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A Qualitative Case Study: Women's Experiences and Challenges at Farmers Markets in India

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Abstract

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Keywords

Farmer's market, women farmers, qualitative, Telangana, India, challenges

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Introduction and Review of the Literature

Women farmers' participation in Indian farmers' markets plays a vital part in improving rural livelihoods, strengthening food security, and promoting gender equality (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2023; FAO, 2011). Women make up most of the agricultural and rural workforce (73%) and carry out about 70% of farm-related activities, yet they often control only one-fifth of farmland (Agarwal et al., 2021). Women face more obstacles than men when fully engaging in and benefiting from these markets (Islam et al., 2024). Among rural women, 80% are engaged in agriculture, with 33% working as agricultural laborers and nearly 48% as self-employed farmers (Patel & Sethi, 2022). Despite this heavy involvement in agricultural activities and farmers' market participation, visibility in direct-marketing spaces across India remains uneven. For example, in East Godavari's Rythu Bazaars (Farmers Market), only 16.7% of stalls were operated by women, with participation ranging from as low as 1.9% in Kakinada to 48.5% in Rajahmundry (Jyothi et al., 2015; Pandey et al., 2021).

Over the past two decades, the Government of India has been working to expand farmers' markets in response to increasing farmer participation, growing consumer demand for fresh produce, and efforts to improve farmgate prices (FAO, 2023). However, these markets are state-led models that vary greatly from region to region, making it difficult to achieve consistent development nationwide. While farmers' markets have created opportunities for many smallholder farmers to access better prices, the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities for women within these spaces remain underexamined (Islam et al., 2024; Jyothi et al., 2015; Patel & Sethi, 2022; Khan, 2025). This gap in understanding, particularly in region-specific contexts, highlights the need for research that examines women's participation in farmers' markets and identifies how these platforms can become more inclusive and responsive to women farmers.

Gender Participation in Farmers' Markets Across India

Gender participation in farmers' markets is crucial, as research across India shows that women who engage in direct marketing still face persistent barriers in accessing and benefiting from these spaces (FAO, 2023; Kandi et al., 2025; Patel & Sethi, 2022). As outlined earlier, these challenges stem from structural and resource-related constraints, but they are also reinforced by institutional and policy features. Empirical research using the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) demonstrates that women's empowerment particularly in decision-making and accessing markets is significantly higher in households oriented toward cash-crop production, which have better market integration opportunities (Pandey et al., 2021). This suggests that the structure of market systems, including APMC frameworks that restrict stall access and favor established license holders, may systematically disadvantage women. As confirmed by survey evidence, only about 13% of women farmers in Gujarat accessed mandis and usually only during lean hours or with male accompaniment pointing to persistent institutional and social barriers (Kapoor, 2021). Even when women do participate, the absence of gender-responsive facilities such as sanitation, storage, and safe transport reduces the benefits they can derive from market participation (Khan, 2025). Without intentional policy reform and infrastructure improvements, farmers' markets risk reinforcing existing disparities rather than serving as inclusive platforms for agricultural development. In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, state-supported Rythu Bazaars have seen mixed levels of

women's involvement, while markets in Punjab and Haryana remain predominantly male-led (Jyothi et al., 2015; Mittal & Kaur, 2021).

Infrastructure and institutional arrangements also influence participation patterns. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu states, cooperatives and women's self-help groups have played a key role in facilitating women's market access by securing stall space, improving safety measures, and offering marketing skills training (FAO, 2023). However, in Karnataka and Maharashtra states, even well-developed market systems are hindered by the absence of gender-responsive facilities such as childcare, sanitation, and safe transport, which restrict sustained engagement by women (Khan, 2025; Patel & Sethi, 2022).

Existing literature offers valuable insights but remains uneven in its focus. Much research has examined women's contributions to agricultural production, yet fewer studies have addressed their participation in farmers' markets often due to institutional barriers limiting data collection (Twyman et al., 2015). Where studies do exist, findings point to significant regional disparities. For example, Pattnaik & Lahiri-Dutt (2021) found that women were active in agriculture across most Indian states, with lower participation in Kerala, Punjab, and West Bengal, while region-specific work by Jyothi et al. (2015) revealed that only 17% of Rythu Bazaar stalls in East Godavari district were operated by women. Constraints cited included the absence of public toilets, inadequate shelter and seating, and other limited amenities or conditions that persist largely due to the lack of targeted policy measures addressing women vendors' infrastructure needs.

Beyond Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, several other regions face persistent challenges. In Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh agricultural hubs undergoing recent policy reforms women's market engagement remains low due to male-dominated procurement structures (Mittal & Kaur, 2021; Saha et al., 2022). In Uttar Pradesh specifically, women face limited decision-making authority and reduced access to financial resources (Roy et al., 2021). In contrast, in parts of Telangana, women report shared decision-making with male family members, taking turns to sell produce and manage household responsibilities. Eastern states face distinct structural hurdles. The abolition of the APMC Act in Bihar has led to fragmented markets, weakened regulation, and greater vulnerability for small and marginal farmers, especially women, who face price exploitation and diminished infrastructure (Economic Times, 2024). In West Bengal, barriers such as low bargaining power, lack of transport, and social norms further restrict women's market access (Chatterjee & Dwivedi, 2023).

Across these varied contexts, the literature consistently shows that women's active participation in marketing can strengthen household welfare and decision-making (Doss, 2011; Pattnaik & Lahiri-Dutt, 2021). Yet much of this evidence remains fragmented, with limited attention to how women's experiences in farmers' markets. Understanding these dynamics requires a framework that can capture the different forms of connections women build and how these influence their participation and outcomes. This study adopts Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1995) as its guiding lens, focusing on bonding, bridging, and linking capital to explore women's current experiences in Peddapalli's Rythu Bazaars and to compare them with those documented in existing literature from other Indian states.

Theoretical Framework

The study is rooted and guided by social capital theory (SCT), which highlights the value of social networks, trust and relationships in the capital with norms that enable individuals and

groups to access resources and opportunities (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1995). In the context of farmers markets, SCT provides a lens to understanding how women's experiences are influenced not only by their own agency but also by the social benefits and relationships that have been motivating them to participate in these markets. These networks are critical in influencing access, support, and empowerment. SCT identifies three forms of capital that are particularly relevant here: *bonding* capital which refers to close relationships within homogenous groups, offering emotional support and shared resources; *bridging* capital which refers to connections across diverse groups, opening opportunities to new markets and collaborations; and *linking* capital, which refers to ties to institutions and decision-makers that can provide training, resources, and policy support (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2001). SCT has strong application in agricultural contexts where networks of farmers access markets, improve information flow and increase their bargaining power (Adhikari & Goldey, 2010; Pretty, 2003). It has been widely used to understand collective efficacy and empowerment, encompassing both individual psychological and behavioral dimensions (Perkins et al., 2002). Thus, by applying SCT to the case of women's participation in Telangana's Rythu Bazaars addresses the study's research questions and serves as a framework for systematic understanding of how they differ by applying SCT to the case of women's participation in Telangana's Rythu Bazaars, this study provides a systematic framework for understanding how different forms of social capital influence women's market experiences (see Figure 1). SCT helps to examine the extent and nature of bonding, bridging, and linking capital that shape women's participation, and supports comparison with previous studies to identify where regional disparities exist, including differences in network access, institutional linkages, and market opportunities.

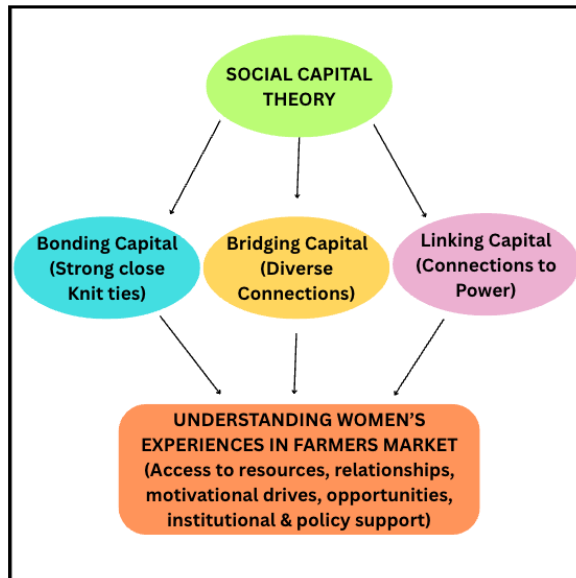
Purpose and Research Questions

This study explored the current experiences of women participating in the farmers markets in the Peddapalli region of Telangana state of India and examined their challenges and roles compared to those documented in the existing literature. By doing so, it contributes to a region-specific understanding along with the development that exists within farmers market, through the lens of women lived experiences. The research questions were:

1. What are the current experiences of women participating in farmers' markets in the Peddapalli region of Telangana?
2. How do these experiences compare to those documented in prior research on women's participation in Indian farmers' markets?

Figure 1

Social Capital Theory in the Context of Farmers Markets



Note. Adapted from Putnam (1995) and Woolcock (2001).

Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the current experiences of women participating in Rythu Bazaars in the Peddapalli region of Telangana, India. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe case study in the naturalistic tradition to provide a “thick description” of a bounded system, capturing multiple realities as expressed by participants within their natural context. In this research, the case is bounded by both location (the Godavarikhani Farmers’ Market in Peddapalli district) and participant group (women vendors with at least two years of experience in market participation). This approach was chosen because it aligns with the study’s constructivist orientation, allowing for an in-depth, holistic examination of women’s roles, experiences, and social capital linkages as they naturally occur. The case study design supports the collection of rich, descriptive data through semi-structured interviews and the integration of contextual knowledge, enabling the researcher to interpret meaning from participants’ perspectives while considering the cultural and institutional setting in which these markets operate (Yin, 2018). This design also allows for pattern matching with existing literature, providing both context-specific insights and a basis for broader comparisons (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

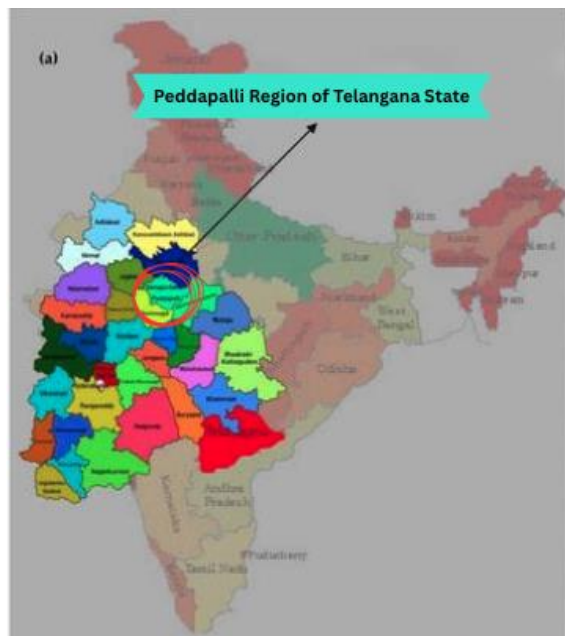
Participants and Context

The purposive sample for this study consists of women registered under the Godavarikhani Farmers’ Market in the Peddapalli district of Telangana to sell their produce (see Figure 2). The case study was conducted in Godavarikhani, a coal mining town located in the northern part of Telangana, a state in southern India. Telangana shares borders with Maharashtra to the north, Karnataka to the west, and Andhra Pradesh to the south and east. Peddapalli district lies in the northern belt of Telangana, known for its semi-urban and rural settlements, and is part

of the broader Deccan Plateau region. Godavarikhani, within Peddapalli, is a significant center for regional commerce, agriculture, and mining, offering both formal and informal market spaces (District Administration Peddapalli, 2024). This region's unique mix of industrial and agrarian livelihoods is often underexplored for exploring experiences in local farmers' markets. The selection of this region was influenced by the lead researcher's familiarity with the area, which supports the case study approach where it examines contemporary phenomenon in their real context, even though the researchers could not visit (Yin, 2018). Prior observations and existing knowledge about the market prompted further exploration to understand the nuances of women's experiences in development. While some participants were primary cultivators producing vegetables, fruits, or seasonal crops on small family-owned or leased plots, the majority identified as housewives engaged in marketing produce grown by family members or in selling processed goods. Although detailed farm profile data (e.g., landholding size, crop yields) were not collected, participant narratives revealed both direct and indirect forms of engagement with agriculture. In households where participants were not the primary cultivators, they still played a central role in market operations, including selling produce, negotiating prices, and managing customer relationships.

Figure 2

Case Study Region- Peddapalli District, Telangana State, India



Note. Adapted from Google opencast mines picture, Ramagundam area, Telangana

Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on the following criteria: (1) women who are registered sellers in the selected farmers' market within the study region, and (2) women with at least two to three years of experience selling their produce at this market. A total of 30 participants were identified who met the criteria and have accepted on voluntary basis when asked for their consent and participation. As data collection progressed, data saturation was met with 12 women.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted over the phone because travel was cost prohibitive, and the women were more comfortable using the telephone (What's App) to decrease cost. The researchers realize that auditory only limits the interpretation of non-verbal cues. However, the women were expressive with their challenges and concerns and were appreciative that someone wanted to hear their views. Interviews were conducted in Telugu, the participants' native language, to ensure a conversational approach and provide the flexibility to express experiences freely. Each call lasted between 30 and 50 minutes and included five to six open-ended semi-structured interview questions covering participants' experiences in the farmers' market, social interactions, economic benefits, challenges, and adaptations to market or livelihood changes. With participant consent, all interviews were audio-recorded for referential adequacy.

Data collection was conducted in two stages to allow for iterative analysis. In the first stage, nine interviews were conducted, transcribed, and coded to identify emerging themes. This preliminary analysis informed minor refinements to the interview guide, ensuring that follow-up questions captured additional perspectives. In the second stage, three additional interviews were conducted to check for new or divergent themes and with none, data saturation was met. A reflective and methodological journal was used to minimize bias and preserve contextual meaning during English translation. A peer debriefing and audit trail with another researcher was used to ensure the open and axial coding was dependable and confirmable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the inductive, comparative, and thematic analysis approach described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). This process emphasizes moving back and forth between the data and emerging concepts to develop a rich, contextually grounded understanding of participants' experiences. Analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection, allowing preliminary findings to guide subsequent interviews and refine probes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The analysis began with open coding, where transcripts were read line-by-line and segmented into smaller units of meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Descriptive labels were assigned to each segment, capturing the essence of the participants' statements. Codes were then compared across interviews to identify recurring patterns and variations in experiences. Throughout this process, analytic memos were maintained to record reflections, potential connections, and methodological decisions, ensuring transparency and rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As coding progressed, categories were refined and collapsed into broader themes that captured the complexity of women's market participation. This purely inductive process allowed themes to emerge directly from participants' narratives without being pre-structured by an external framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Finally, themes were synthesized to provide a structured yet nuanced interpretation of the findings, addressing the study's research questions and theoretically triangulated with the literature review.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure that these interpretations are rigorous and meaningful, trustworthiness must be established through four key criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): confirmability, dependability, transferability, and credibility, with reflexivity playing a crucial role in maintaining transparency.

To enhance the trustworthiness of this study, several measures were implemented to ensure integrity and transparency in the research process. To establish confirmability and dependability, the lead researcher engaged in reflexive and methodological journaling. After each participant interview, the researcher maintained a journal to record personal thoughts, reflections, and decision-making processes throughout the study. Thorough description (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was utilized to offer a comprehensive understanding of the research, enabling readers to interpret and contextualize the data effectively. This approach enhanced the transferability of the study, allowing future researchers to assess whether the findings applied to similar contexts. Furthermore, the study underwent peer debriefing and theoretical triangulation to promote transparency and strengthen the credibility of the findings and conclusions. These strategies ensured that multiple perspectives were considered, reducing the influence of potential bias.

The lead researcher acknowledges positionality as someone from the same research location with an intimate understanding of the locality, society, and language for this study. Growing up in the same community has fostered deep insights into its cultural norms and social dynamics. However, recognizing that insider status can introduce bias, the researchers made a conscious effort to critically enhance transparency, reflexivity, and overall credibility in the research findings. Bias was minimized through peer debriefing among all researchers involved in coding the responses, as well as using audit trails and systematic documentation of the interviews.

Findings

This study addressed key research questions relating to the experiences of women farmers in agricultural markets and compare the challenges with the existing literature. Participants shared their diverse experiences, motivations, and challenges encountered in these markets. The interview questions were meticulously designed to elicit comprehensive responses, allowing for a nuanced understanding of farmers' perspectives. By journaling and coding the responses, five overarching themes emerged, aligning closely with the research questions of this study.

Current Experiences of Women Participating in Farmer's Markets

The findings are explained in the five themes that emerged from the experiences shared by the twelve participants. They are: (a) economic and market dynamics; (b) community and relationships; (c) motivations and their goals; (d) constraints and challenges; and (e) adoption strategies and solutions.

Theme 1: Economic and Market Dynamics

Participants' accounts revealed that economic factors were a central driver of their market participation. Women consistently described bypassing middlemen as a key motivation, enabling them to retain a greater share of profits. These earnings were often used for essential household needs, such as food, healthcare, and daily expenses. While direct market participation provided a financial lifeline, it also exposed women to shifting market conditions, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when logistical disruptions and changing consumer behaviors reduced profitability.

Within the SCT framework, these economic exchanges show bonding capital, the trust-based ties built within familiar groups (Putnam, 2000) through repeated interactions with regular

customers, which help maintain loyalty and stability even when external conditions are uncertain. At the same time, they reflect bridging capital, or the connections women make beyond their immediate circles to reach new buyers and access wider market opportunities (Woolcock, 2001). Together, these close-knit relationships and broader market linkages highlight how bonding and bridging capital work side by side to strengthen women's economic resilience.

Table 1

Theme 1- Findings

Participant & Role	Initial Code(s)	Illustrative Quote	Theme/Category
Women 5 (Vegetable farmer)	Eliminating middlemen; Sustaining income	<i>Nowadays, farmers are getting nothing. Participation in the markets is just to eliminate the middlemen prices and get some amount to sustain.</i>	Economic and Market Dynamics
Women 4 (Wholesale seller)	Direct selling; Income for essentials	<i>I chose to come here to earn some extra money. Most of the extra money I earn is used for my daily food or for buying medicines for my health. Selling directly in the market rather than giving it to wholesale middlemen is a positive aspect.</i>	Economic and Market Dynamics
Women 8 (Greens farmer)	Transport challenges; Produce wastage	<i>Since COVID-19, there have been major changes... Now, due to the pandemic, I rely on alternative transportation, causing difficulties. Some produce goes to waste as I must sell it in the morning after bringing it to the market at night.</i>	Economic and Market Dynamics
Women 9 (Full time seller) husband farmer)	Decline in demand, Changing consumer behavior	<i>Demand, supply, profits, and losses have all changed... fewer people are coming to the markets to buy greens as many now grow their produce.</i>	Economic and Market Dynamics

Theme 2: Community and Relationships

The theme of community and relationships emerged as a key aspect of women's participation in the farmers' market, showing how strong social networks and mutual support shape their engagement. The market functioned not only as a place for economic transactions but also as a social space where women nurtured bonds, collaborated in practical tasks such as transportation and stall setup, and exchanged agricultural knowledge. These close-knit relationships created a sense of belonging and trust, while also providing tangible benefits that

eased the challenges of market participation. Within the SCT framework, these dynamics reflect bonding capital as described by Putnam (2000), meaning the close and trust-based ties formed within a homogenous group that build collective resilience and encourage sustained involvement in the market.

Table 2

Theme 2- Findings

Participant & Role	Initial Code(s)	Illustrative Quote	Theme/Category
Women 3 (Full time seller, husband farmer)	Group travel; Strong village bonds	<i>We are a group of women who get together in our village and then come here to sell our produce... we book an auto together, carry our produce, and bring it here.</i>	Community and Relationships
Women 5 (Vegetable farmer)	Long-term market group; Knowledge sharing	<i>Our routine involves a group of people from the same village coming to sell our produce here... we exchange information about produce, seeds, and other matters.</i>	Community and Relationships
Women 7 (Wholesale seller)	Customer relationships; Trust building	<i>I have been selling here for years, so my customers trust me. They know my produce is good quality, and they come back every week.</i>	Community and Relationships
Women 9 (Full time seller, husband farmer)	Mutual support; Shared responsibilities	<i>Sometimes, if I cannot attend, my friends sell my produce for me and I do the same for them when they are busy.</i>	Community and Relationships

Theme 3: Motivations and Their Goals

Motivation emerged as the most significant driver influencing women's continued participation in the farmers' market. For many, engagement in market activities was deeply rooted in generational traditions, where farming and selling produce formed an inherited livelihood passed down through family lines. This continuity reinforced their sense of identity and responsibility within the household economy. Beyond heritage, practical motivations centered on ensuring produce reached consumers without spoilage, with profitability considered important but often secondary to minimizing waste. Daily routines, market interactions, and the rhythm of selling became embedded in their way of life. These motivations reflect both intrinsic factors, such as personal and cultural commitment, and extrinsic factors, including economic needs and market opportunities, aligning with Social Capital Theory's view of sustained engagement. This sustained engagement connects to bonding capital as described by Putnam

(2000), where shared norms and obligations within close networks reinforce participation and commitment over time.

Table 3

Theme 3- Findings

Participant & Role	Initial Code(s)	Illustrative Quote	Theme/Category
Women 2 (Vegetables & greens grower)	Generational tradition; Family livelihood	<i>My motivation stems from the fact that my mother-in-law and father-in-law used to do this, and my husband and I continued it... we needed to sell the produce to earn money and sustain ourselves.</i>	Motivations and Their Goals
Women 7 (Wholesale seller)	Division of family roles	<i>That's why we come here daily. My father-in-law handles the farms, and my husband manages the entire business.</i>	Motivations and Their Goals
Women 11 (full time seller, husband farmer)	Preventing spoilage; Secondary profits	<i>Our main goal is to sell our produce without it spoiling or going to waste... profits are secondary, but we're motivated by the margin we make when we sell our produce here ourselves.</i>	Motivations and Their Goals
Women 6 (Full time seller, husband farmer)	Routine lifestyle; Market unpredictability	<i>Every day brings a new story. Some days we make a high profit, and some days not... our main motivation comes from our daily activity, routine, and way of living.</i>	Motivations and Their Goals

Theme 4: Constraints and Challenges

Challenges were a recurring and significant element in participants' accounts, revealing a combination of infrastructure-related issues and production-level concerns. Out of the twelve participants, nine of them strongly expressed the difficulties encountered within agricultural markets, particularly the lack of basic amenities such as lighting, seating, and sanitation facilities. The absence of essential infrastructure not only creates inconvenience for farmers but also affects their ability to conduct business efficiently, especially during adverse weather conditions. Alongside infrastructure concerns, several participants raised issues related to seed quality, emphasizing that newly introduced varieties sometimes failed to produce the expected yields, reducing overall income. These dual constraints, market facility limitations and unreliable seed supply add pressure to the already demanding task of sustaining their livelihoods.

From an SCT perspective, these challenges highlight a lack of linking capital as described by Woolcock (2001), where limited formal connections to institutions and decision-makers restrict women's ability to secure infrastructural improvements, reliable inputs, and policy support that could address these systemic barriers.

Table 4

Theme 4- Findings

Participant & Role	Initial Code(s)	Illustrative Quote	Theme/Category
Women 1 (Greens farmer)	Infrastructure deficiencies; Self-provision of resources	<i>Challenges are nothing new; we incur difficulties in production as well as selling. Marketing facilities aren't that great; we bring our own items to make selling more comfortable.</i>	Constraints and Challenges
Women 11 (full time seller, husband farmer)	Poor seed quality; Lack of basic amenities	<i>Sometimes we face difficulties with the types of seeds they provide. New varieties don't always benefit us... The market lacks lights, shelter, ramps, and seating arrangements, which makes it challenging, especially during rainy weather.</i>	Constraints and Challenges

Beyond the Case: Comparative Analysis of Constraints Across Regions Based Upon Literature Review

In continuation with the fourth theme, *Constraints and Challenges*, the second research question compares the expressed challenges of women farmers in this study with those reported in other regions of Telangana and across India via a literature review. This comparison underscores regional disparities under the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) framework, which was introduced by the Government of India in 2003 to bring systematic improvements to agricultural markets (Tiwari & Tripathi, 2020).

In northern Telangana's semi-urban Godavarikhani market, women reported strong family support for participation, with challenges centering primarily on physical amenities rather than social acceptance, an experience aligned with the supportive dynamics discussed in Theme 2. However, when compared with urban farmers' markets in Telangana, differences emerge. Urban markets tend to offer better-developed infrastructure and the potential for higher prices (Sridevi & Prashanth, 2021), yet sanitation facilities and gender-inclusive spaces remain limited, posing barriers to women's sustained participation (Jyothi et al., 2015). In rural Warangal and Nizamabad, studies document additional issues such as transportation constraints, lack of storage facilities, and reduced-price realization due to middlemen (Kumar & Reddy, 2022). These challenges mirror, yet in some cases exceed, those faced by the women in this study's site. Beyond Telangana, literature shows that regional policy implementation and infrastructure

investment vary considerably, resulting in distinct patterns of inclusion and exclusion for women farmers.

Table 5

Major Categories Among Comparative Study

Category	Study's Findings	States with Similar Findings
Market Infrastructure	Lack of lighting, seating, and sanitation facilities. Farmers bring their own items to make selling comfortable.	Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha: lack of sanitation facilities, shelters, ramps, and seating, making market participation difficulties (Reddy, 2022; Sridevi & Prashanth, 2021; Jyothi et al., 2015).
Seed Quality	New seed varieties often result in lower yields, especially for tomatoes.	Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra: dissatisfaction with newly introduced seed varieties that do not always yield expected results, reducing overall productivity (De Boef et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2021).
Gender-Specific Barriers	Female farmers face challenges related to both seed quality and market infrastructure.	Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal: male-dominated market structures, restrictions in decision-making for women, and lower access to market resources (Mittal & Kaur, 2021; Roy et al., 2021; Saha et al., 2022).
Weather Conditions	Adverse weather conditions make market operations difficult due to lack of shelters and ramps.	Odisha, Maharashtra, Bihar: Market infrastructure struggles with weather-related challenges, with inadequate shelters and storage facilities during extreme conditions (Roy et al., 2021; Economic Times, 2024).

This comparative perspective situates the Godavarikhani case within a broader national context, showing that while some challenges such as sanitation, infrastructure, and seed quality are widely shared, others, like male-dominated decision-making, are less prevalent in this region. These differences demonstrate the need for region-specific policy strategies that address both common structural deficits and unique contextual barriers. Even from a Social Capital Theory perspective, many of these shared constraints across states point to weak or absent linking capital (Woolcock, 2001), as women vendors have limited formal relationships with market committees, agricultural departments, or other decision-making bodies that could address infrastructure gaps,

improve seed distribution, and promote gender-inclusive governance (Adhikari & Goldey, 2010; Pretty, 2003). Strengthening these institutional linkages is essential for reducing structural barriers and creating more equitable market systems.

Theme 5: Adoption Strategies and Solutions

In response to the constraints detailed in Theme 4, women farmers in Godavarikhani demonstrated adaptability and resourcefulness in sustaining their livelihoods. Their strategies reveal a pragmatic approach to problem-solving, shaped by both necessity and experience. A recurring adaptation centered on preserving produce freshness despite limited infrastructure. Simple but effective techniques such as spraying water, covering greens with wet jute cloths, and careful tying were employed to maintain quality and extend shelf life. While these methods could not fully prevent spoilage, they reflected the farmers' commitment to maximizing marketable produce.

To address gaps in market facilities, women relied on personal resources to create a more functional and comfortable selling environment. Bringing stools, chairs, and personal vehicles helped them manage daily operations more efficiently. In some cases, collective action was taken to improve selling conditions, such as arranging lighting or protective coverings to mitigate environmental effects. These small-scale, self-funded adjustments allowed the women to operate more effectively in an environment with minimal institutional support. Within the lens of Social Capital Theory, these strategies demonstrate how bonding capital (Putnam, 2000) within close vendor networks and elements of bridging capital (Woolcock, 2001) with broader market actors enable women to share resources, exchange information, and collectively problem-solve. However, the limited evidence of linking capital reflects the absence of strong institutional ties that could provide formal support or structural improvements.

Table 6

Theme 5- Findings

Participant & Role	Initial Code(s)	Illustrative Quote	Theme/Category
Women 2 (Vegetable & greens grower)	Produce preservation	<i>I try to keep the produce fresh by spraying water, using wet jute covers, and tying them properly so they don't become mushy. But still, greens are sensitive, and they can't be protected easily with the limited resources we have.</i>	Adoption Strategies and Solutions
Women 7 (Wholesale seller)	Use of personal resources	<i>Market facilities aren't that great; we bring our own items to make selling more comfortable. I bring my own stool, and chair, and we have our own vehicle to transport produce or anything else needed.</i>	Adoption Strategies and Solutions

Table 6 – continued

Participant & Role	Initial Code(s)	Illustrative Quote	Theme/Category
Women 3 (full time seller, husband farmer)	Collective efforts	<i>Sometimes we bring our own lights and shelter so that our produce doesn't get spoiled in rain or sun. This way, we can sell without too much loss.</i>	Adoption Strategies and Solutions

Conclusions

This study explored the real-life experiences of women participating in the Godavarikhani Farmers Market in Telangana, India, documenting their experiences and challenges with adaptation strategies. The findings were situated within SCT (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1995; Woolcock, 2001), with clear connections to how bonding, bridging, and linking capital influence women's market engagement. SCT was majorly applied to understand the participants experiences and linking them back to the theory, mainly during the analysis and interpretation stages of this research which helped in enhancing the understanding of how social networks, trust, and institutional connections shape participants' opportunities and constraints. This theoretical framing provided an interpretive structure for understanding.

The findings highlight that women's participation in farmers' markets is shaped by both economic necessity and strong community networks. Bonding capital was exemplified by the tight-knit relationships among groups of women who travel and sell together offering emotional and logistical support. Bridging capital, represented by their market connections and relationships with other sellers and buyers, opens access to broader information flows and opportunities. However, the limited presence of linking capital such as formal ties to governmental agencies, extension services, or policy bodies constrains women's ability to secure infrastructural improvements, quality inputs, or market-specific support (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Pretty, 2003). This lack of linking capital was particularly evident in challenges such as inadequate sanitation, insufficient shelter, unreliable seed supply, and limited access to formal market decision-making processes.

A comparative review of existing literature shows that these constraints are not unique to the Peddapalli region. Poor infrastructure remains a barrier across Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka (Reddy, 2022; Sridevi & Prashanth, 2021), while dissatisfaction with newly introduced seed varieties is also reported in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal (De Boef et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2021). Gender-specific constraints, including male-dominated procurement systems and limited decision-making power, have been documented in Punjab and Haryana (Mittal & Kaur, 2021; Saha et al., 2022). These regional disparities have the need for targeted, location-specific interventions equally for even development in each state. However, few constraints like seed quality, poor infrastructure can be solved across India.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Findings from this study reveal clear gaps between policy objectives and on-the-ground realities for women farmers. The experiences described by participants also provide strong

recommendations to improve the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) framework (Tiwari & Tripathi, 2020). Based on the challenges and insights shared, the following policy directions are proposed.

Infrastructure Development

The primary concern across many regions of India is the persistent lack of sanitation, lighting, seating, and shelter in farmers' markets, which directly affects women's safety, comfort, and ability to sell during adverse weather conditions. In the present study's region, similar challenges were observed, making infrastructure improvement a strong recommendation for policy intervention.

Improved Seed Quality

Many studies, including this one, highlight concerns regarding seed quality. Addressing this issue requires facilitating formal connections between government agencies, NGOs, and extension services to enhance access to subsidies, reliable market information, and decision-making spaces.

Gender-Inclusive Market Governance

In India, gender-specific policies have increasingly been taken into serious consideration, and several initiatives are in process (Kandi et al., 2025). However, within farmers' markets, gender inclusivity remains a significant challenge. Establishing comfortable spaces for women sellers, ensuring their representation in market committees, and promoting cooperative groups can strengthen their bargaining power (Doss, 2011).

Transport and Storage Solutions

Although this is a more region-specific challenge, it was nonetheless highlighted in this study. Developing affordable transportation services and cold-storage facilities can help reduce post-harvest losses and stabilize women farmers' incomes (Kandi et al., 2025).

Future Research Directions

This case study offers a region-specific perspective that can inform broader market development strategies. Future research should examine how different forms of social capital interact over time to influence women's resilience in agricultural markets and assess the long-term impacts of targeted policy interventions. Comparative, multi-regional studies could further clarify how state-level policy differences affect women's empowerment and economic sustainability in farmers' markets.

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