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Women empowerment through Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs): A case study of Aurai Block, Bihar

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Abstract

As per the thought of Amartya Sen, “Empowering women is key to building a future we want.” Empowerment is the process of enabling an individual to increase control over their lives, to gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their lives, to increase their resources and qualities and to build capacities to gain access in order to gain control. Empowerment is now increasingly used and connected to social development groups such as poor people, rural women, farmers, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and marginalized people. Empowering women means encouraging them for their socio-economic development. Farmers Interest Group (FIG) is a self - managed, independent group of farmers with a shared goal and interest. A study was conducted in Aurai block in two Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) namely, Hari Om ATMA Group and Chandani Mahila ATMA Group. Data for this study were collected through survey with the help of an interview schedule. After having interaction with the women beneficiaries and complete understanding of study area, the researcher was drafting a schedule to capture various aspects related to this study. It is observed that there is a positive transformation in the life of women after being a part of the Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs).

Keywords: Women, Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs), women empowerment

1. Introduction

Women constitute almost half of the country's population, therefore enhancing their condition can immensely contribute to poverty alleviation. The word ‘Women Empowerment’ itself implies that women are not powerful enough - they need to be empowered. This painful truth has been in existence for a long time. It is in recent years that noticeable work started beginning to lift women out of the rift of insignificance and powerlessness. The patriarchal society suppressed women’s freedom across the world. Women were not allowed to vote or even put forward any opinion. Women were confined to their homes. As time progressed, they realised that their life meant much more than just serving in the household. As more and more women started crossing the man-made barriers, the world began to witness the rise of women. Unlike men, women never try to stifle the voice of their opposite gender. They hold the hands of all the downtrodden people - men and women both and they pull them out of misfortune as they try to improve their lives. To develop India as a superpower the development of women is equally important and it should be a priority to give her a chance to develop herself. Women’s empowerment plays a catalytic role towards the achievement of transformational economic, political and social changes required for sustainable development. Empowerment of women is very critical for the development of the society. Increasing gender equality and women’s empowerment, as a means of accelerating growth and development, is an end in itself. It allows individual women and girls to enjoy their full human rights and it leads to more stable economies and stronger societies. Women with equal access to opportunities can grow into strong and smart women who can take on leadership roles in the society. The term “women empowerment” has come out from the discussions in the major international conferences of the 1990s that have defined it as having five components: women’s sense of self-worth, their right to have and to determine choices, their right to have access to opportunities and resources, their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally (Guideline on Women’s Empowerment, POPIN-UN Population Division, United Nations, 2014).

A Farmer Interest Group (FIG) is a self-managed, independent group of farmers with a shared

goal and interest. The members work together to achieve this goal by pooling their existing resources, gaining better access to other resources and to share in the resulting benefits. Farmer Interest groups helps to alleviate women status not only financially but also socially and economically, as they earn their own money and are also able to support their family and therefore contribute to the development whole society. This group contributing to the requirement of the women who are in need for supporting their families, building up their self-confidence and hence empowerment.

2. Objective of the study

In the light of the aforementioned observations, the article critically sets the following objective: -

- To study the socio-economic profile and the changes occurred in the life of women after joining the Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) in the Aurai block.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Selection of area

The study was conducted in Aurai block of Bihar state.

3.2 Selection of farmer interest group

Two Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) namely, Hari Om ATMA Group and Chandani Mahila ATMA Group working at Aurai block were selected to conduct the present study.

3.3 Selection of sample

For the present study, total 40 women beneficiaries i.e., 20 from each Farmer Interest Group were randomly selected from the given Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs). All these women beneficiaries were chosen as target respondents to get information about their socio-economic profile and the changes occurred in their life after joining the Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs). The number of women beneficiaries in each Farmer Interest Group is given in table 1 below:

Table 1: FIGs in Aurai Block

Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs)	Number of women beneficiaries
Hari Om ATMA Group	20
Chandani Mahila ATMA Group	20
Total	40

Source: Field survey

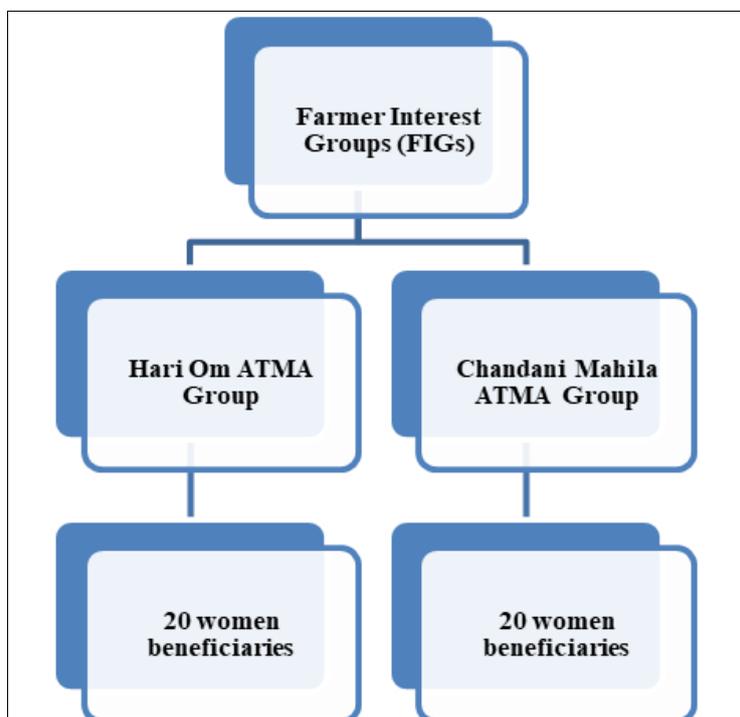


Fig 1: Samples framework

Collection of data

An interview schedule was formulated to elicit information regarding socio-economic profile of women. The questionnaire consists of questions focusing on the changes that occurred in the life of women after joining the Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs). As for this study we have collected the secondary data through various research papers, articles and websites. Primary data was collected through field visit of Aurai block from all the women who were part of the two Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs). Since a successful study would depend only upon getting the maximum amount of information from the women beneficiaries, hence the questionnaire was formulated with the same intention so as to bring out maximum information from the women

beneficiaries without sounding their sentiments and confidentiality. Their personal information has been kept strictly confidential. The questionnaire consists of numerous questions to meet the objectives of the study and the answers have been carefully recorded for a successful and valid research work. The result thus obtained is then analysed and processed in the form of tables.

Results and Discussions

Socio-economic profile

Socio-economic profiles plays an essential role in explaining the socio-economic life of the women. The socio-economic profile of the women also enables us to acknowledge their empowerment level. The data collected is shown below in the

table 2:

Table 2: Socio-economic profile of women

Particulars	Number of women beneficiaries		Percentage	
	Hari Om ATMA Group	Chandani Mahila ATMA Group	Hari Om ATMA Group	Chandani Mahila ATMA Group
Age				
Young (Up to 30)	3	6	15%	30%
Middle (31-50)	12	10	60%	50%
Old (Above 50)	5	4	25%	20%
Caste				
Unreserved	–	5	–	25%
Other backward class (OBCs)	10	7	50%	35%
Scheduled caste (SCs)	7	6	35%	30%
Scheduled tribe (STs)	3	2	15%	10%
Education				
Illiterate	4	6	20%	30%
Primary school	–	–	–	–
Middle school	–	6	–	30%
High school	14	6	70%	30%
And above	2	2	10%	10%
Marital Status				
Unmarried	–	–	–	–
Married	18	16	90%	80%
Widow	2	4	10%	20%
Divorced	–	–	–	–
Religion				
Hindu	20	17	100%	85%
Muslim	–	3	–	15%
Family type				
Nuclear	8	10	40%	50%
Joint	12	10	60%	50%
Family Size				
Up to 5	8	10	40%	50%
More than 5	12	10	60%	50%
Income Earners In Family				
One	6	7	30%	35%
Two	10	8	50%	40%
More than two	4	5	20%	25%
Family Occupation				
Unemployed	2	–	10%	–
Self-employed	–	–	–	–
Farmers	15	8	75%	90%
Labourers	3	2	15%	10%
Agricultural Land owner				
Yes	15	16	75%	80%
No	5	4	25%	20%
possession of house				
Own	20	15	100%	75%
Rented	–	5	–	25%
Social Participation				
Not member of any organization	–	5	–	25%
Member of one organization	16	12	80%	60%
Member of more than One organization	4	3	20%	15%

Source: Field survey

It is understood from the table 2 that the mostly women belong to the middle age group between 31- 50 years. Most of the women belongs to the other backward class group. The educational factor reveals that maximum of the women beneficiaries has received higher education. Only a few has received above higher education.

Further, maximum of women beneficiaries who responded are married, a very low number of women beneficiaries are widow. Most of the women beneficiaries are from Hindu religion. Most of the women beneficiaries lives in joint family

which indicates that their family system is united and members are close to each other. Large family size has been observed as there are more than 5 family members in the family due to large number of children.

Regarding the economic condition of the women beneficiaries, it is observed that there are more than two income earners in the family. Most of the families of the women beneficiaries are involved in agricultural activities. It is observed from the table that most of the families has own land. Most of the families have their own house. Furthermore,

most of the women beneficiaries belong to the member of one organization.

Table 3: Changes that occurred after joining Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs)

Changes	Hari Om ATMA Group		Chandani Mahila ATMA Group	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Education of beneficiaries	10	50%	8	40%
Rise in income	16	80%	15	75%
Social awareness	8	40%	6	30%
Improving socio-economic status	15	75%	13	65%
Developing decision making abilities	10	50%	7	35%
Becoming self-independent	9	45%	9	45%
Employment generation	13	65%	11	55%
Self-motivation	8	40%	10	50%
Developing leadership abilities	7	35%	8	40%

Source: Field survey

4.2 Changes that occurred in the life of women after joining Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs)

The above Table 3 depicts information on the changes that occurred in the life of women after joining Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs). Most of the women beneficiaries have experienced a rise in their income, whereas maximum women beneficiaries have invested their income in improving their socio-economic status and are able to enhance their life and quality of education. As they become self-independent and generate employment for the others which have improved the lifestyle of the entire women in Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs). Some of the women beneficiaries joined Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) to gain social awareness and are able to make decisions on their own and also develop leadership abilities and self-motivation to enhance their quality of life.

Conclusions

The study focused on Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) and its impact on women empowerment. The concept of Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) is a better way for women and helps them to improve their socio - economic status. Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) have an essential role in empowering women, as it gives women a way to get benefited socially as well as

economically. Their involvement in making decisions is enhanced. Farmer Interest groups (FIGs) enables women to develop leadership abilities and generate employment for others. After becoming self-independent, most of the women have experienced a rise in their income and use this income at first, to support their families and enhance their life and quality of education. Women have realized that they have an important role to play in the society and make major decisions regarding their life. There is an increase in women’s mobility and participation in social activities. Women are able to talk freely in public and are aware of the present happenings. They are encouraged and motivated to grow in the society. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is an increase in their awareness and knowledge. After joining Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs), there is a several changes seen in the life of women with respect to socio-economic conditions in the Aurai block. Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) has enabled the women of Aurai block to become self-independent which will enhance their standard of living. The Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) have made women more empowered and powerful as they have leadership abilities which can be used for enhancing their socio-economic condition and quality of life.



Fig 2: Case Study 1: Vibha Kumari (Farming)

Vibha Kumari, a resident of Kathaili village of Jalalgarh block of Purnia district, was born in a simple farmer's family. I lived with my parents, younger brother and two sisters. During interview, Vibha told the following:

After my marriage, the burden of responsibility increased on me for strengthening the financial system of the family. My husband had a cultivated land but due to poor condition and lack of modern knowledge, farming was not being able to do well.

Rice, wheat, maize were cultivated in the traditional way running in the village. One day a program 'Krishi Vaigyanik Aapke Gaon Mein' was organized under Farmer Interest Group in which all the aware women farmers of the village participated enthusiastically. In the program, agricultural scientists informed about farming that with new technology, improved seeds, timely sowing, irrigation and proper care, good quality yield of the crop was obtained. After receiving complete training, I started producing crops due to which my economic condition was strengthened. I made a different identity for herself as a women farmer and became a source of inspiration for other women farmers, youth and house wives of village and nearby areas. Many women farmers in the nearby areas increase their source of income with the latest technology.

**Fig 2:** Case study 2: Pratima Kumari (Tailoring)

Pratima Kumari, wife of Munni Kumar Patel, village Madhepura, panchayat Belav, Block Shekhopursarai, District Sheikhpura (Bihar). During interview, Pratima told the following:

I had only one acre of land. I was somehow sustaining my family by doing farming with this one acre of land but I was worried about not being able to meet the expenses of my family. Then I was started learning sewing which was organised by the women of Farmer Interest Group and I used to go to the centre for two hours to learn sewing and in this way, I learned sewing in three months only. Then in the meantime, I bought a sewing machine by taking a loan from the SHGs and then started doing sewing work at my home. So that I started getting some income. Now I calculated the cost and income and then felt that this work can change my life

and make me self-independent. I also told other women to do sewing and the other women also started doing sewing. Now through tailoring work, my income is about 3000-4000 rupees in a month. With the help of Farmer Interest Group, a women's food security group has also been established in which I am the Deputy Chief. In this way, I was feeling happy in my life and also motivate others to move forward.

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