

THE PRESENT STATUS OF MAHARASHTRA'S GROUP FARMING SCHEME

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ABSTRACT

Group farming has multiple benefits like collective planning and cultivation over increased continuous area, collective processing, value addition and marketing and technology application which otherwise seem challenges in Indian agricultural scenario. Hence, the Maharashtra State Government implemented the Group Farming Scheme during 2017-19. The present status of this scheme was studied and it was observed that maximum groups were registered in Nagpur and Amravati Agriculture Divisions of the state and the participation of farmers from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women farmers was very less. The groups were involved in a variety of agriculture and allied activities but were not undertaking collective cultivation as envisaged as the prime component of the concept of group farming. The farmers were able to reap individual and group benefits under the scheme and were able to raise huge amounts of loans as capital for group enterprises which would have had been extremely difficult for an individual farmer.

Keywords : group, farming, small, marginal, farmers, loan

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has always been an imperative component of the Indian economy and it has been proven especially in the Covid-19 crisis. During the pandemic, agriculture enterprise was one of the important sectors that helped the country's economy. The quarter ending June 2020 reported a contraction of 23.9 % in national GDP during the pandemic of Covid -19, but agriculture was the only sector to have reported positive growth. The Gross Value Added (GVA) by the agriculture sector increased by 3.4 per cent during 2020 as compared with 2019 (Mahapatra 2020).

The Government of India has put forth the objective of doubling the farmers' income by the year 2022. Land, irrigation facilities, strong input and output supply chains, mechanization and technical support are the vital aspects that remain essential for achieving this. Since independence, starting from the Community Development Project to ATMA, different extension approaches have been implemented by the Government of India for the development of farm sector. Group efforts by the farmers themselves following the group approach, too, have been in practice. Group farming is the most important and vital component of group approach. The necessity of group farming is emphasized on account of the following reasons:

- (1) Fragmentation of land
- (2) Ease of farming with the use of technology

- (3) Marketing strategy
- (4) Post Harvest Technology
- (5) Processing and value addition
- (6) Support allied business

Group farming is the process of doing collective, planned farming by the members of a group on a continuous geographical area in the farm, processing and value addition of agricultural produce, collective marketing through group arrangements and achieving personal, group and collective development through professional agriculture business. Different groups like Self-Help Groups, Commodity Interest Groups, Farmers' Interest Groups are in existence and are working, so as to minimize the cost of production and to earn more profit for the farmers.

Realizing the importance of group farming as an important component for doubling the farmers' income, the Government of Maharashtra implemented the Group Farming Scheme in the years 2017-18 and 2018-19. The farmers had to register with a group of at least 20 members and 100 acres of land to avail the subsidy of up to Rs.1.00 Crore provided to the beneficiary group after sanction of their project report under his scheme. Subsidy was provided for development of various components in farming from production to processing and marketing. Hence, present study was undertaken with the objective of studying the present status of group farming scheme in Maharashtra.

OBJECTIVE

To know the the present status of Maharashtra’s group farming scheme

METHODOLOGY

In the year 2017-18 four groups and during year 2018-19 seven groups were established and registered under the Group Farming Scheme in Pune district. Thus, total 11 groups were functional in Pune district under the Group Farming Scheme. Group leaders of all the eleven groups were approached for collecting information. Leaders of eight groups showed willingness to share information regardless of COVID-19 pandemic situation, and hence, these eight groups were selected for the present study. The number of members from the selected eight groups’ varied between 20 to 52. All the farmer members of each selected group were requested to remain present following pandemic necessitated social distancing norms for collection of information at specific date, time and place allotted for each group. Information was collected from 124 farmer members from these 8 groups that remained present to share the information even during pandemic situation. Thus, the 124 farmer members that remained present for data collection, constituted the sample for the present study. Data was collected through personal contacts. Statistical tools such as frequency and percentage were used for analysis of data.

The information about the Group Farming Scheme of Maharashtra state was obtained from the office of Deputy Director (Extension), Department of Agriculture, Maharashtra state. Information about the number of groups, farmer beneficiaries of different categories participating, area (acrage) covered under the scheme and status of bank loans availed by the group was collected according to the eight agriculture zones of Maharashtra state. Pune district was selected purposively considering the access and availability of necessary information from the State Agriculture Department to study the yearly enrolment of members and groups, components / operational areas of the

1.2 Members under Group Farming Scheme in Maharashtra State

Table 2 : Distribution of group members under Group Farming Scheme according to social Categories

Sr. No.	Agricultural division	Number of members in a group according to categories				Total	Division wise percentage of members	Women
		General	Scheduled Caste	Scheduled Tribes				
1	Pune	1635	004	074	1713	12.26	034	
2	Konkan	1121	121	138	1380	09.88	134	
3	Nasik	1091	025	123	1239	08.87	143	
4	Nagpur	922	106	180	1208	08.65	099	

groups and the group (collective) and individual benefits availed by the groups / members. The information about the groups from Pune district under this scheme was obtained from District Superintending Agriculture Officer, Pune. The information pertaining to number of members in each group, land possessed by the groups, type of land available with the groups, crops grown, major crops, bank loans and its repayments, farming and allied activities of the group and initiatives taken for improvement of farm and income of the members was collected by individually and separately meeting the officials and members of the farmers groups registered under the Group Farming Scheme.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented under three major headings of Maharashtra state, Pune district and representative sample, respectively.

(1) Maharashtra state

1.1 Number of groups in Maharashtra state

Table 1 : Distribution of groups under group farming scheme in Agriculture Divisions of Maharashtra State (n=318)

Sr. No.	Agricultural Division	Number of groups	Percentage of groups
1	Pune	38	11.95
2	Konkan	15	4.72
3	Nasik	37	11.64
4	Nagpur	64	20.13
5	Latur	43	13.52
6	Kolhapur	34	10.69
7	Aurangabad	26	8.17
8	Amravati	61	19.18

Table 1 depicts that Nagpur division had highest number of groups (20.13 per cent) registered under Group Farming Scheme in Maharashtra state followed by Amravati (19.18 per cent), Latur (13.52 per cent) and Pune division (11.95 per cent).

Sr. No.	Agricultural Division	Number of members in a group according to categories					
		General	Scheduled caste	Scheduled tribes	Total	Division wise percentage of members	Women
5	Latur	1706	091	003	1800	12.89	196
6	Kolhapur	1213	042	002	1257	09.00	159
7	Aurangabad	3075	009	0	3084	22.08	024
8.	Amravati	1850	318	120	2288	16.37	415
Category wise total number of members		12613	716	640	13969	100.00	1204
Category wise percentage of members		90.29	5.13	4.58	100.00	---	8.62

Table 2 shows that there were large majority of members (90.29 per cent) from general category under group farming scheme in Maharashtra state. Farmer members participating in the Group Farming Scheme from the scheduled caste and schedules tribes were very less, viz; 5.13 per cent and 4.58 per cent, respectively. The proportion of women members was merely 8.62 per cent.

Divisionwise distribution of the number of members in groups revealed that Aurangabad division had 22.00 per cent members followed by Amravati (16.37 per cent members), Latur (12.89 per cent members) and Pune division (12.26 per cent members).

1.3 Area under group farming scheme

Table 3 : Division wise area under the groups of the group farming scheme

Sr. No.	Agricultural Division	Area (ha.)	Percentage
1	Pune	1613.17	10.12
2	Konkan	1699.56	10.66
3	Nasik	1657.91	10.40
4	Nagpur	2387.21	14.97
5	Latur	2027.68	12.72
6	Kolhapur	1712.20	10.74
7	Aurangabad	2250.49	14.12
8	Amravati	2593.12	16.27
Total		15941.33	100.00

Table 3 indicates that Amravati division had highest area under this scheme (16.27 per cent) while Nagpur and Aurangabad divisions had 14.97 per cent and 14.12 per cent

of area under Group Farming Scheme, respectively. The groups from Pune division under the Group Farming Scheme had an area of 1613.17 ha.

1.4 Bank loan availment status of groups under group farming scheme

Table 4 : Bank loan availment status according to agriculture divisions of groups under group farming scheme

Sr. No.	Agricultural Division	Number of groups applied for bank loan	Sanctioned loans	Not sanctioned loans	Pending proposal	Number of groups not applied for bank loan	Total number of groups
1	Pune	20	06	14	00	18	38
2	Konkan	12	06	04	02	03	15
3	Nasik	37	14	14	09	00	37
4	Nagpur	46	11	23	12	18	64

Sr. No.	Agricultural division	Number of groups applied for bank loan	Sanctioned loans	Not sanctioned loans	Pending proposal	Number of groups not applied for bank loan	Total number of groups
5	Latur	40	19	02	19	03	43
6	Kolhapur	33	29	04	00	01	34
7	Aurangabad	16	10	06	00	10	26
8	Amravati	48	22	26	00	13	61
Total		252	117	93	42	66	318
Percentage		79.25	46.43	36.90	16.67	20.75	100

Table 4 depicts that 79.25 per cent of the groups under Group Farming Scheme submitted proposal for availing loan from banks. From the total groups, 46.43 per cent of the groups received sanctions for loans while loans of 36.90 per cent groups were not sanctioned and loan sanction proposals

of 16.67 per cent groups were pending with the banks when the information was collected. One-fifth (20.75 per cent) of the groups had not submitted proposals for availing loans from banks till the time of study.

(2) Pune district

2.1 Groups according to formation years and members from different categories

Table 5 : Groups according to formation years and members from different categories

Sr. No.	Year	Number of groups	Category wise number of members			
			General	SC	ST	Women
1	2017-18	04	115	00	00	01
2	2018-19	07	233	00	00	00
Total		11	348	00	00	01

It is seen from Table 5 that during the year 2017-18 four groups and during the year 2018-19 seven groups had been established in Pune district under the Group Farming Scheme. Category wise data shows that there were total 348

members in the eleven groups. All the members belonged to general category with not even a single member from the SC and ST categories and only one woman as a member amongst the total 348 members.

2.2 Components of work

Table 6 : Groups in pune district under group farming scheme and their work area components

Sr. No.	Name of group	Components / operational areas	Project expenditure (₹ Lakhs)
1	Purandar Natural Shetkari Gat, Bopgaon, Purandar	Common construction of cattle shed, milk storage and collection centre, oil mill, fruit and vegetable processing unit, vermicompost unit	179.62
2	Jogeshwari Kisan Samruddhi Shetkari Gat, Khamgalwadi, Baramti	Jaggery production unit	309.62
3	Deccan Valley Farmer Producer Company, Kalwadi, Junnar	Drip irrigation, mechanization, farm pond, livestock, vermicompost unit, processing unit, marketing	281.92
4	Rajvardhan Vividh Karykari Seva Sahkari Sanstha	Jaggery production unit	211.00
5	Shriram Shetkari Gat, Kalewadi, Purandar	Common pipeline, cold storage, fruit processing unit, polyhouse	165.23
6	Krishidhan Shetkari Bachat Gat, Padsthal, Indapur	Jaggery production, implements and machinaries	231.00
7	Shri Kateshwar Shetari Gat, kati, Indapur	Common farm pond, poultry, cattle shed construction, livestock feed production unit and pack house	215.00

Sr. No.	Name of group	Components / operational areas	Project expenditure (₹ Lakhs)
8	Shashwat Farmers Group, Surwad, Indapur	Cattle shade construction, oil milling, ghee processing, drip irrigation, common farm pond	221.80
9	Baliraja Shetkari Gat, Golegaon, Junnar	Community pack house, juice production, processing unit, bio-fertilizer production laboratory, plastic crates procurement, corrugated boxes procurement, tractor, blower, implements	216.90
10	Indrayani Krishi Seva Mandal, Charholi, Khed	Oyster mushroom production, polyhouse, cold storage, food processing	167.00
11	Vadheshwar Agro Sendriya Sheti Gat, Pasure, Bhor	Machinery and implements bank, common irrigation, poultry unit, cattle shed construction, marketing, shade net, rice mill	164.15
Total			2363.24

Table 6 shows that the groups in Pune district under group farming scheme are working for different component of agriculture and allied sector. The various work area segments reveal that the earlier focus on merely production in traditional farming has been shifted and the groups are working on processing of farm produce, marketing of produce, collection and storage of produce for which they were earlier dependent on marketing and processing functionaries. They are also working in allied sectors like dairy and poultry. They were also on the path of developing entrepreneurship amongst

themselves with the initiation of bio fertilizer production, animal feed production, oyster mushroom production and oil and rice milling to raise their income. They were also involved in creating irrigation facilities, mechanization and controlled farming for tackling the problems in farming. The amount involved for any of these projects was much more than Rs One Crore with 20 per cent of own share of the group which otherwise would have been highly impossible for an individual farmer.

2.3 Benefits availed by the groups

Table 7 : Distribution of the groups under group farming scheme according to benefits availed by them

Sr. No.	Benefit component	Unit	Total value (₹ In Lakhs)	Subsidy from group farming	Subsidy from other schemes
(A)	Group benefit components				
1	Group farming/farmers training/farmers tour	22	36.62	15.46	00
2	Irrigation facility area (acres)	681	131.36	71.74	00
3	Implement and Machinery Bank (Number)	19	41.7	7.21	14
4 (a)	Dairy management (Milk production Lit. /month)	28600	93.10509	55.14705	00
4 (b)	Poultry (Number of birds/batch)	68000	115.7829	69.46576	00
5 (a)	Controlled farming Polyhouse area (R)	-	-	-	-
5 (b)	Shade net house area (R)	0.2	5.24	3.14	00
6	Collection and storage	-	-	-	-
7 (a)	Godown (Capacity MT)	3140	236.9	121.49	00
7 (b)	Cold storage (Capacity MT)	195	174.93	104.96	00
7 (c)	Processing Centre (Capacity MT)	85.5	1061.518	490.4528	00
8	Marketing management (Number)	3	71.34286	20.25572	00
9	Other components	24	105.97	49.27	00
Total A		100769.7	2074.469	1008.591	14

Sr. No.	Benefit component	Unit	Total value (₹ In Lakhs)	Subsidy from group farming	Subsidy from other schemes
(B)	Individual benefit components				
1	Group farming/farmers training/farmers tour	4	2	0	00
2	Irrigation facility area (acres)	210	109.07	24.42	00
3	Implement and Machinery Bank (Number)	7	66.1	25.24	00
4 (a)	Dairy management (Milk production Lit. /month)	0	17.5	0	00
4 (b)	Poultry (Number of birds/batch)	10011	41.89	25.13	00
5 (a)	Controlled farming Polyhouse area (R)	0	0	0	00
5 (b)	Shade net house area (R)	0	0	0	00
6	Godown (Capacity MT)	0	0	0	00
7	Processing centre (Capacity MT)	0	0	0	00
8	Marketing management (Number)	0	0	0	00
9	Other components	10	85	0	00
Total		10242	321.56	74.79	00

Under this Group Farming Scheme, groups were free to avail collective benefits or individual benefits or both, collective and individual benefits, as per their requirement. Considering the problems in agriculture, under this Scheme, thrust was given on providing trainings, field exposure, irrigation, implements and machinery, storage, marketing and processing facilities for the produce. Table 7 reveals that under group component, 100769.7 benefit units of various components with total cost of ₹ 2074.469 lakhs were granted

with the subsidy of ₹1008.591 lakhs from Group Farming Scheme, while, under individual component 10242 benefit units worth ₹ 321.56 lakhs with the subsidy of ₹ 74.79 lakhs was granted. These figures show that more benefits were taken by the groups for group components rather than individual components. This reveals that the groups are focusing on the group development rather than individual development.

(3) Representative sample

3.1 Number of group members

Information pertaining to members in each group under study is presented in Table 8.

Table 8 : Groupwise number of group members

(n=226)

Sr. No.	Name of the group	Number of group members
1	Purandar Natural Shetkari Gat, Bopgaon, Purandar	22
2	Jogeshwari Kisan Samruddhi Shetkari gat, Baramati	20
3	Rajvardhan Vividh Karykari Seva Sahkari Sanstha, Varkute, Indapur	23
4	Shriram Shetakri Gat, Kalewadi	22
5	Krushidhan Shetkari Bachat Gat, Indapur	41
6	Kateshwar Shetkari Gat, Kati	52
7	Baliraja Shetkari Gat, Golegaon	20
8	Indrayani Krishi Seva Mandal, Charholi	26

3.2 Land holding

3.2.1 Land holding of individual farmers

Farmer members of the groups under study were classified according to their land holding.

Table 9 : Distribution of respondents according to their Land holding

(n=124)

Sr. No.	Land holding	Total 124 farmer members from eight sample groups	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Landless	00	0.00
2	Marginal (Up to 1.00 ha)	35	28.22
3	Small (1.01 to 2.00 ha)	52	41.94
4	Semi-medium (2.01 to 4.00 ha)	23	18.55
5	Medium (4.01 to 10 ha)	14	11.29
6	Large (10. 01 ha and above)	00	0.00

It was observed from Table 9 that 41.94 per cent of the respondent group members had small land holding followed by marginal land holding (28.22 per cent), semi medium land holding (18.55 per cent) and medium land holding (11.29 per cent). None of the members belonged to the category of large land holding.

3.2.2 Land holding of the respondent groups

The land owned by all the members from each group collectively was studied as land holding of the group.

Table 10 : Distribution of groups according to land holding of the groups (n=8)

Sr. No.	Land holding (ha.)	No. of groups	
		Frequency	Percent
1	Upto 45 ha	05	62.50
2	Between 46 to 49 ha	01	12.50
3	50 ha and above	02	25.00

Table 10 shows that 62.50 per cent of the respondent groups have land upto 45 hectares followed by one-fourth of

them (25.00 per cent) had 50 hectares and above land. Only 12.50 per cent of the respondent groups had land between 46 to 49 hectares. In spite of possession of land by all the eight groups under study, not even a single group was undertaking collective cultivation.

3.3 Type of land

Table 11 : Distribution of respondent groups according to type of land (n=8)

Sr. No.	Land possessed (ha.)	No. of groups	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Irrigated	05	62.50
2	Irrigated + Rainfed	03	37.50
3	Rainfed	00	00.00

Data from Table 11 reveals that 62.50 per cent of the respondent groups had irrigated land while 37.50 per cent had irrigated+rained land. None of the respondent group owned only rained land.

3.4 Crops grown

Table 12 : Crops grown by the respondent groups under group farming scheme

Sr. No.	Fruit crops	Vegetables	Cash crops	Cereals / Pulses
1	Grapes	Green Peas	Sugarcane	Bajra
2	Banana	Beans		Wheat
3	Pomegranate	Tomato		Sorghum
4	Custard Apple	Leafy vegetables		
5	Fig	Capsicum		
6	Guava	Broccoli		

Table 12 indicates that respondent groups were growing variety of fruit and vegetable crops. In the real sense it is the indication of changing farming system and changing attitude of farmers. Also some respondent groups were growing cash crops like sugarcane. They were also involved in cultivation of cereal crops like bajra, wheat and sorghum on a very low scale to satisfy their consumption needs.

3.5 Distribution of respondent groups according to major crops cultivated by them

Table 13: Distribution of respondent groups according to major crops cultivated by them (n=8)

Sr. No.	Particulars of crop	No. of groups	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Fruit crops	2	25.00
2	Vegetable crops	1	12.50
3	Cash crops	2	25.00
4	Fruit + Vegetables	1	12.50
5	Fruit + Cash crop	2	25.00
6	Vegetables + Cash crop	0	00.00
7	Fruits+Vegetables+Cash crop	0	00.0

3.7 Repayment of loan

Table 15 : Distribution of respondent groups according to repayment of bank loan (n=3)

Sr. No.	Bank loan repayment	No. of respondent groups		Remark
		Frequency	Percentage	
1	No repayment	1	33.34	Project work is in progress
2	Upto 25 % repayment	0	0.00	--
3	26 to 50 % repayment	1	33.33	--
4	51 to 75 % repayment	1	33.33	--
5	100% repayment	0	00.00	--

Table 15 reveals that from amongst those groups that had availed bank loans, 33.33 per cent, each, of the respondent groups repaid their loan to the tune of 26 to 50 per cent and 51 to 75 per cent. Only one group (33.34 per cent)

Table 13 indicates that one-fourth of the respondent groups (25.00 per cent) each were cultivating fruit crops, cash crops and fruits+cash crops, respectively. There were 12.50 per cent groups, each, that were engaged in cultivation of vegetable crops and fruits+ vegetable crops, respectively. None of the group had combination of vegetable+ cash crops and fruits+vegetables+cash crops.

3.6 Availed Bank Loans

Table 14: Distribution of respondent groups according to availed bank loans (n=8)

Sr. No.	Bank Loan	No. of groups	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Availed	03	37.50
2	Not availed	05	62.50

It is observed from Table 14 that 62.50 per cent of the respondent groups had not availed bank loan while the remaining 37.50 per cent of the groups had availed loans from banks.

3.8 Farming and allied activities

Table 16 : Distribution of groups according to farming and allied activities of the group (n=8)

Sr. No.	Particulars of activities	Number of groups	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Farming (Agriculture, Horticulture including polyhouse and organic farming)	8	100.00
2	Dairy	8	100.00
3	Poultry	1	12.50
4	Collection and storage of farm produce	4	50.00
5	Processing	8	100.00

It is observed from Table 16 that all respondent groups (100.00 per cent) were engaged in farming, dairy and processing. One-half of them (50.00 per cent) had collection and storage units while 12.50 per cent groups had poultry units.

3.9 Initiatives taken by the groups for improvement of farm and income of members

Table 17 : Distribution of respondent groups according to initiatives taken for improvement of farm and income of members (n=8)

Sr. No.	Particulars of activities	Number of groups	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Land and soil improvement (Bunding, leveling, green manuring, use of bio-fertilizers)	2	25.00
2	Provision of Irrigation facilities (Pipelines, farm ponds, drip irrigation)	6	75.00
3	Implements and machinery bank	2	25.00
4	Pest and disease control (collective efforts including preparation and use of bio pesticides)	2	25.00
5	Group marketing	8	100.00
6	Post harvest technology (grading, packing, storage)	4	50.00
7	Processing (Fruit processing and Jaggery preparation)	8	100.00
8	Collective purchase of inputs	6	75.00

Table 17 depicts that all groups (100.00 per cent) were involved in group marketing and processing while equal percentage (75.00 per cent, each) had developed irrigation facilities at their farms (pipelines, construction of farm ponds and drip irrigation) and involved in collective purchase of inputs. One-half of them (50.00 per cent) were engaged in post harvest technology management. One-fourth of the groups (25.00 per cent, each) were involved in land and soil improvement, had implements and machinery bank and doing collective efforts for pest and disease control, respectively.

CONCLUSION

The group farming is regarded as beneficial to resource poor small and marginal farmers. The proportion of small and marginal farmers amongst farmers from the scheduled castes and tribes, as well as women, is significantly high. However, participation of farmers from the scheduled castes and tribes and women farmers in the Group Farming Scheme was very less. The State Government should encourage and ensure increased participation of farmers from these categories in the Group Farming Scheme of State Agriculture Department.

As none of the groups under Group Farming Scheme

in Pune district were following collective crop cultivation or livestock rearing, the groups are more or less functioning on the lines of farmers' groups and not undertaking group (collective) farming as envisaged in the concept of group farming. The State Agriculture Department should encourage farmers of groups under Group Farming Scheme to undertake group cultivation.

Group Farming Scheme implemented by State Department of Agriculture had provided financial support to groups in establishment of large investment projects which might had not been easily possible for individual small and marginal farmers. There is positive impact of group farming on different aspects of farming from production process to value addition. Hence, it is recommended that group farming should be promoted on large scale, especially among small and marginal farmers, through State Department of Agriculture by demonstrating success of groups under group farming.

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Received : July 2021 : Accepted : October 2021