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Women's self-help groups, decision-making, and improved agricultural practices in India: From extension to practice

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Women's self-help groups, decision-making, and improved agricultural practices in India: From extension to practice

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MOTIVATION

- ❖ Effective agricultural extension is key to improving productivity, increasing farmers' access to information, and promoting more diverse sets of crops and improved methods of cultivation
- ❖ However, in India, the coverage of agricultural extension workers and the relevance of advice provided is poor
- ❖ Traditional agricultural extension also tends to exclude small, marginal and women farmers
- ❖ While women often play an integral part in farm activities, they tend to have a smaller role in agricultural decision-making

OUR QUESTION

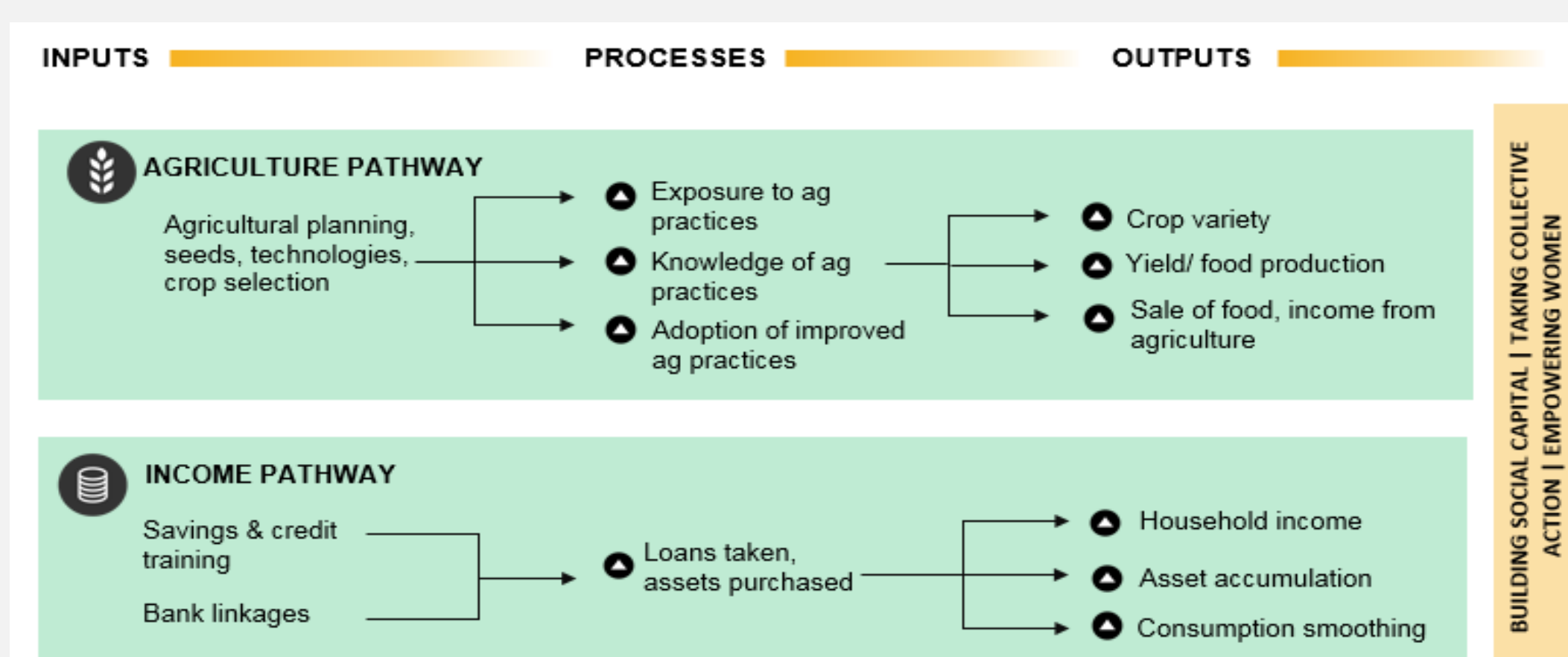
- ❖ Could another information delivery platform—that of **women's self-help groups (SHGs)**—provide information services and improve women's status, especially for women from marginalized communities?

CONTEXT

- ❖ SHGs are groups of 10-20 women from the same community, who meet once a week to deposit money into a common pot
- ❖ Members can take loans from this common pot in times of need
- ❖ SHGs provide a unique opportunity to reach women farmers from marginalized communities. Why?
 - **Reach:** Under the central government program, NRLM, SHGs have proliferated, and now cover close to 5 million households
 - **Modality:** Local knowledge, social networks, and participatory training are increasingly being recognized as important determinants of technology adoption. SHGs leverage these
 - **Multiple pathways to impact:** SHGs empower women socially, politically and economically, as well as directly provide them with agriculture-related advice.
- ❖ We study the impact of one non-governmental organization, PRADAN
- ❖ PRADAN's multi-sectoral approach includes
 - group formation and capacity building
 - savings and credit linkages
 - agriculture-livelihoods initiatives,
 all of which aim to improve women's role as farmers and decision-makers.
- ❖ PRADAN also works primarily with marginalized and tribal communities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- ❖ We identify three different pathways through which SHG membership could affect outcomes
 - **Agriculture pathway** - improving access to inputs, markets and technical knowledge
 - **Financial pathway** - increasing access to finance
 - **Empowerment pathway** - improving women's role in decision-making on agriculture
- ❖ We measure outcomes along all three
 - agriculture pathway - no. and types of crops grown, access to information etc
 - financial pathway - bank account ownership, consumption expenditure etc
 - empowerment pathway- women's empowerment in agriculture (WEAI) index, decision making) etc

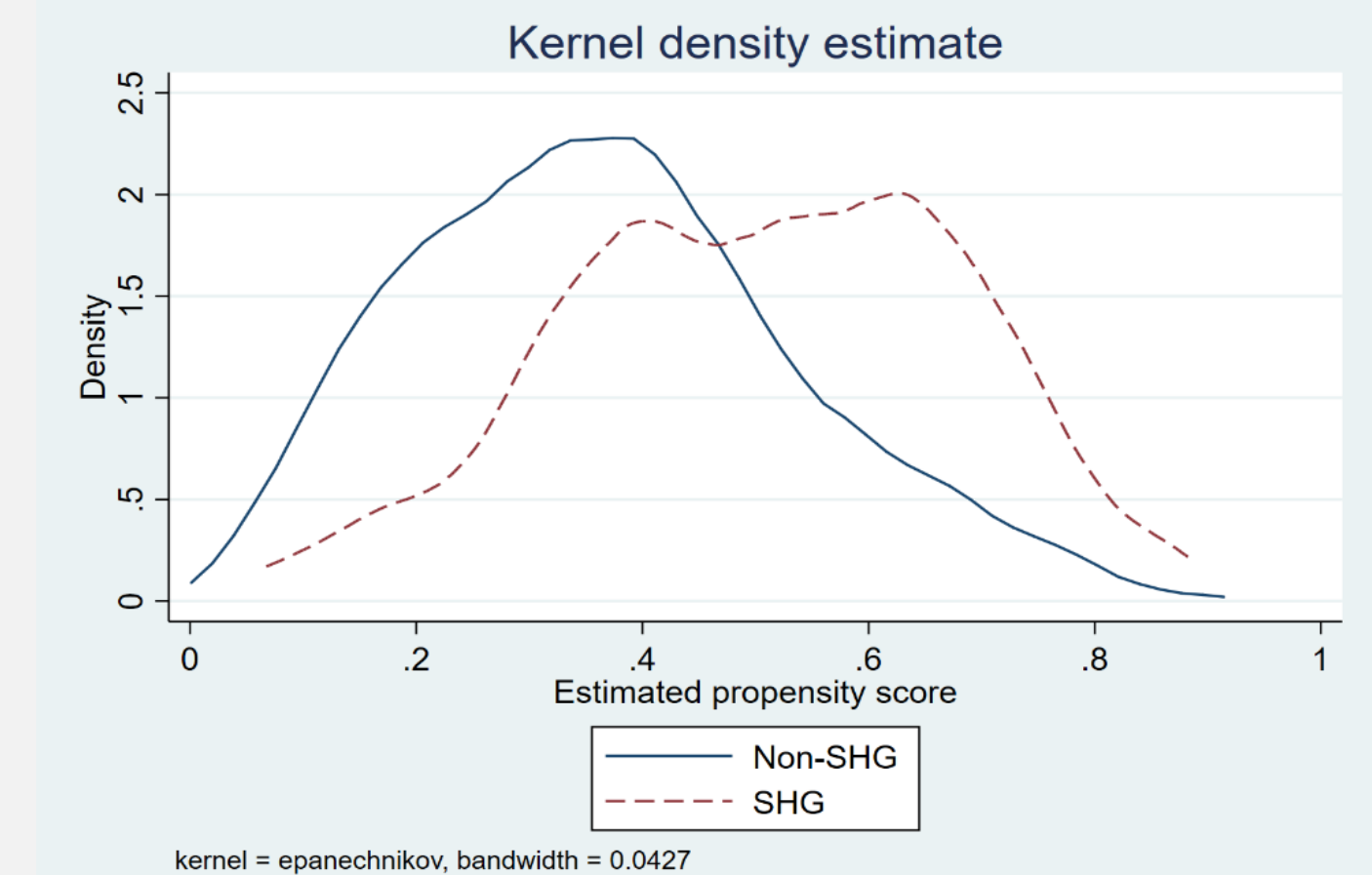


DATA

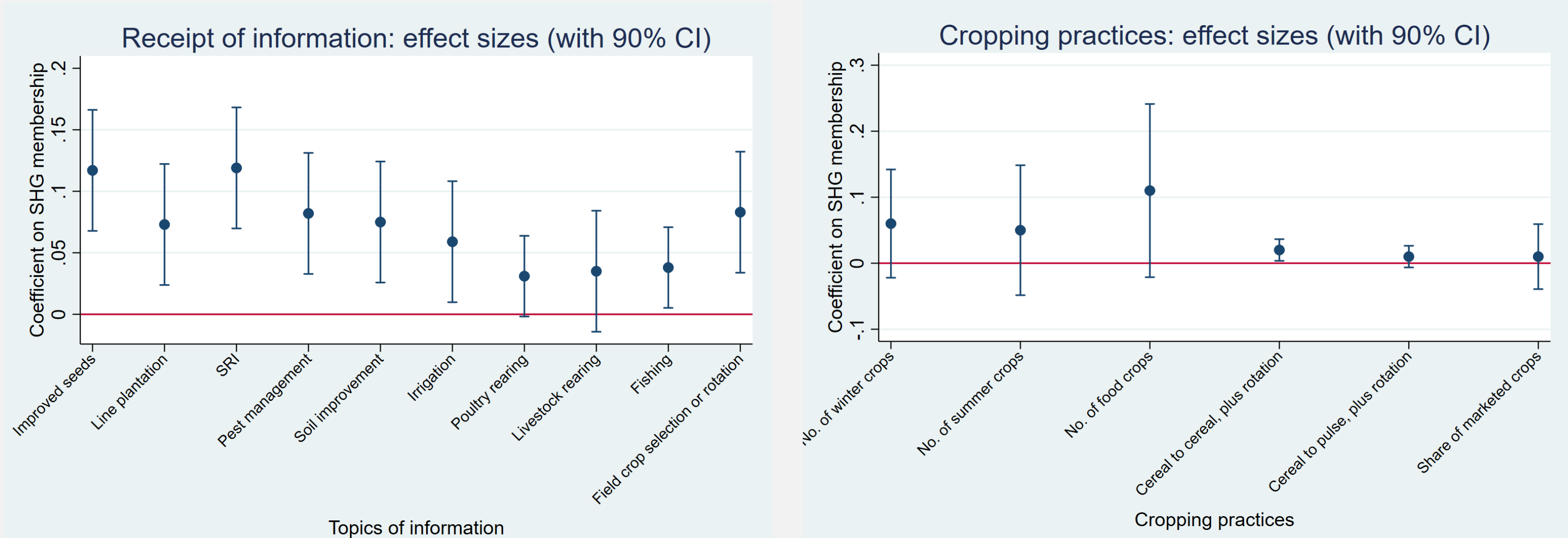
- ❖ Cross-sectional primary data from 8 districts in 5 states of eastern and central India
- ❖ Two blocks purposively selected in each district – both receiving PRADAN's livelihood interventions
- ❖ 5 villages from each block, and 20 ever-married women between 15 and 49 were selected from each village
- ❖ The achieved sample size was **1617 women** from **80 villages** in **16 blocks** across **8 districts**.
- ❖ Our survey collected data on
 - demographic and socioeconomic characteristics
 - participation in women's collectives
 - receipt of agricultural information
 - cropping practices in the two seasons prior to the survey
 - women's empowerment in agriculture, as measured by the WEAI.

METHODS

- ❖ SHG groups were not randomly introduced across our sample
- ❖ In the absence of hard targeting criteria, we use nearest-neighbour matching methods (NNM)
- ❖ The comparison group sample of non-members is selected based on similarity to the SHG member sample in observable characteristics
- ❖ The characteristics we use to match are
 - respondent woman characteristics (e.g. age, education, marital status, indicators of her status and time use)
 - household characteristics (e.g. household size, caste, size of land owned, access to credit from non-SHG sources)
 - village level characteristics (e.g. population, presence of a government primary school, electricity, distance to bank, distance to nearest agricultural wholesale market, shocks)



RESULTS

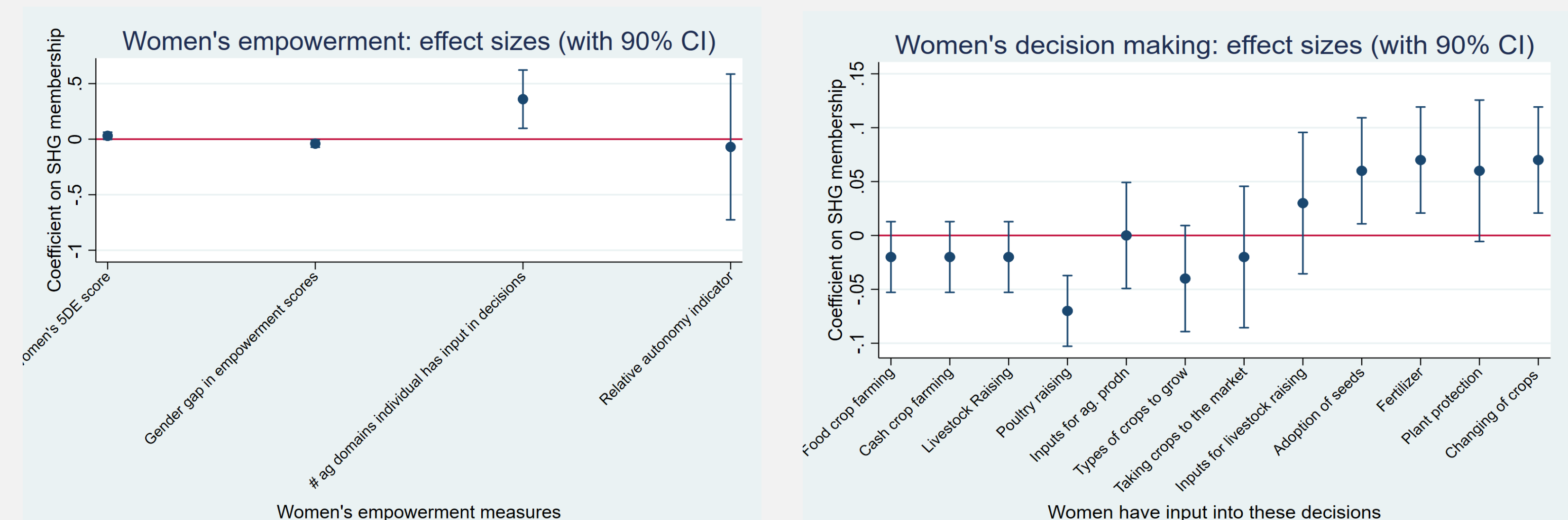


PANEL A: AGRICULTURE PATHWAY

Dependent variable:	Respondent woman has a bank account	HH took loan in last 12 months	Total household expenditure on food in last 7 days (INR)	Total household expenditure on durables in last one year (INR)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Woman belongs to SHG	0.15*** (0.03)	0.16*** (0.03)	-8.75 (20.58)	5157.29 (3583.52)
N	950	950	950	950
Mean	0.45	0.23	432.48	18049.26

*p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *p<0.01

PANEL B: FINANCIAL PATHWAY



PANEL C: EMPOWERMENT PATHWAY

CONCLUSION

- ❖ We find evidence that SHG membership increases women's access to information, their ability to make decisions related to agriculture, their bank account ownership and their ability to take a loan
- ❖ However, we do not find any evidence of impact on agricultural practices such as the number of crops grown, diversity across seasons, or the share of crops marketed
- ❖ While SHGs may improve information provision and women's role in agricultural decision-making, other constraints might be hindering progress
- ❖ These could include income constraints, limited market access, social norms and traditions and women's domestic responsibilities
- ❖ By identifying the gap between knowledge and practice along the SHG impact pathways, our work suggests new areas for future SHG programming and policy research.