

**Training Programme | Leveraging Agroecology for
Livelihood | September 29, 2026**

A stylized illustration of a woman in a purple sari carrying a brown basket on her head, walking through a field of golden wheat. The background is a light beige color with green and yellow geometric shapes representing the wheat stalks.

**The Role of FPOs in Conserving
and Promoting Agrobiodiversity**

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India's hidden agricultural opportunity

- Agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries make up 18% of India's GDP
- Small and marginal farmers hold 86% of all farm holdings in the country and are the custodians of most traditional crop varieties
- These varieties are better adapted to a changing climate than hybrids
- Consumer demand for nutritious, natural food is growing, a real market opportunity
- FPOs can be the bridge between this traditional wealth and today's market



Traditional seed bank and local crop diversity

Evolution of FPOs in India

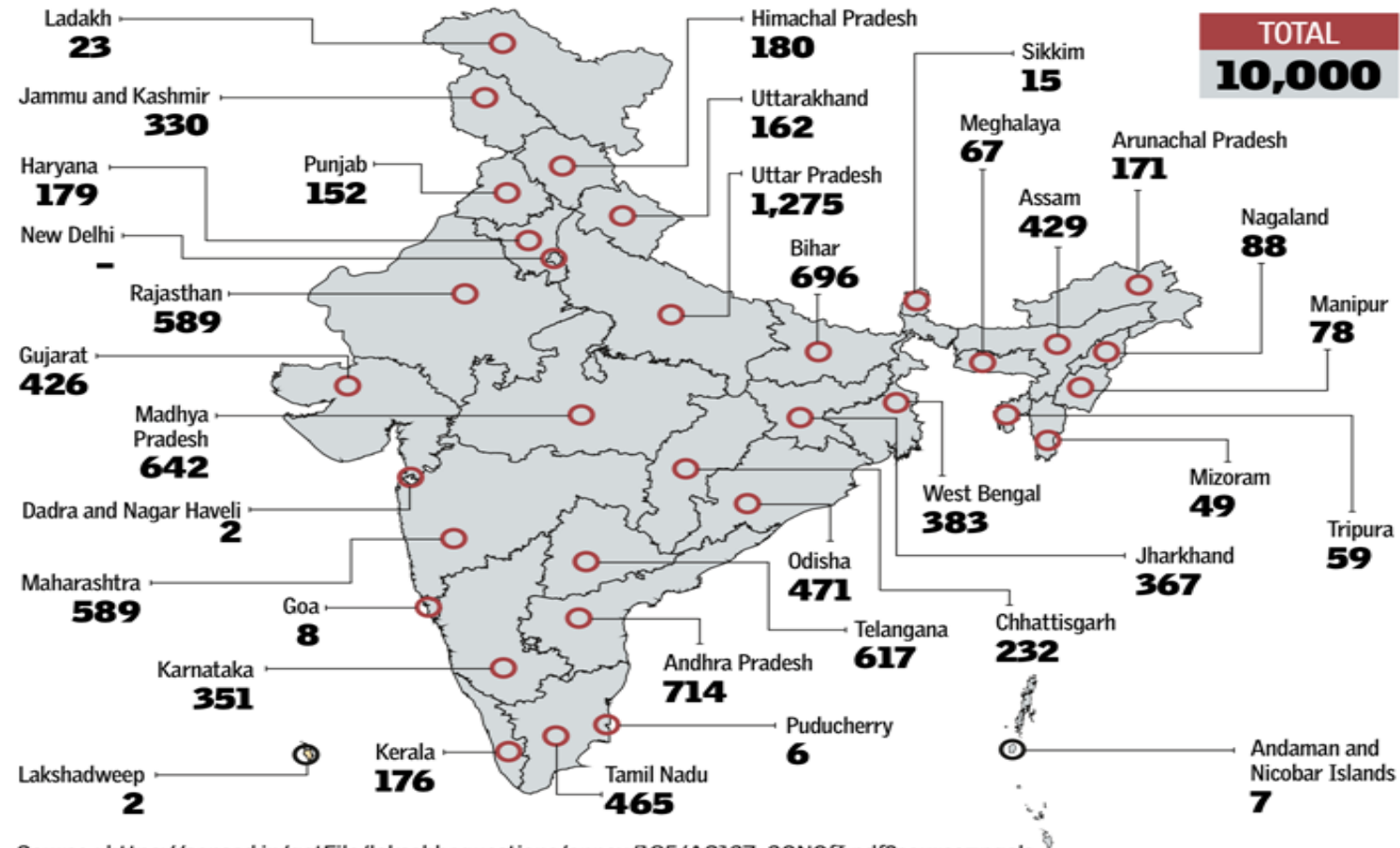
Milestone	Year
Farmer Producer Company Introduced	2003
First FPO formed in Kerala	2004
10000 FPO scheme Launched	2020

Today, FPOs receive institutional support through schemes involving NABARD, NCDC, SFAC and other agencies.



Farmer with traditional seeds

No. of FPOs registered under central scheme



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

Why many FPOs struggle?

Financial

- Working capital shortages
- Limited bank lending despite guarantee schemes

Institutional

- Small FPOs often excluded from larger programmes

Market

- Weak branding and consumer awareness

Seed systems

- Shortage of quality indigenous seeds



Farmer processing agricultural produce

What successful FPOs have in common?

Key success factors:

1. Farmer-owned seed systems
2. Premium pricing
3. Value addition
4. Branding
5. Direct market access

The complete value chain:

Indigenous Seeds → FPO → Processing →
Branding → Premium Market



Traditional crop produce being prepared for market

How FPOS can help small farmers?

- Reduce input costs - Collective buying of natural fertilizers and seed production saves money.
- Higher prices - Direct selling reduces middleman commissions and increases farm income.



Community seed bank and local seed diversity



Farmer handling harvested grain

- Climate resilience- Traditional crops survive weather shocks, securing baseline harvest
- Conserve biodiversity- Protects rare local crop varieties for future generations of farmers.

4 step action roadmap

Developed roadmap with 14 FPO leaders and practitioners working on the ground.

Step 1- *Choose the right crop*

Step 2- *Support farmers*

Step 3- *Building markets*

Step 4- *Navigate policy*



Different traditional crop diversity

Roadmap step 1: Identify winners

Choose the right indigenous crop first

A successful variety must satisfy three conditions:

- Farmers want to grow it because it is profitable.
- It is suited to the local ecosystem.
- Consumers are willing to pay a premium.

What FPOs should do

- Start with elders: ask farmers aged 60–70+ what they grew before the Green Revolution
- A 2–3 day seed-mapping exercise can surface 10–30 surviving varieties
- Run a diversity block: grow all collected varieties on half to one acre
- Trial with farmers and KVK scientists- taste, yield, quality, viability
- Start narrow- no more than five varieties at a time



Roadmap step 2: Support farmers

Build the entire farming ecosystem

The FPO should become the backbone of production, not just procurement

Priority actions

- Establish community seed banks.
- Develop dedicated seed producers.
- Train farmers in natural farming and bio-inputs.
- Invest in local processing infrastructure.
- Support organic certification, GI tagging and branding.



Roadmap step 3: Create markets

Think backwards from the consumer

Successful FPOs build markets before scaling production.

Market strategy

- Understand consumer demand for nutritious traditional foods.
- Tell the product's story- origin, farmers and health benefits.
- Build institutional buyers (temples, schools, hospitals).
- Maintain consistent quality.
- Partner with market-facing organizations when needed.



Roadmap step 4: Navigate policy

Scale requires an enabling policy environment

FPOs cannot create an enabling ecosystem alone, they need supportive institutions.

Immediate priorities

- Leverage existing schemes like NMNF and APEDA.
- Advocate for MSP support and easier credit.
- Seek dedicated mandi spaces for indigenous produce.
- Push for long-term capital and simpler certification systems.
- Strengthen branding for India's agrobiodiversity.



From roadmap to reality

KARNATAKA (ONLINE)

Bibi Jan Halemani

**Founder President, Bibi Fathima
Swasahaya Sangha**

Women's leadership in
building biodiverse farms

WEST BENGAL

Sourangshu Banerjee

**Team Coordinator, Professional
Assistance for Development
Action (PRADAN)**

FPOs for climate sensitive
and biodiverse agriculture

ODISHA

Edith Luna Panda

Advisor, Atragamee

How kalajeera rice secured
a GI tag and place in Shri
Jagannath temple's
Mahaprasad