

Women in Agribusiness: Driving Innovation beyond the Farm

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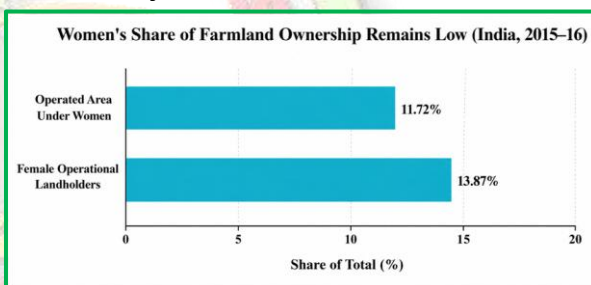
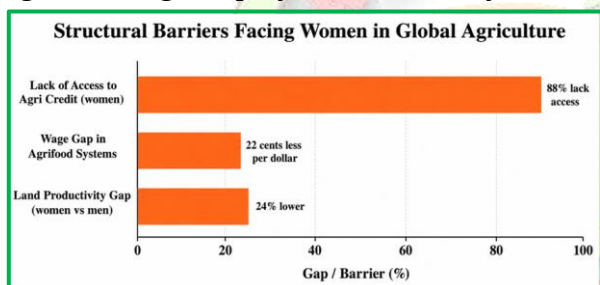
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Women constitute the backbone of India's agricultural workforce, yet their presence in leadership, capital ownership, and entrepreneurship remains disproportionately thin- a gap that is now closing through startups, FPOs, and targeted policy interventions.

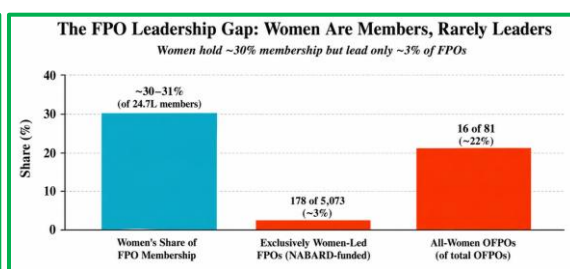
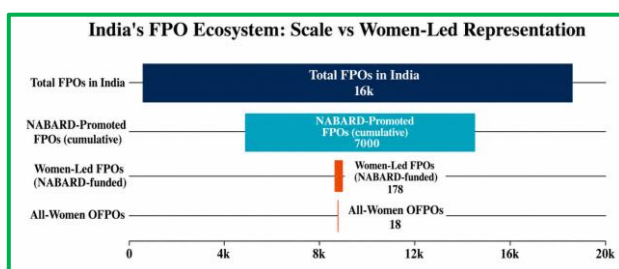
The Paradox- Labor without Leadership

India's agricultural economy runs substantially on women's labor, but this contribution rarely translates into land ownership or decision-making power. Female operational landholders account for just 13.87-13.96% of total holdings, a modest rise from 12.79% in 2010-11, while women operate only 11.72% of the total cultivated area. Of India's 20.44 million female operational holdings, participation is concentrated in Andhra Pradesh (12.6%), Maharashtra (11.6%), Bihar (11.2%), and Uttar Pradesh (8.9%). Globally, this productivity gap is stark: farms of identical size managed by women yield 24% less than those managed by men, purely due to unequal access to inputs, credit, and extension services- not skill. Women in agrifood wage employment also earn just 78 cents for every dollar men earn.



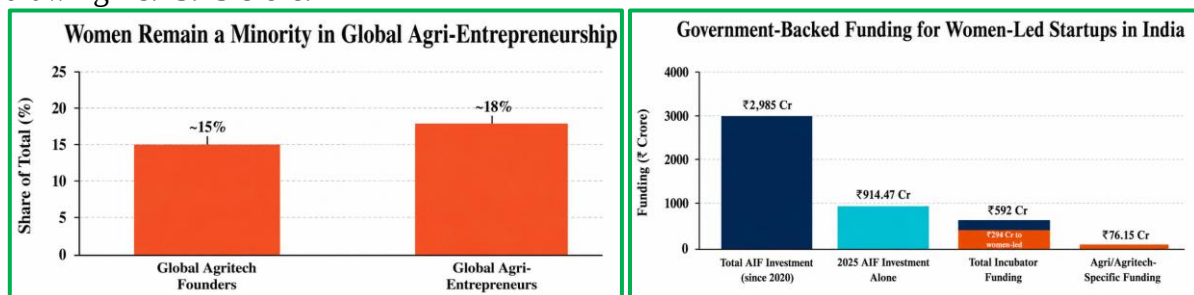
FPO Leadership: A 30% Membership, 3% Leadership Gap

Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) are the institutional vehicle through which India intends to formalize smallholder agriculture, yet women's presence here mirrors the broader leadership deficit. Of NABARD's 7,000+ promoted FPOs with 24.7 lakh farmer-shareholders, roughly 30-31% are women, yet only 178 out of 5,073 NABARD funded FPOs (about 3%) are exclusively women led. This is genuinely striking: women are nearly a third of the membership base but lead only a tiny fraction of the organizations. On the positive side, targeted "all-women" Off-Farm Producer Organisations (OFPOs) are emerging- 18 of NABARD's 81 OFPOs are exclusively women run, covering 6,890 beneficiaries. Separately, government data shows 800 women led producer companies were promoted under the FPO scheme between FY2022-23 and FY2024-25.



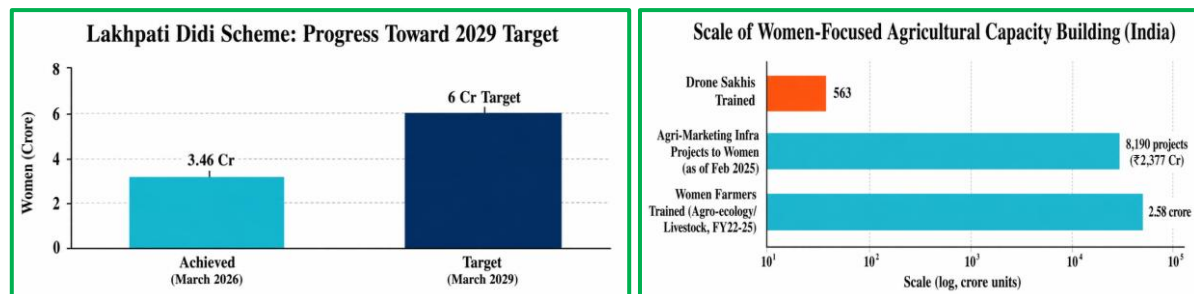
Agri-Startups- Small Numbers, Rising Capital

Women founders remain a minority in agritech, but capital flows into women-led ventures are growing measurably through formal government-backed funds. Globally, women represent only about 15% of agritech founders and 18% of agricultural entrepreneurs overall. In India specifically, a tracked directory identifies at least 15 women-led agritech companies spanning input supply, farm-to-market logistics, and rural fintech including Intello Labs (Himani Shah, Series B), MoooFarm (Aashna Singh, Series A), KisanKonnnect (Nidhi Nirmal, Series A), and AgroWave (Anu Meena, Pre-Series A). At the policy-funding level, Startup India's Fund of Funds Scheme has channeled around Rs.2,995 crore into women-led startups since 2020 through Alternative Investment Funds, with Rs.914.47 crore invested in women-led startups in 2025 alone- a sharp rise from Rs.616.82 crore in 2024. Separately, incubators under the same scheme have approved Rs.294 crore of Rs.592 crore total funding specifically to women led startups. A related PIB dataset shows Rs.2,838.9 crore invested in 154 women-led startups across all sectors between 2020-2025, with the Agriculture/Agritech sector alone drawing Rs.75.15 crore.



Policy Support- From Self-Help Groups to Lakhpati Didi

Government policy has shifted from generic rural welfare toward explicitly income-target-driven entrepreneurship for women, and the scale here is now genuinely large. Under DAY-NRLM, 10.08 crore rural households have been mobilized into 92 lakh Self Help Groups, and as of March 31, 2026, more than 3.46 crore SHG members have been certified as "Lakhpati Didis"- women earning over Rs.1 lakh annual household income. This milestone of 3 crore was achieved a year ahead of the March 2027 target, prompting the government to raise the goal to 6 crore Lakhpati Didis by March 2029. Since 2013-14, SHGs have collectively accessed Rs.13.41 lakh crore in bank credit. In agriculture specifically, between FY2022-23 and FY2024-25, 2.58 crore women farmers received training in agro-ecology and livestock management, 503 women were trained as "Drone Sakhis," and 70,021 SHG women were trained in natural farming. Under a separate agri-marketing infrastructure scheme, 8,190 projects worth Rs.2,377 crore have been sanctioned to women farmers as of February 2025, with Rs.173.97 crore in subsidies released for storage infrastructure alone.



Conclusion

Women in Indian agribusiness embody a striking paradox- they form the backbone of agricultural labor and represent nearly a third of FPO membership, yet own just 14% of operational landholdings and lead only about 3% of FPOs. This same gap echoes in entrepreneurship- women make up under 20% of agri-entrepreneurs and agritech founders globally, even as ventures like Intello Labs, MoooFarm, and Farmizen prove that women led

agribusinesses scale successfully when given capital and market access. Encouragingly, policy is beginning to close this gap at real scale- over 3.46 crore women have become "Lakhpatri Didi," Rs.2,995 crore has flowed into women led startups through government backed funds, and 800 women led producer companies have been promoted in just three years. Together, these numbers tell a consistent story- women are not marginal participants but foundational drivers of India's agricultural economy and the real innovation frontier lies not in proving their capability, but in dismantling the structural barriers around land, credit, and leadership that still hold them back from the top of the value chain.

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