



An In-Depth Analysis of Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Limited : Innovation in Agriculture

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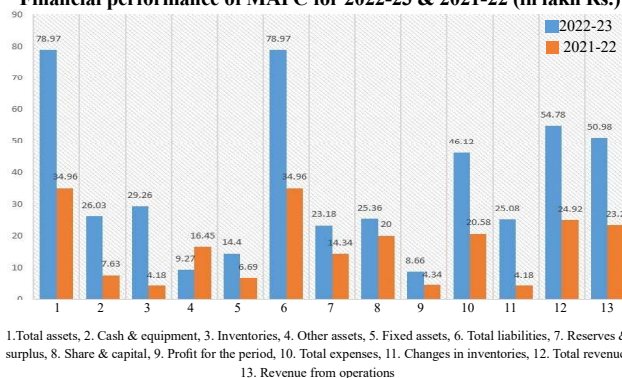
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HIGHLIGHTS

- The study employs a mixed-method approach, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the organizational structure, economic impact and innovative practices of the FPC.
- The research identifies and highlights the robust organizational structure and effective governance mechanisms within the FPC as key contributors to its sustained growth, offering valuable lessons for the development of similar agricultural models elsewhere.
- The study unveils the FPC's commitment to holistic rural development through community engagement and social initiatives.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT

Financial performance of MAPC for 2022-23 & 2021-22 (in lakh Rs.)



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ABSTRACT

Context: This study unveils the transformative journey of the Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Limited and the exceptional success achieved by the Farmer Producer Company (FPC) in enhancing farmer livelihoods, promoting sustainable practices and fostering community resilience.

Objective: The objective of the study is to comprehensively analyze the factors contributing to the success of the FPC and extract valuable insights for the broader understanding of effective agricultural models.

Method: Employing a mixed-method approach, the study combines qualitative and quantitative analyses. In-depth interviews with key stakeholders and field visits provide a holistic understanding of the organizational structure, economic impact and innovative practices of the FPC.

Results and Discussion: Economic impact analysis demonstrates a substantial improvement in farmer incomes, validating the FPC's role in enhancing agricultural profitability. Innovative practices, such as crop diversification and technology adoption, emerge as key drivers of success. Community engagement and social initiatives further underscore the FPC's commitment to holistic rural development.

Significance: The study contributes to the literature on Farmer Producer Companies, offering insights that can inform policy decisions, guide future agricultural initiatives and inspire similar endeavors globally. The success story of Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Limited serves as a valuable case study, demonstrating the potential of FPCs to drive sustainable agricultural development and community well-being. This research provides a nuanced understanding of the factors underpinning its success, emphasizing the need for collaborative, community-driven approaches in shaping the future of agriculture.

Agriculture remains the backbone of economies of many countries, including India where rural communities depend on it for their livelihoods (Agriculture census, 2015-16). In light of emerging challenges such as market instability, limited access to modern technologies, and inadequate infrastructure, the socioeconomic and agricultural development of farmers is hindered. To address these issues, Producer Organizations have emerged as a viable solution. These organizations aim to provide farmers with improved access to markets, modern technologies, and better infrastructure, thereby fostering their socioeconomic and agricultural development (Chendegara et al., 2023). In India, the agricultural sector has witnessed significant shifts and the rise of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) has garnered attention as an innovative model for agricultural development (Mukherjee et al., 2018; Venkattakumar et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2021; Gorai et al., 2023). In the dynamic landscape of agricultural development, the role of Farmer Producer Organizations has emerged as a transformative force, ushering in a new era of sustainable farming practices and community empowerment (Alagh, 2007; Singh, 2008; Venkattakumar et al., 2012; DAC, 2013; Venkattakumar et al., 2017; Mukherjee et al., 2018; Manaswi et al., 2019; Nikam et al., 2019; Amitha et al., 2021; Gorai and Wason, 2022). The Government of India had, in February 2021, launched a new Central sector scheme titled 'Formation and Promotion of 10,000 FPOs' by 2024 with a clear strategy and committed resources to promote 10,000 new FPOs in the country with budgetary provision of ₹6,865 crore (NABARD, 2021). Different legal provisions are there for registering Farmer Producer Organizations, like companies, trusts, cooperative societies etc. In general, it is seen that Producer Company is favourable legal form than other forms because FPOs registered under Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) have provisions for profit sharing generated by FPO in the form of dividend (NABARD, 2021).

The Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Limited, situated in the culturally rich and agriculturally vibrant region of Murshidabad district of West Bengal, has become a standout example of how collective efforts can yield remarkable results. While FPCs have proliferated across the country, the Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Limited stands out for its exceptional achievements in enhancing farmer incomes, promoting sustainable agricultural practices and

fostering community resilience. For this, the present study was conducted to analyze the organizational structure and governance mechanisms of this Farmer Producer Company, to assess its economic impact on the livelihoods of its member farmers, to explore the innovative agricultural practices adopted by the FPC for enhanced productivity and to examine the role of community engagement and social initiatives in the success of Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Limited.

METHODOLOGY

At first stage, a comprehensive review of existing literature on successful Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) in West Bengal was conducted focusing on key indicators of success, challenges faced and best practices. Then the authors identified and selected a target FPC with a noteworthy success story. The selection was based on criteria such as sustained growth, positive impact on farmer incomes, innovative practices and community engagement. The chosen FPC served as the primary case study for this success story. A multi-method approach was employed for data collection. In-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including FPC leaders, farmers, government officials and experts in agricultural development were conducted. Surveys were administered to a representative sample of forty FPC members to gather quantitative data on



Location of study area of West Bengal State

the economic and social impact of the organization. Moreover, the authors examined official documents, reports and financial statements of the FPC to understand its organizational structure, business model and growth trajectory. In the next stage, field visits were undertaken to the FPC's operational areas to witness firsthand the implementation of various initiatives, interact with farmers and observe the impact of the FPC on the local community. These visits provided context and enriched the qualitative aspects of the success story. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques. Qualitative data, including interview transcripts and field notes, were thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns and key success factors. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical tools to quantify the economic and social impact of the FPC. The validity of the findings was ensured through triangulation, cross-verification of information from multiple sources and feedback from key stakeholders. This step helped enhance the credibility and reliability of the success story. The authors adhered to ethical standards throughout the research process including informed consent, protected the anonymity of participants and ensured the confidentiality of sensitive information. At the final stage, the success story narrative was developed by organizing the findings into a cohesive and engaging storyline. The authors incorporated direct quotes, anecdotes and visuals to enhance the storytelling aspect and make the success story relatable to a broad audience.

RESULTS

An attempt has been made to record qualitative information through in-depth interviews of forty key respondents. Here a qualitative research technique, case study method was used to collect qualitative data and write case stories. Case stories added value to this research investigation in terms providing useful reflections and insights.

Background: "To pay remunerative price to the small and marginal farmers and direct sale of vegetables to urban consumers is our mission."- Indeed, this is the opinion of Giasuddin Molla and many other members of the Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Limited now running successfully in the villages around Murshidabad town in West Bengal.

Most of the farmers of Murshidabad district are small and marginal and are growing vegetables and selling in markets 50-60 km away. Farmers used to

face many problems of unavailability of inputs such as vegetable seeds and fertilizers, incur losses due to untimely rainfall and in the end get exploited by marketing agents and middle men in the market, thereby wasting money and time. Farmers always complained low incomes as they never could get remunerative prices for their vegetables. A need was felt to organize these small and marginal farmers but no one took any steps towards this dream.

Intervention: A non-government organization by the name Access Development Services (ADS) took up on the initiative to mobilize vegetable growers in the district. Farmers growing vegetables in the villages around 30-40 km were selected to form groups. Marginal farmers were given preference and 15-20 farmers were included in one group. About 100 such groups were formed. Farmers with leadership qualities were identified to lead the group. Head of the groups were trained about group norms, group culture and structure and the operation with the help of trainers from the Access Development Services.

After formation of the groups, farmers were provided with technical training on vegetable cultivation, especially on crop planning, farm management, input purchase and judicious use, post-harvest handling of the vegetables, grading, storage and marketing. Massive awareness campaign was organized to work in groups for vegetable farmers.

Ten like-minded leaders from among the small and marginal vegetable growers came together and formed Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Limited (MAPC Ltd.) on 28th January, 2013 with an initial capital of Rs. 1 lakh. Central Government promotes of FPO, the SFAC has funded, under its scheme, cash capital of Rs. 6 lakh to the MAPC Ltd. The MAPC Ltd. was set up under the central government project Vegetable Initiative for Urban Cluster (VIUC).

This company is by the farmers and for the farmers and is being run on democratic lines. Before venturing into operations, the ADS had thoroughly studied the business environment including local farm produce – the kinds and variety of vegetables grown, available marketing channels, marketing practices, prices at the wholesale market that farmers are getting and the prices customers are paying and the consumer preferences of vegetables and the infrastructure available for transporting and the all-weather road networks.

ADS funded the MAPC Ltd. For post-harvest infrastructure development of fruits and vegetables.

Table 1. Financial Performance Comparison for the Fiscal Years 2022-2023 and 2021-2022

Particulars	Amount (in Lakh Rupees)	Amount (in Lakh Rupees)
Revenue from operations	50.98	23.20
Other income	3.80	1.72
Total revenue (i+ii)	54.78	24.92
Purchases of stock in trade	6.44	5.99
Changes in inventories	25.08	4.18
Employee benefit expense	3.27	3.41
Other expenses	11.31	6.98
Total expenses (iii+ iv+ v+ vi)	46.12	20.58
Profit for the period (A-B)	8.66	4.34
*B/C Ratio (A/C)	1.18	1.21
Earnings per equity share	3.48	4.35

*All amounts are in rupees in Lakhs, except the last 2 rows

**For the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023

Table 2. Financial Assistance and Grants Received for the Periods 2022-2023 and 2021-2022

Assistance & Grants	Amount (in Lakh Rs.)	Amount (in Lakh Rs.)
NABARD - Grant	0.82	1.88
Loan - IGS	-	30
SFAC – Equity Grant	-	5.30
Loan - Ananya Finance	50	-
Loan Outstanding	52.50	30

*For the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023

Table 3. Balance Sheet Comparison as of 31st March, 2023 and 31st March, 2022

Particulars	31 st March, 2023	31 st March, 2022
Equity and Liabilities	Amount (in Lakh Rs.)	Amount (in Lakh Rs.)
Share capital	25.36	20.00
Reserves and Surplus	23.18	14.34
Term loan	29.99	-
Other current liabilities	0.43	0.62
Total Liabilities	78.97	34.96
<i>Assets</i>		
Fixed assets	14.40	6.69
Other non-current assets	9.27	16.45
Inventories	29.26	4.18
Cash and cash equivalents	26.03	7.63
Total Assets	78.97	34.96

*All amounts are in Rupees in Lakhs

The FPO has taken a rented space of 10 katha (670 sq.m.) for setting the Vegetable Pack House – the basic infrastructure for aggregating, grading and packing vegetables for safe transport. MAPC Ltd. has purchased one pick-up van for transporting vegetables. Table 1-3 reflects different financial parameters of the Producer Company. Table 1 provides data on Financial Performance and Table 2 describes Financial Assistance and Grants Received by the FPC for the Periods 2022-2023 and 2021-2022; while Table 3 reflects the Balance Sheet comparison for the year 2022 and 2023.

Provision of inputs to farmers: For strengthening relations with farmers FPC started responding to their problems. One problem that all farmers faced with lack of inputs at the time they are most needed. So, Company started to deliver seeds, fertilizers, pesticides. FPC opened an input shop in Berhampur to serve the farmers in the nearby villages.

“Local farmers were facing the problem of irregular supply of fertilizers. We solved this by collective purchase and delivery of inputs at farmers’ door step at subsidized rates, as we got rebate on bulk purchases, directly from agencies – IFFCO and others. Every type of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides are made available to farmers at 15% discount rate than market rates, This timely intervention by the FPC brought great relief to farmers and attracted them to accept membership” said one board member, Santosh Sarkar. *Collective sale of vegetables:* MAPC Ltd. initially started selling vegetables in nearby towns and gained experience in regular aggregation and grading activities. Company got involved in completely removing the middlemen and break the long chain of middlemen in the supply chain of vegetables. The sole aim is to maximize the farm returns to the member farmers.

“Our ultimate aim to form the producer company was only to benefit the small and marginal farmers” declared stakeholders. By resorting to collective purchase of inputs at discounted prices, farmers could reduce the cost of cultivation of vegetables. By resorting to collective sale of vegetables, directly to consumers, farmers could get a major share of consumer rupee and thereby all the member-farmers are happy and thankful to the FPC and its ideals.

Expanding operations of FPO: MAPC Ltd. Has worked out plans to sell vegetables of farmer-members at long distance market, on trial basis, directly to consumers in August 2016. After overcoming initial problems, direct sales to consumers picked up. Currently the FPC is in

the business of direct sale of vegetables at the farmers' markets in Kolkata and sub-urban areas. The FPC has achieved remarkable business volume by the activity of direct sale to consumers.

For continuous and constant supply of vegetables to farmers' markets, company has started the activity of direct auction at APMC market near Salt Lake in Kolkata. On an average, about 15-20 metric tons of vegetables are sold daily at this market now.

Farmer members' response: "We are happy that our vegetables were regularly sold at markets, 50-60 km away from our village. We could never dream of this achievement before. Now we are thankful to the company for making this facility at local level without any extra charges and efforts." Said Ratan Mandal, a farmer and stakeholder of the company. "This market helps us to save our valuable time and money. We are free to sell our vegetables without any intermediate fees." said Afjal Hossain, a tomato farmer.

Future: Now the Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Ltd. has 1000 member-farmers and generate employment for 70-80 persons. Now the FPC has turned out to be quite successful with a capital outlay of Rs. 25 lakhs. More and more small and marginal farmers are getting attracted to become members and being inspired by its success. In future, the company has new vision to scale up operations, build new processing infrastructure and provide social and cultural activities for their members and their families. Now all the farmer-members enjoy a sense of ownership, belongingness and sustainability and stability of their own FPC.

DISCUSSION

The vulnerability of small farmers with limited bargaining power and their susceptibility to monopolistic exploitation in formal contracts of the farmers, the Government of India introduced the concept of 'Producer Companies' (PC) following recommendations from the YK Alagh Committee in 2001. Amendments to the Companies Act of 1956 facilitated the establishment of these Producer Companies (Marbaniang *et al.*, 2019). The objective was to provide smallholder farmers with equitable opportunities to compete in modern agro-food networks, thereby enhancing their skills, revenue and bargaining power in both production (Noopur *et al.*, 2023) and marketing of agricultural produce, ultimately narrowing the gap between farmers and

consumers. The findings of this research shed light on several critical factors contributing to the success of the Farmer Producer Company studied, emphasizing the significance of the collaborative efforts between marginal farmers, Promoting Agency Access Development Services (ADS) and its officials. The following key points emerge from the reflections provided:

Empowerment of Marginal Farmers: Marginal farmers formed the strong base of the FPO. Sense of belongingness and ownership was experienced by all the members. The sense of togetherness in plight paved way for their might (Gorai *et al.*, 2023). This highlights the importance of involving and empowering marginalized sections in the formation and sustenance of FPCs.

Strategic Business Planning and Growth Opportunities: Access Development Services and its officials have made strong business plans by their basic study of vegetable business environment and continuously explored new opportunities for growth and expansion. The continuous exploration of new opportunities for growth and expansion underscores the role of strategic foresight in the success of FPCs (Mahapatra *et al.*, 2023). This aspect contributes to the evolving literature on business development within the agricultural sector.

Training and Capacity Building: ADS has also made the ground work strong by forming farmers' groups, training them on all aspects of vegetable cultivation and also on the group culture and group dynamics. The sole cause of success of this FPC is the training support rendered by ADS to all the farmer-members of FPC. This emphasizes the broader importance of capacity building in ensuring the sustainability and resilience of FPOs (Gorai *et al.*, 2022).

Responsive and Supportive Approach: ADS and its officials as well as the heads of farmers' groups are quite sensitive to the problems of vegetable growers. They have responded timely in collective purchase and distributing all required inputs to farmers, thereby winning their hearts. This is one problem all are harassed for and the FPC could solve so amicably and quickly adds to the success of the FPC.

The FPC could achieve the dream of enabling vegetable growers in selling vegetables directly to consumers, thereby getting the major share of consumer rupee. The production of vegetable by the members of FPC increased consumption of vegetables ensured nutritional security at their household level (Noopur

et al., 2023), besides development of entrepreneurship at village levels especially to farm women (Chauhan and Saikia, 2022; Chauhan *et al.*, 2023). The FPC has a growth orientation and expanded faster to far-away markets in Kolkata's farmer's markets. The future of this FPC seems to be quite promising. Reflections drawn from the stories were studied to understand the important factors leading to stability and success of the organizations. The success story of the high performing Farmer Producer Companies can be adopted as a model for organizing and mobilizing farmers into FPCs in other parts of country on a sustained basis.

Areas for Improvement: Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Limited has ample room for improvement in various aspects to better serve their members and contribute to agricultural development. Firstly, it can enhance the performance through comprehensive capacity-building initiatives aimed at improving members' skills in agricultural practices, financial management and entrepreneurial endeavors. Additionally, promoting the adoption of modern agricultural technologies and practices can boost productivity and quality while reducing post-harvest losses. Efficient financial management systems are also imperative to manage funds effectively and facilitate access to credit and insurance services. Sustainable agricultural practices should be promoted, focusing on environmental conservation and resource management. Lastly, it should develop risk management strategies to address production-related risks effectively and monitor their social impact on members' livelihoods and communities.

CONCLUSION

This research paper explores the remarkable journey of the Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Limited, a beacon of agricultural excellence nestled in the heart of rural India. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on successful Farmer Producer Companies, offering insights that can inform policy decisions, guide future agricultural initiatives and inspire similar endeavours globally. The findings aim to shed light on the tangible benefits and challenges faced by FPCs, with Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Limited serving as a valuable case study for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in the field of agricultural development. As we embark on this exploration of Murshidabad Agro Producer Company Limited's triumph, the paper aims to capture the

essence of its transformative journey, offering valuable insights into the potential of FPCs to drive sustainable agricultural development and community well-being.

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