

**Contribution of farmers' groups to sustainable transformation: a value chain
perspective**

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Abstract

In the world over, sustainability concerns revolving around the current state of food systems has become ubiquitous. Within the variety of discourses around alternatives to the current state, collective actions among smallholder farmers' groups (broadly defined as organizations formed by and for farmers) are seen as a potential avenue towards sustainability transition (UNDESA 2012, HLPE, 2019; ICA, 2020). Whether formal or informal, farmers groups are perceived as agents of change since they functions around "principles" and "values" that proponents of sustainable transformation aim to abide by, such as ownership structure, inclusiveness, and "not for profit" orientation (Agrawal, 2020; Bijman and Wijers, 2019; ICA, 2020).

Several empirical studies have highlighted the effects of farmer organizations on management and preservation of natural resources, on poverty reduction and on food security (Kwapong and Hanisch, 2013; Grashuis & Su, 2018; Bizikova et al, 2020). In the Global South, the specific role of farmers organizations along value chains relate, among others, to improving farmers livelihoods, knowledge exchange, market participation, inclusion, voice and bargaining power (Markelova & Mwangui, 2010; Fischer & Qaim, 2014 ; Agrawal, 2020; Bijman, 2016; among many others.)

Recent literature reviews explore the role played by farmer organizations in influencing farm sustainability (Candemir et al, 2021). Some other reviews on the effects of agricultural cooperatives explore the resulting changes that cooperatives might bring for their members (Grashuis and Su, 2019; Bizikova et al, 2020). While a few studies have explored benefits of participating in farmers groups on improving environmental sustainability (Hernandez-Aguilera et al, 2019), most of the investigated effects in the recent reviews relate to (positive or negative) impacts on economic dimension of sustainability such as income, livelihood and access to markets (Francesconi and Wouterse, 2015; Minah et al, 2022).

Albeit the increasing awareness that sustainable transformation of the food systems has to happen primarily within planetary boundaries (Rockström et al, 2009), there still is no comprehensive review on how farmer groups may contribute to this transformation by navigating simultaneously among their economic strategies, the environmental sustainability and social justice goals (Camargo Benavides & Ehrenhard, 2021; Bizikova et al, 2020).

To address his research gap, this paper is conducting a meta-review of the portfolio of recent publications on farmer's groups contribution to sustainability. Starting with a conceptualization of sustainable transformation as a desired social (and economic) change within planetary boundaries, the review explores the role played by the farmers groups in preserving and regenerating their natural environment while meeting social and economic outcomes.

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