by the government through various schemes to support institution creation, capacity building, and infrastructure development. The next step is not necessarily to create new schemes but to link these efforts to marketing and demand creation.

When companies work with farmer collectives in inclusive partnership models, building a brand and reaching consumers takes significant time and investment. For example, if we want consumers to believe that Kashmiri walnuts are the best in the world, we need sustained marketing. Global brands such as Californian almonds spend billions of dollars on marketing to build that perception among consumers.

The government could complement its work on infrastructure and capacity building by promoting specific products and creating market demand for them. Campaigns could highlight products from particular states or districts and use digital platforms and social media channels to tell the stories. These concepts need to reach the consumer's mind. Imagine a Kashmiri celebrity appearing in a video saying that Kashmiri walnuts are among the best in the world, or a well-known sportsperson or artist from Mizoram promoting their state's dry ginger and turmeric.

By promoting these products through storytelling, content creation, and marketing, the government can help monetize the investments already made in building farmer institutions and infrastructure over the years. Such campaigns would create a market pull. When consumers start asking for these products, demand rises—and when demand rises, farmers' incomes increase.

We have suggested this idea in several forums, and policymakers and state government representatives usually respond very positively. But, ultimately, someone needs to take ownership of implementing it. For example, the Ministry of Commerce could select five or ten key products each year and run nationwide campaigns around them. The objective would not be to promote a specific company or brand, but to build demand for the product itself. Whether the product is sold directly by farmers or in partnership with companies does not matter—the important thing is that farmers benefit from the increased demand and higher incomes.



4

DISCUSSION

This study indicates that FPOs can perform the dual function of protecting biodiversity and ensuring resilient agriculture, thereby boosting farmers' incomes. To do this, farmers need support in the form of seeds, inputs (natural fertilizers and pesticides), farm machinery suited to small farms, processing technology and markets.

There is a lack of comprehensive data on FPOs and details of their work. In 2024, the Tata–Cornell Institute used data from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, and found that 44,460 FPOs working in agricultural fields were registered between 2003 and September 2024, but there is no information on their current status.¹⁰ While there is data on the 10,000 FPOs formed under the Central scheme, there is no information about the crops they work on. We looked at the FPOs that received the awards, such as CII FPO Excellence Awards, FPO Impact Awards, FPO Icon Awards and Samunnati Lighthouse FPO Conclave—while some of the winners do work on indigenous foods, this is not a specific eligibility criterion.

More FPOs need to work on indigenous varieties. This will help farmers adapt to climate change and ensure a cleaner and toxic-free environment and better incomes for the farmers. Though there are few examples of FPOs working on indigenous varieties of crops, the case studies in this report indicate that such organizations help farmers reduce input costs through bulk procurement, improve price realization through collective marketing, improve direct access to markets by cutting out the middlemen, and add value through processing, branding and packaging.

According to the *2023 Annual Survey of Marginal Farmers*, agriculture is dominated by small and marginal farmers and smallholdings, which account for about 86 per cent of all farm holdings in the country.¹¹ We found that FPOs working with indigenous seeds, organic farming and natural farming face issues including lack of markets and of suitable inputs such as seeds and fertilizers. FPOs need to work with these small and marginal farmers, who are the custodians of indigenous seeds, which perform better than hybrids when grown with organic inputs. Another imperative is to support women-run FPOs as their control over seeds, production and marketing improves household nutrition.

FPOs have the potential to strengthen smallholder agriculture, but this potential is realized only when these organizations are supported beyond formation. Similarly, existing procurement and pricing systems continue to favour a narrow set of crops. This misalignment limits the scale at which biodiversity-based farming can be sustained. This needs to change. Overall, we need a special scheme to motivate FPOs to produce and market indigenous crops.

5

RECOMMENDATIONS



Based on the case studies and expert insights, we recommend the following to strengthen Farmer Producer Organizations working with indigenous varieties:

1. Need for policy and institutional framework

- There is currently a lack of a Central policy specifically supporting indigenous foods. Experience from states that have such policies shows that they help FPOs grow and function better. A national policy or mission focused on indigenous crops and biodiversity-based food systems would help align schemes, funding and institutional support.
- Extension services need to be aligned toward sustainable, biodiversity-based agriculture. Currently, there is a contradiction in which government staff promote hybrids while also encouraging natural farming. Better coordination is also needed between departments dealing with agriculture, biodiversity, nutrition, tribal welfare, rural development and climate change.

2. Strengthening Farmer Producer Organizations

- FPOs working with indigenous crops face several institutional and financial challenges. There is currently little formal recognition of natural produce, making it difficult to assure consumers that products are genuinely natural and chemical-free.
- Small FPOs often face shortages of working capital because banks are reluctant to provide loans. They also face financial constraints when purchasing produce from farmers.
- Tax and GST exemptions for FPOs working on indigenous foods would provide relief. Tailored credit instruments, seed system finance, and subsidies for seed banks and processing units would reduce financial barriers.
- Rules governing the formation and functioning of FPOs also need to be reviewed for remote areas, where members live far apart and it is difficult to gather the required number of directors to pass resolutions. Legal and registration procedures are also expensive and time-consuming for small FPOs operating in such areas.

3. Market access and infrastructure

- FPOs require better market infrastructure to reach consumers. Dedicated platforms should be created in mandis where indigenous produce can be sold. Inclusion in the National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) would also improve access.
- Policies should mandate reserved stalls or platforms in mandis, Rythu Bazaars, and weekly markets specifically for indigenous and natural produce.
- Value addition improves market acceptance. Therefore, subsidies and grants

should prioritize village-level processing units owned by FPOs. These units can carry out cleaning, grading, milling and packaging locally. This will help farmers retain a larger share of value, reduce dependence on intermediaries and improve income stability.

4. Demand creation and public procurement

- Demand for indigenous crops needs to be strengthened. The government can play an important role in branding India's biodiversity. Campaigns could highlight products from specific states or districts and use digital platforms and social media to share their stories.
- Products with Geographical Indication (GI) tags have stronger market potential and should be promoted.
- Demand can also be created through institutional procurement. Traditional crops and millets should be included in public nutrition programmes such as the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme programme (ICDS), Midday Meal Scheme and Public Distribution System (PDS) and in government hostels and government hospitals. Government procurement, along with premium pricing for indigenous crops, would provide a stable market and reduce the need for farmers to search for new markets.
- The FPO consortiums can play an important role in providing branding and markets to indigenous varieties.

5. Support to farmers conserving indigenous varieties

- Desi seeds are in short supply. Policies should promote village-level production and conservation of indigenous seeds. Financial support, such as seed system finance and subsidies for seed banks, would also help strengthen local seed systems.
- Farmers who conserve and promote indigenous varieties should receive recognition and incentives. Monetary compensation should be provided for each variety conserved and for the quantity maintained.
- Seed registration and certification norms should be simplified to make it easier for farmers to conserve and share indigenous seeds.
- The government should also set a minimum support price (MSP) for these crops that is higher than the MSP for hybrids. Ideally, MSP should include production cost plus an additional 50 per cent. The government should procure produce when prices fall below MSP.
- Policies are also needed to support storage of indigenous crop varieties.
- Farmers also need training to produce organic manure, fertilizers and pesticides locally. Universities and agricultural institutions should be encouraged to work on indigenous crop varieties to strengthen conservation efforts and improve availability.

6. Recognition for role played in biodiversity conservation, climate resilience

- There is need for documentation of the work that FPOs are doing.
- FPOs engaged in biodiversity conservation should receive direct annual payments linked to the area under conservation-oriented practices. These ecosystem service payments will recognize FPOs not only as food producers but also as stewards of soil health, water resources, biodiversity and climate resilience.
- Greater coordination is required between agriculture, biodiversity, nutrition, tribal welfare, rural development and climate change departments. An integrated policy framework or unified national mission for indigenous crops and biodiversity-based food systems will enable better alignment of schemes, funding and institutional support.

REFERENCES

1. Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare. 2023. Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation, Amit Shah inaugurates the National Mega Conclave on FPO in the cooperative sector and releases the action plan for formation of 1100 new FPOs by PACS in New Delhi. Press Information Bureau (PIB). Retrieved from <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1939473®=3&lang=2>
2. Kumar A., et al. 2023. An Overview of FPOs in India. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anand-Kumar-284/publication/377815831_An_Overview_of_FPOs_in_India/links/65ba29bf34bbff5ba7daddf6/An-Overview-of-FPOs-in-India.pdf
3. Mukherjee A., et al. 2025. Current challenges and solutions for sustainability of Farmers Producer Organisations through grassroots organisational ecosystem. *Current Science*, Vol. 128, No. 7, 10, pp. 699–709. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anirban-Mukherjee-7/publication/390574083_Current_challenges_and_solutions_for_sustainability_of_Farmers_Producer_Organisations_through_grassroots_organisational_ecosystem/links/67f4bedd9b1c6c487783c6d3/Current-challen
4. Nikam V., et al. 2023. Farmer Producer Organizations in India: Challenges and Prospects. Policy Paper 40. ICAR-National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (NIAP), New Delhi. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Vinayak-Nikam/publication/377241668_Policy_Paper_on_Farmer_Producer_Organizations_in_India_Challenges_and_Prospects/links/659d17973c472d2e8ebfb6ca/Policy-Paper-on-Farmer-Producer-Organizations-in-India-Challenges-and-Prospects.pdf
5. Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, GOI. 2024. Draft 'National Policy on Farmer Producer Organisations'—Public Comments/Suggestions reagrding. Retrieved from https://agriwelfare.gov.in/Documents/HomeWhatsNew/National_policy_onFPOs_18.Jun2024.pdf

6. Anon. 2026. Government to extend FPO scheme for five years, address compliance and capital hurdles. Press Trust of India (PTI). Retrieved from <https://www.ptinews.com/story/business/govt-to-extend-fpo-scheme-for-five-years-address-compliance-and-capital-hurdles/3182340>
7. Kumar A., et al. 2023. An Overview of FPOs in India. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anand-Kumar-284/publication/377815831_An_Overview_of_FPOs_in_India/links/65ba29bf34bbff5ba7daddf6/An-Overview-of-FPOs-in-India.pdf
8. Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare. 2021. Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs). Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. Press Information Bureau (PIB). Retrieved from <https://www.pib.gov.in/FactsheetDetails.aspx?Id=148588®=3&lang=2>
9. Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare. 2025. Production of Organic Fertilizers. Press Information Bureau (PIB). Retrieved from <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx-?PRID=2201002®=3&lang=1>
10. Tata-Cornell Institute for Agriculture and Nutrition (TCI). n.d. Identifying the Number of FPOs Promoted in India: A centralized database can help make farmer producer companies more effective, Policy Brief. Retrieved from https://tci.cornell.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/TCI-FPO-Numbers_Policy-Brief.pdf
11. Anon. 2023. Annual Survey of State of Marginal Farmers in India. Development Intelligence Unit (DIU). Retrieved from <https://sambodhi.co.in/sambodhipanels/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ANNUAL-SURVEY-OF-STATE-OF-MARGINAL-FARMERS-IN-INDIA.pdf>

ANNEXURE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name of organization
2. States/districts where you work
3. Number and names of FPOs supported by your organization and number of members
4. Do the FPOs you support work with indigenous/traditional crop or seed varieties? Do you also promote natural farming?
.....
5. Which traditional/indigenous crops or seed varieties are being promoted, and why were these chosen (locally conserved, climate resilience, local food habits, market demand, etc.)?
.....
6. What type of market does FPOs mainly sell their produce to—local, wholesale or direct to consumers? Is there a distinct market for indigenous varieties? Do value-added products prepared using traditional varieties have a market?
7. Can you share one successful example or case study where an FPO helped conserve indigenous crops and helped increase farmer incomes?
8. Are there any existing policies or schemes that support FPOs working with traditional or indigenous crops? How have they helped?
9. Are there any challenges FPOs face in promoting indigenous or traditional varieties?
10. What specific policy changes or new support mechanisms would most help?

India's traditional crops offer a solution to climate and health challenges, but they remain underutilized in mainstream policy.

This report explores some Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) that have bridged this gap, turning the conservation of rare landraces into a profitable venture for small and marginal farmers. It also provides a roadmap for policy reform needed to secure India's food heritage.



Centre for Science and Environment

41, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi 110 062

Phone: 91-11-40616000 Fax: 91-11-29955879

E-mail: cse@cseindia.org Website: www.cseindia.org