

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN FARMERS THROUGH GROUP FARMING PRACTICE BY JLGS IN PALAKKAD BLOCK

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Abstract

Kerala is primarily a rural economy. But the current practice is moving away of farm land conversion of farm land for residential purpose or to other purpose. People are moving away from farm activities. At the same time there exists large areas of uncultivated farm land. It was at this time that Govt of Kerala had adopted Group farming practice. Kudumbassree under Joint Liability Groups has taken up the initiative of group farming. Many of the land less women got an opportunity to become farmers under Sangha Krishi or JLG farming. Govt of Kerala had initiated several programs for the upliftment of the farmers through JLG farming. All these caused for the empowerment of farmers. Here is an attempt to examine the farmer empowerment through the group farming practice.

Key words: Sangha Krishi, Empowerment, Group farming, CDS, ADS, Kudumbasree

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Farmer empowerment is one of the important factors for the social and economic development of a region. It includes different ideas of farmers as citizens who should play a vital role in securing improvements in the functioning of government and markets through their actions at local level. In the international development forum empowerment has formed as an important part of the discussion of gender equality. Participatory activities could empower poor farmers. They can enhance capacity building and can improve confidence. Contract farming type of farming can direct landless people in to the path of farming. The Farmer Empowerment and Protection Agreement on Price Assurance Act, Govt of India, 2020 gives a national framework for contract farming.

Farmer empowerment often is connected with the using up of available resources. For this creation of groups is considered as an effective method to boost linkages between farmers. The linkages are useful for accessing credit facilities. Farmers can be empowered by providing inputs, technical knowledge etc.

The approaches to empower farmers are of different types. It can be represented through a pyramid. Here, I – agricultural inputs, TA – technical advice, FO – farmer organizations, RBA – rights-based approach, D – democratization.

The Farmer Empowerment Pyramid

$$\begin{array}{c}
 I \\
 I + TA \\
 I + TA + FO \\
 I + TA + FO + RBA \\
 I + TA + FO + RBA + D
 \end{array}$$

(Ministry of foreign affairs, Denmark, Sept 2004)

The traditional approach to empowerment were represented at the top and more modern approaches of contemporary discussions were represented in the bottom. At the individual level knowledge, resources, status and self-esteem helped to develop the capacity building. Empowerment strengthens the position of people as members of families and as economic actors. It is both a process and result. The process is awareness and capacity building where as the result is greater participation. Access to financial services, human assets like skill, farming knowledge, organizational ability, interaction with markets, knowledge elements like analytical ability, tools to cover information on markets, Agri services, technologies and self-esteem factors like social esteem, relationships to authorities are considered as factors responsible for empowerment. (Ministry of foreign relation, Denmark)

Women and farming

Women form the backbone of the agricultural economy in India. About 79% of women workforce in India is engaged in agriculture. Women works in the field of production, preparation, fertilizing etc. Mostly women work in family farms and also as paid agricultural laborers. They also work in leased lands. Even with their contribution they remain as most vulnerable group. They lack access to education, extensive services, land, credit facilities and thus remain as the largest group of landless labourers. Only 9.3% of women actively own land. In countries like India women constitute a substantial majority of agriculture workforce and produces most of locally consumed products. Actually, this can be considered as an extension of their household activities. Women works as a wife, daughter in law and as a mother. There exists a gender-based discrimination. Women are not recognized as farmers in Indian policies and denied institutional support of the bank, insurance and the government departments.

Women empowerment is the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy and training. By empowering women in the agriculture sector has of double-sided effect. One as a farmer empowerment measure and secondly as a measure of women empowerment. There are certain organizations which comprises women only. One such organization is ANANDI in Saurashtra, Gujarat. The women with less than 10- 20 cents of land were considered as land less. Such women were mostly included in the SC, ST or minorities. (Anand, S., & Maskara, M).

The gender relations of family farming can transfer agricultural information and knowledge resources to farm girls. Farm girls do not get proper information due to the lack of occupational inheritance of agriculture. Family farming can preserve some what the cultural values of traditional agriculture. People in local communities maintain traditional knowledge and they can transfer it through oral or non-oral means. They can regenerate local food system with environmental sustainability. (Lyson, T. A., & Green, J. (1999)).

States like Andhra Pradesh and Kerala has adopted certain practices for reviving the agriculture sector. Indira Kranthi Prathan is a group farming approach by women in Andhra Pradesh under Mahila Kisan Sashakteekaran Pariyojana (MKSP) The similar to that practice under the MKSP in Kerala is the group farming practice by Kudumbasree, the anti- poverty eradication mission in Kerala. The neighborhood group are the bottom levels groups under Kudumbnasree. JLGs are the grass root level groups formed for farming activities. It consists of 4-5 members. The members are mainly from the same neighborhood groups. Those members from the neighborhood groups who are interested in farming can form JLGs.

The group farming has changed the status of woman who were otherwise engaged as housewives or agriculture laborers to that of farmers. Earlier some of the respondents were engaged in thrift activities under kudumbasree, but they were also converted as farmers. The members of the groups were either from the same Neighborhood groups or from the different. The group farming under this facilitated for peer learning. The size of land holding by the BPL category is considered as a significant indicator of the way of life.

There are different studies to assess the performance of groups. Measuring output or direct benefit is important because it influence directly the welfare of group members. In Kenya direct benefit include Cash or credit, improved livestock breeds, knowledge, and spiritual uplifting. There is great challenge in measuring the performance of groups whose tasks are diverse whose outcome be components of larger or longer-term goals. There are different factors affecting group performance. (Place, F., Kariuki, G., Wangila, J., Kristjanson, P., Makauki, A., & Ndubi, J. (2004).

As per Ox farms experience in Sub Saharan Africa, collective action has the advantage of improving the position of small-scale farmers in markets including the delivery of inputs and training, economies of scale and increasing bargaining power. Farmers are more able to obtain information, reach quality standards and operate on a larger scale when they pool financial and labour resources. This will enable farmers to sell in markets including international markets which is out of reach for small farmers. In a small holder agricultural system, there may be problems related to poor market information, high transaction cost, limited and asymmetric information, lack of coordination and lack

of market power. Generally smaller groups where there are more chances of accountability by the leaders are effective. (Shiferaw, B., & Muricho,2011)..

Participation in the activities of Kudumbasree can act as an instrument for the upliftment of rural women. The collective farming initiative elevates agriculture to a higher level by bringing more fallow lands under farming. About 80% of the SHGS enjoyed credit from the banks (KV Praveen and A Suresh)

Collective farming by Kudumbasree proved that agriculture with proper institutional support can be considered as a livelihood activity. Kudumbasree has opened connection with local branches of public sector banks in taking land under lease. This helps farming groups to avail loan facilities through better credit system. This is an addition to the availability of loan facilities available within the community and neighborhood areas. Pattom, the system of land leasing is prohibited with in the state. But through the initiative of Kudumbasree farmers can cultivate land. (Bindu P Varghese and Rajiv Kumaramkandath).

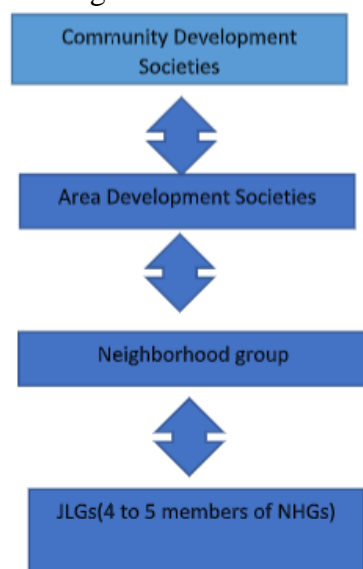
The three tiered community-based training architecture under Kudumbasree is evaluated through JEEVA. It has proved that the most effective and sustainable manner of community training through which the knowledge is shared among the maximum number of people with minimal cost. The selected JEVA members act as the apex units for the training architecture. Training is made in a consistent manner such that a group of 604 persons over the entire state. (kudumbasree state mission)

Farming under Joint Liability Groups (JLGs)

In Kerala Kudumbasree has undertaken group farming by forming Joint liability groups. They are formed from the neighborhood groups. The members who have interest in farming related activities have formed JLGs and linked it with banks for getting financial assistance.

In the Sangha Krishi or JLG farming, Family has an important role. It is the practice of landless women who otherwise were remaining as agriculture workers or housewives. These women are clubbing family activities with farming activities. Mostly they get support from the family too. So, they can preserve the indigenous practice

The structure of JLG farming:



Community Development Societies (CDS) were existing at the local panchayath level. The ward level activities were under the Area Development Societies (ADS). There were also NHGs at the local level which consists of 10-20 women from poor neighborhood households. From the NHG members 4-10 members were combined to form JLGs where they were linked to a bank for getting loan facilities. Mostly number of members were limited to 5. An amount of 1 lakh per acre was sanctioned to each group for a maximum of 3 lakhs as per interest subsidy scheme. Besides this area incentive were also provided according to nature of crop cultivating. The auditing was done by the JEVA members. Each JLG have to maintain the account book which is auditable later. The positive influence from the supporting network and different agencies and Grama Panchayat helped the

farmers. The local bodies helped to procure fallow land from the land owners. The land was fixed at a rent or on the basis of crop harvested. The farming activity with the support of local government institutions gives the women farmers a higher level of confidence which is helpful for their empowerment.

The present study attempts to study the empowerment of women farmers under the JLG farming of Kerala. The objective of the study is as follows

1) to find out the level of empowerment of farmers after joining the group farming through JLGs

Group farming under JLGs is a statewide programme. Palakkad district consists of 13 blocks. Here we are taking the group farming activities in Palakkad block only. Palakkad is the block where crop diversification is practiced. The different crops cultivated here are categorized into paddy, banana and vegetables and tubers.

Data sources and Methodology

The study takes primary data. The sample size is 80. Two respondents were taken from 40 JLGs which were selected randomly. The members include 40 president and 40 farmer members.

The first objective is to find out the empowerment of farmers before and after joining JLGs. Empowerment index was constructed for both periods. Here farmer empowerment is calculated as a summation of Political, social, economic, knowledge and psychological empowerments. The farmer empowerment index of farmers and presidents were measured separately. 5-degree Likert scale is used to mark responses where the maximum value is 5 and minimum value is 1. Independent sample t-test was used to measure the change in income level after joining JLGs. Independent sample t-test was used to compare the empowerment before and after the entry to JLG farming.

Mean, correlation and frequencies were used at appropriate places.

General profile of respondents

95% of the farmers are married. 65% of them are coming from the class of OBC.

Before practicing JLG farming the respondents were engaged as agriculture labourers remaining as housewives. After the entry into group farming most of them began to consider farming as the main activity.

Main Occupation	Before entry in to JLG	After entry in to JLG
Agricultural labour	28(35)	15(18.7)
JLG	0	63(78.8)
Housewife	42(12.5)	0
Others	10(12.5)	2(2.5)
TOTAL	80(100)	80(100)

Before entering to JLG, the occupation of 35% of respondents were agriculture labour. At present only 18.7% of respondents are still considering or giving importance to agricultural laborer.

12.5% of respondents were housewives and now they are considering farming as the main occupation.

Factors determining Farmer empowerment

There are multiple factors which contribute to the empowerment of farmers. The factors contributing to the upliftment of women farmers can have a greater effect upon the future of the farming sector. If women are empowered it will increase their decision-making ability. Women can spend more income including food and education of children's the improved food and educational achievement reduced health costs and improved labour productivity (C Leigh Anderson Travis W Reynold, Pierre Biscayne, Vedavati, Patwardhan and Carly Schmidt). If we give same access to male and female farmers, they will be equally productive.

The input application have a higher return than the subsequent applications as stated by the law of diminishing returns. So the women are coming from lower levels and marginal productivity from women's use of inputs would be higher than that of same level of investment in men (Croppenstedt, GoldStern and Rosas 2013)

The present study combines the five types of variables to measure farmer empowerment. The variables taken under the political, economic, social, knowledge and psychological heads are taken.

Farmer empowerment is the summation of political, economic, social, knowledge and psychological empowerments. The formula used for this is similar to the HDI index calculation.

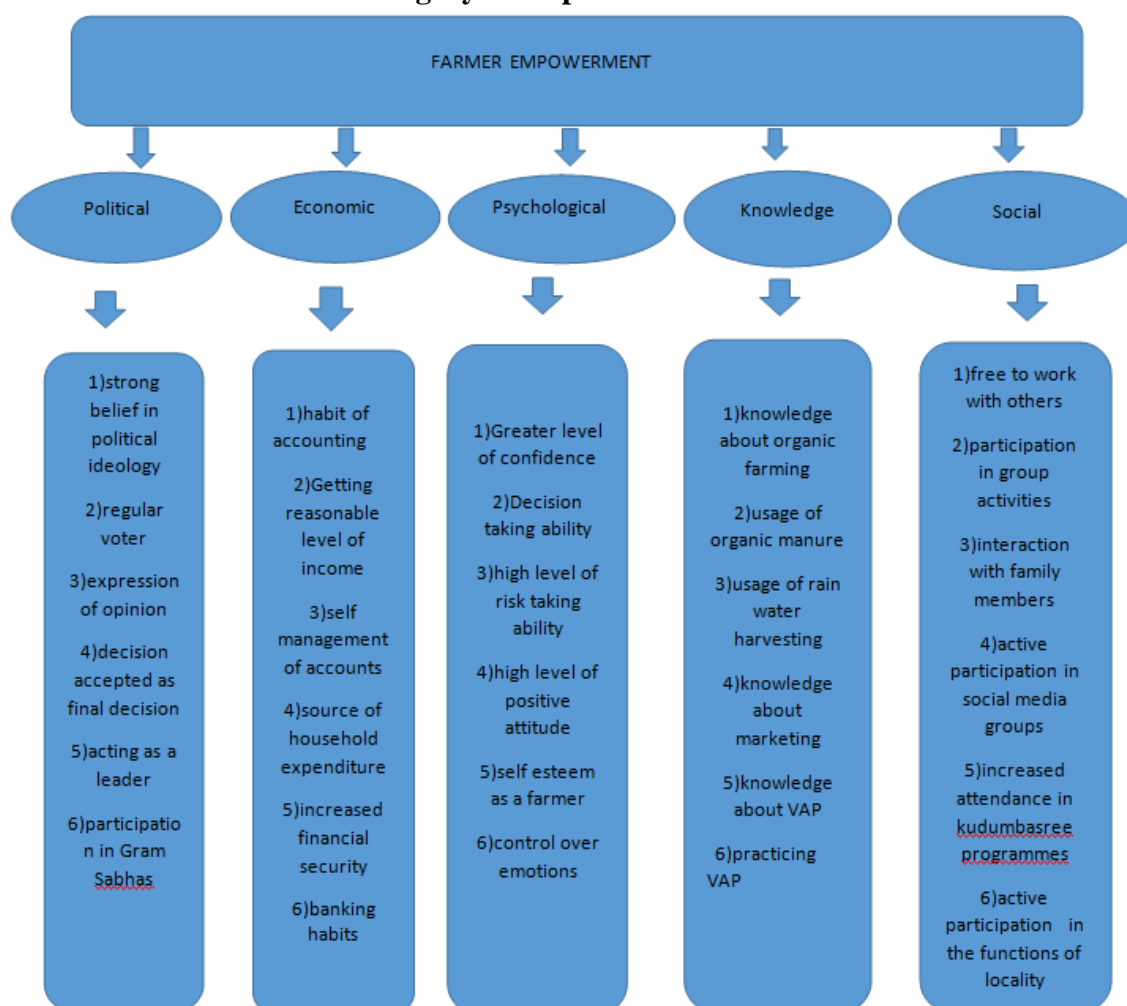
So, the farmer empowerment = $\frac{\text{Actual value} - \text{minimum value}}{\text{maximum value} - \text{minimum value}}$.

Here the farmer empowerment is measured among the farmers in the Palakkad district. 80 JLGs were taken and from each JLG, 2 Persons were selected. One is president and the other the member farmers. So, there is 40 presidents and 40 farmer members.

The factors determining farmer empowerment are broadly classified into 5 variables. In each category 6 factors were identified to measure political, social, psychological, knowledge and economic empowerment.

After calculating each empowerment as per the above stated formula, the total farmer empowerment index of member farmers and presidents were calculated each before entering into JLG and after the entry to JLG.

Variables included in each category of empowerment



As per the formula stated, the empowerment in each category were taken. Before joining in to the JLG Groups the farmer empowerments were very low. All the values in social, political, psychological, knowledge and economic were less than .4. After the entry in to JLG farming all of the indices rose to more than .5. The highest being social followed by psychological, economic and knowledge. So the total empowerment has increased to .5873 from a level of .3054 before the entry to JLG.

Empowerment indices

	BEFORE JOINING JLG	AFTER JOINING JLG	CORRELATION BETWEEN BEFORE AND AFTER VALUES
SOCIAL	0.2979	0.6547	.511(.00)
PSYCHOLOGICAL	0.3714	0.5875	.636(.00)
POLITICAL	0.338	0.5224	.625(.00)

KNOWLEDGE	0.2156	0.5854	.401(.00)
ECONOMIC	0.3042	0.5865	.367(.00)
TOTAL	0.3054	0.5873	.562(.00)

There exists a strong positive correlation between before values and after values at .562(p=.00) level. It means that the effect of empowerment is greater among those people who are comparatively better with respect to empowerment before too. The correlation is greater among psychological and political variables. The correlation is lesser among economic variables.

Comparison between the empowerment of president and member farmers

Comparing the empowerment level of the President and of members, all are benefitted through the group farming practice. The empowerment of both president and members in the group were improved after joining JLG. Both of them were higher than .5. So, the JLG farming has contributed for an improvement not only for presidents but also for member farmers. So, it is not concentrating any one particular section. Every farmer is benefitted through the programme.

Empowerment of president and member farmer										
Position in group	Social		Political		Psychological		Knowledge		Economic	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
President	0.2875	0.6885	0.3292	0.5167	0.3604	0.5802	0.2052	0.6083	0.2927	0.6104
Member	0.3083	0.6208	0.3469	0.5281	0.3823	0.5948	0.2261	0.5625	0.3156	0.5625

With respect to social, knowledge and economic empowerments, the empowerment of presidents were higher than that of members. On the other hand, members achieved higher than president's empowerment in political and psychological empowerment. Thus, the JLG farming has contributed towards a positive change among the rural women farmers.

Income level of farmers

Empowering women leads to economic benefits for women themselves and for their household communities. There will be an effect upon women's decision-making process related to productive resources, agricultural management and agriculture income. This helps to eliminate female male difference in resource access, increase in the women's use of productive resources and increased participation in labour markets. It will also have impact upon the nutrition and educational attainment of children (Leigh Anderson, Travis W Reynolds. Pierre Biscaye, VedavatiPatvardhan Clary Schmidt)

Farmer group empowerment programmes are considered as a programme for agriculture development. Farmer groups are the key development resource in agriculture sector. These strategies have a positive influence upon the income level too (Nia Desiana, AtikAprianingsih)

The end of any economic activity should have its positive impact upon the income level. So here we attempt to find out whether the JLG farming has contributed towards a positive change in income level. The income changes are taken for the total 80 farmers in Palakkad block. In all JLGs the farmers are equally distributing the gain from farming. So, there is no scope for measuring the income change for president and member farmers separately.

Independent sample t test was used to measure the change in income before and after the entry in to group farming.

There is a significant level of change in the mean weekly income of the family.

	Mean weekly income(rupees)	No of farmers
Income before group farming	5175(.00)	80
Income after Group farming	7293(.00)	80
correlation	.975(.00)	

The mean income of farmers before the entry of JLG farming was 5175 rupees. After the entry to JLG farming the income level of the family rose to 7293 rupees. The increase in family income is due to the entry to the group farming. It shows the effectiveness of the group farming through JLGs. The change in income is obviously will be the income from the JLG farming. There also exist a high degree of correlation between the farmers before and after the entry to JLG. That means the income change was proportional to their previous income level. All these causes for their empowerment.

Findings and conclusion

The major findings of the study are the following

1) the number of respondents with in the Agriculture labourer category has decreased from 35% to 18.7%. It means they were transformed to the category of farmers. Even then it shows that 18.7 % of the total respondents considers agriculture labour as the major occupation. The number of respondents with in the housewife's category is also changed. Most of them began to engage in farming activities.

2) the group farming practice through JLGs has caused for the empowerment of farmers. The empowerment has occurred to presidents and other member farmers alike. It shows the effectiveness of the policies of the authorities. There is a high change in social empowerment

3) The entry in to the group farming practice has caused for an increase in the family income of the farmers from 5175 to 7293. It shows the efficiency of group farming practice.

The dream of socio-economic empowerment of women will not be complete without empowering those who are living in India's last periphery, that is the women farmers in India. The voices should be heard not at the policy level but also at the implementation level. (Oxfam international) The group farming practice under JLGs practicing in Kerala is somewhat satisfying these objectives. Group farming practice has caused for empowerment of farmers and increase in income. The empowerment had happened to all the members alike whether president or ordinary member.

As the motto of Food and Agricultural Organizations, that is, "leaving no one behind" we also have to close the gender gap. We may conclude by the writing of world Bank "Empowerment is the process of increasing capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices in to desired action and outcome. In this direction the group farming practice undertaken by the women farmers under JLG groups in Kerala plays a greater role.

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