

FARMER'S ORGANIZATIONS FOR EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL FARM WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Women among the tribal population have very important role in the agriculture-cum forest-based economies. Women's work is regarded as crucial for the survival of tribal households in terms of provisioning for food, income, earning and management of financial resources. Food gathering is also a vital economic activity even for women of agricultural tribes. As the socio-economic progress of the community has a direct link with the empowerment of women, the development programmes for women are receiving greater attention. The task now is to ensure effective participation of women in sustainable development of the community.

In this scenario, Farmers' Organizations are seen as a useful organizational mechanism for mobilizing Tribal farm women collective self-help action aimed at improving their own economic and social situation and that of their communities. Such organizations were perceived to have an ability to generate resources from their members. They could operate at different levels from the local to the national.

Farmers' organizations of all types have an important role in development – they provide space for participation, which contributes to group members' ownership of the issue at one hand as well as any solutions. This in turn builds group cohesiveness, solidarity and promotes mutual support. They can be the platform for building a sense of community, a social support system, increasing self-confidence, learning together and providing a sense of equality. A well-organized group can be taken seriously in a wider environment.

Groups with common interests can secure access to services that individuals cannot such as training, credit or equipment, infrastructure etc. Lack of access to any of these could be the vital issue that an individual farmer faces. This is particularly the case where farmers organize as a response to marketing concerns, as there are clear economic benefits of working in groups. These include the ability of groups to buy inputs in bulk, access more distant markets and access to information, etc. Working together can increase members' bargaining power, which helps to share, and lower risks and costs. In areas where tribal farmers are scattered geographically, and transport and communications are difficult, the importance of such organizations is even greater.

The present paper is substantially based on field experiences, case studies and documents on farmers organisations. An attempt has been made to focus on importance on promotion of Farmers Organisation for empowerment of tribal farm women. Accordingly, paper focuses on some crucial aspects, discusses concept on formation and management of women Farmers groups, federations and so on. The paper concludes that the farmer's organization is critical and central for empowerment of tribal farmers and also for sustainable agriculture. This works at every level, from farmers experimenting together to locally improve techniques to jointly representing their interests at an international level. Given the difficulties faced by tribal farmers, every effort is needed in order to achieve the improvements needed in their

various circumstances. Farmers' Interest groups, networks or federations can all make a huge contribution to raising awareness and campaigning for change. In majority of cases, strong local organizations are, and will continue to be, key to building sustainable development of agriculture.

KEYWORDS: Farmers' Organisations, Upward Accountability, Downward Accountability

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is an active and multidimensional process, which enables women to realize their identity and power in all aspects of life. The need for empowerment of tribal's women hardly needs justification. Their primitive way of life, economic and social backwardness, low level of literacy, out dated system of production, absence of value systems, sparse physical infrastructure in backward tribal areas and demographic quality of tribal areas make the development of tribals and tribal areas essential

Women among the tribal population have very important role in the agriculture-cum forest-based economies. Women's work is regarded as crucial for the survival of tribal households in terms of provisioning for food, income, earning and management of financial resources. Food gathering is also a vital economic activity even for women of agricultural tribes. Women are major earners from the sale of NWFPs especially in forest dependent livelihood systems. Due to tribal women's role in trade and marketing and to having primary responsibility for household provisioning, they are the de facto managers of most household income, as well as of the agricultural produce. In order to ensure women's productive and effective participation in the development, Farmers' Organizations are seen as a useful organizational mechanism for mobilizing Tribal farm women collective self-help action aimed at improving their own economic and social situation and that of their communities. Such organizations were perceived to have an ability to generate resources from their members. They could operate at different levels from the local to the national.

Many governmental and non-governmental organizations have been trying to organize tribal farm women into groups and integrate them into the development process by actively involving them in transfer of technology, production and marketing, planning, implementing and monitoring of different projects on tribal/rural development, agriculture and allied sector development, natural resource management etc. Some of the popular examples of Farmers' Interest Groups (FIGs)/Farmers' Organisations (FOs) under National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP), Watershed Associations under Integrated Watershed Management Programs, Vanasamrakshana Sameti under Joint Forest Management Projects, etc.

National Commission on Farmers, Ministry of Agriculture, and Draft National policy of farmers has indicated the following aspects on group approach:

Group Farming by Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has been mainly organised for supporting micro-enterprises operated by women with the help of micro-credit. With the growing diminution in the size of operational holdings, it will be useful to promote SHGs at the production end of the farming enterprise involving men. This will be particularly helpful in the case of integrated pest management, integrated nutrient supply, scientific water management, improved post-harvest technology, marketing, etc. SHGs will however become sustainable, only if they have backward linkages with technology and credit, and forward linkages with processing and marketing organizations. Steps will have to be taken to convert micro-finance into livelihood finance through appropriate support systems. There is also a need for establishing SHG Capacity Building and Mentoring Centers.

Farmers' organizations of all types have an important role in development – they provide space for participation, which contributes to group members' ownership of the issue at one hand as well as any solutions. This in turn builds group cohesiveness, solidarity and promotes mutual support. They can be the platform for building a sense of community, a social support system, increasing self-confidence, learning together and providing a sense of equality. A well-organized group can be taken seriously in a wider environment.

Groups with common interests can secure access to services that individuals cannot such as training, credit or equipment, infrastructure etc. Lack of access to any of these could be the vital issue that an individual farmer faces. This is particularly the case where farmers organize as a response to marketing concerns, as there are clear economic benefits of working in groups. These include the ability of groups to buy inputs in bulk, access more distant markets and access to information. Working together can increase members' bargaining power, which helps to share, and lower risks and costs. In areas where farmers are scattered geographically, and transport and communications are difficult, the importance of such organizations is even greater.

Everywhere in the world, a limited number of farm women are collaborating with each other in some way or the other and forming groups for sharing information and working together. Under the right circumstances, women farmers' groups can make a very positive difference to the lives of those working to improve their livelihood options as well as to the sustainable development of agriculture. Working together can take many forms, and a variety of terms are used to cover the scope of this idea – collective action, farmers' organizations, women's' groups, unions, co-operatives, self-help groups, networks, alliances, associations, committees, clubs, partnerships etc. These terms imply a range of methods for joining forces, at different levels, in a variety of sizes and scopes, with different aims or with different legal status.

Part I: Promotion of Farmers' Interest Groups (FIGs)

Groups of women farmers, who come together spontaneously or through their own efforts to answer their own felt needs, are more likely to be effective than groups that are brought together to suit the needs of an external agency. The groups/associations of the latter category last only as long as the project period. Their cohesion and motivation often lie in material and financial considerations. Spontaneous and voluntary formations of social groups involve a high degree of trust, which cannot be manufactured. This is one reason why community groups are often formed around one strong personality, and due to some immediate issue.

There is an important difference between women farmers or communities that organize themselves to work together, and women farmers being organized in groups by external actors, who see this as a vital step and entry point for community development. External agencies often view the creation of organizations as a positive intervention, a way of increasing impact and sustainability of activities. Women farmers and communities often do benefit from participating in such projects through gaining access to trainings, information, resources and further linkages. However, groups formed in this way are typically more prone to difficulties at the start and there is a risk that they will not continue if or when the initiating institution withdraws from the project. Alternatively, where previously established local groups gain the support of external agencies, this arrangement can be very positive. A key challenge for facilitating agencies is to act as catalysts and bring out the self-organizing capacities of farmers in the most locally relevant and useful way. Effective support can facilitate or enable local groups to achieve more, or be heard by the right people. It can be especially constructive while community groups are establishing themselves, or in response to a stated need. However, as groups develop and find their own strength, the external agencies need to consider different types of support groups may need.

Stages of Group Formation

Broadly there are five stages in organization of group as indicated below:

Forming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the group members enroll themselves and conduct 1-2 initial meetings
Storming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the group members start discussing and reacting to the various issues / conflicts
Norming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the groups start framing norms to run it successfully
Developing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide capacity building to the group members on different areas
Performing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the group starts performing by involving in planning the commodity converge with developmental programmes, management of inputs and output, value addition, packaging, grading, transportation, marketing etc.

GUIDELINES FOR FORMATION OF FIGS

The Core Functions of FIG Are

- Acting as collateral through group pressure
- Ensuring optimal production planning, meeting the market and household food security needs
- Maintaining common infrastructure –farm machinery, farm ponds, bore wells, tractors, storage godowns, drying platforms, primary processing units etc. and equipment which cannot be afforded by one farmer but can be owned by 20 farmers together
- Linking with the local government at panchayat level to obtain access to governmental programmes like agriculture and allied sector development programmes/funds etc.

Characteristics of the FIG

- Number of members in a women FIG is 15 to 20. This is keeping in view the experiences of SHGs' promotion in the country.
- Age – above 18 years
- Practicing farmer of the village
- While promoting women FIGs, different other community institutions promoted in the area under various government and non-government programmes have to be kept in view. The details of such institutions, lessons learnt etc. have to be kept in view while promoting FIGs. Such institutions may include the following:
 - Self Help Groups (SHGs)
 - Village Organisations (VOs) (Federations of SHGs at village level.)
 - User Groups– Groups of farmers in compact areas promoted to use the benefits of a common structure erected under watershed programme, such as Watershed Committee, or any other such livelihood groups, Groups of wage labour promoted under NREGS Groups of farmers formed on compact lands assigned to SC, ST farmers – compact land blocks developed under programmes like NREGS, CLDP, NABARD etc., Commodity groups, Cooperatives, Tank management committee, VSS/ FPC, Community networks etc.

If such groups exist then it is advisable to select appropriate groups keeping in view the objective of the project and then treat them as FIGs. The advantage will be that you will get the benefit of an existing and organisationally stronger group.

The following specific steps may be taken for organization of FIGs

- Organize informal meetings with prospective group members to discuss the purpose, methods of operation and benefits of groups as well as possible enterprises/activities.
- Women Farmers' groups may be formed once the participants have identified viable income-raising activities
- They decide on criteria for group membership: for example, whether members should belong to a specific category on the basis of common needs, common problems, common interest, similarity in commodity, small holders, social affinity, homogeneity in socio-economic status and neighbourhood etc.
- FIGs will get informal recognition from agriculture and horticulture departments. FIG is not a legal body.
- Only one member from one household may be considered for FIG and no person can be a member in more than one FIG for all financial matters. From the perspective of equity this is important. If there is a joint family, multiple memberships are possible on the basis of one member per 'chula'.
- FIGs should choose their leaders and co-leaders. No designations like Chairperson, Treasurer, and Secretary etc., need to be given to the leaders. Instead, the designation of Representative can be used. Thus, this does not take on significance of a hierarchy and they are perceived as Representatives.
- It is always better that the leadership is rotational. However, the periodicity of rotation etc., should be left to the group. It is also to be remembered that there should be sufficient time for the leadership to work before they are changed in order to give all members leadership experience.
- In a village, apart from compact area of group members of each FIG, the area under all FIGs also has to be compact. Keeping the functions of the FIG in view, farmers will be covered in a contiguous land patch of 20 farmers and these 20 farmers will form a potential FIG. This is so that it becomes easy to access watershed funds and also plan for common infrastructure for a particular commodity.
- As far as possible, the village saturation (i.e. coverage of all farmers cultivating the entire cultivable area of village) approach has to be adopted.
- Due attention has to be given to farmers cultivating lands in ridge areas, rain fed lands, assigned lands etc.
- Confidence and clarity of key persons (*Sarpanch*, elders, opinion makers, key informants etc) has to be taken while mobilisation and organisation of farmers.
- Periodic meetings and consultations at the village level is a must to keep the community informed about the interventions that the project is making. Often this is forgotten leading to isolation of the project in the villages. At least one meeting a month and minimum 12 meetings per year must be conducted at FIG level. Transparency and democratic functioning must be emphasized through example. Questions must be encouraged and fully answered.

- Each farmer may have a common fund in the group
- The FIGs must maintain a set of records relating to their financial transactions, membership register, minutes book etc. This will vary in accordance to the nature of the groups. It is suggested that the Group promoters to be in touch with the organisations that have been promoting such primary groups and take their help in developing the record system at the groups.
- For different activities (like formation of FIGs, election of group leaders, group meetings etc), decisions/resolutions have to be recorded in Minutes Book with required signatures.
- Members will seek primary membership in FIGs. Services to the members will primarily be provided at savings, credit, insurance, procurement, marketing, trading, storage, processing, land, soil & water resource management, etc.
- Admission/Removal/Resignation of members can formally be done at FIG level; norms to be established for this component.
- Organize women farmers group with the help of locally-available/ identified community organizers/group promoter.
- Group promoters make a list of potential group members and leaders, possible group activities and required inputs.
- Assess their productive resources, including capital, skills and experience.
- During the initial period of 6-9 months, the members may be encouraged to take small amount of loan at a reasonable rate of interest as decided by the group. This shall help them in developing a habit of repaying the borrowed amount in different installments. This type of modality shall help in developing solidarity in the group, planning for their commodity till it reaches markets.
- Ranking/grading of the above FIGs may be done after 6-9 months. At that stage, only mature FIGs may be given external or project benefit, revolving fund, etc. The remaining FIGs may be further strengthened with the help of group promoter and may be given project benefits, revolving fund etc., as and when they get maturity. Proper transparent criteria may be used for assessing the maturity of FIGs. Provide capacity building on each and every stage of the group.

At this stage, special care may be taken not to break any of the existing women group, just because of availability of certain small financial incentives to FIGs. The formation of viable and stable groups requires patience and, in most cases, a period of two to six months. Both overly rapid formation and overly long delays, which may dampen the interest of potential group members, are avoided. The process of group formation may face formidable obstacles. In most of the cases, the rural poor are economically dependent on landowners, traders and middlemen and may fear intimidation if they are involved in independent peasant organizations. Local leaders who may see the groups as a threat to patron-client relationships pose other constraints. At local level, project staff can help to overcome this antagonism by calling meetings to sensitize leaders to the objectives of the project/programmes and, above all, to illustrate the benefits of its activities to the area as a whole.

Services FIG will Provide

- Trading
- Insurance
- Credit Linkages
- Storage / Ware housing
- ICT- Market Information, Price information, Technology
- Processing
- Input Linkages- Fertilizers, Manure, Irrigation, Equipments and Pesticides
- Water shed activities, water budgeting and water audit
- Capacity building
- Seed processing and seed bank
- Technical support
- Fund mobilization
- Government linkages
- Short, Medium, and long-term credits
- Seed banking and processing
- Marketing, Exporting, etc.

Functions of FIG

- Demand estimation
- Distribution
- Soil testing
- Book Keeping
- Thrift and credit management
- Crop plan group wise
- Group Management
- Processing units
- Grading
- Farmer Field School (FFS)
- Loan Guarantee

- Knowledge Sharing
- Managing common Infrastructure etc

Group emphasizes income-generating or cost-saving activities based on local experience and low-cost technology. These undertakings do not replace but are meant to supplement members' normal production. Activities of this type are most likely to broaden the groups' economic base, mobilize savings, strengthen group cohesion and develop their enterprise management skills. Groups are encouraged to undertake social or community improvement activities only at a later stage. It is important that - as far as possible - each group identifies, plans, carries out and evaluates its own activities. This is essential for group development and, eventually, self-reliance. While group promoters have an important role in encouraging group activities, especially in the initial stages, theirs is a facilitating role that will be reduced gradually as the groups develop.

Grading of FIGs

Based on the maturity criteria, the groups are graded into A, B, C and D categories Maturity criteria

- Regularity in meeting
- Good attendance (> 80%)
- Good recovery (> 90%)
- Proper maintenance of records and accounts
- Fine for absentees, late comers or those who delay in payment of dues

Involvement in development of agriculture, allied sector and rural development activities

Once a group fulfils all the above criteria, it will be considered under group - "A Grade" and such matured groups, placed in "A" grade, are eligible for involvement in developmental programmes. The B, C and D grade groups need capacity building to become "A" grade group.

Group Promoters

The group promoter (GP) is a key agent in the success of any participatory project. He or she works with the farmer, building up their confidence in their own abilities and promoting their self-reliance. As this work must be done without creating dependency, the GP's task is essentially that of an intermediary, with three basic roles:

- Group adviser, strengthening the groups' leadership, organizational and planning capacity
- Participatory trainer, teaching groups basic technical, literacy and problem-solving skills
- "Link Person", facilitating communication between the groups and government and NGO development services.

Experiences show that one group promoter can help to organize an average of 15-20 women farmers groups. GPs must have experience in working with people and local organizations in tribal areas, and familiarity with the problems of the farmer. It is essential that candidates have a strong commitment to live with, work with and assist the farmer. Capable group promoters may be recruited from government agencies or local NGOs willing to work with farmer. In some cases, preference has gone to government agencies willing to second their staff to the project.

GPs promote self-reliance by involving the group members in activities that allow them to develop leadership and record keeping skills. They encourage group-to-group exchanges, and ensure the presence of one or more group members whenever they deal with supporting institutions such as banks and delivery agencies. When and how should GPs withdraw from their groups? Past experiences in the projects indicate that it takes three to five years for groups to achieve complete self-reliance.

Once groups have established a sound economic, technical and management base, project can promote their consolidation into local-level inter-group federations. These federations promote solidarity and economies of scale both in group activities and delivery of developmental services. Development of local and, eventually, regional and national structures also stimulates formation of more groups. An inter-group federation must be accountable to all group members. It has a facilitating; coordinating and educational role as a source of technical assistance, economies of scale and guidance. For instance, a federation can offer training to new groups, financial help to their activities from savings and perform some of the functions of group promoters by providing technical and marketing support to the farmer groups etc.

Part II: Formation and Management of Federations

When we use the term “federation”, we mean an organisation of organizations; a federation can be created for different purposes. It could help to access credit, or help in procurement of inputs, marketing of produce brought in by the members of the FIGs, or, it could engage in policy advocacy. It could also engage in a mix of all these or other developmental activities.

Organizational Forms

FIGs can promote several types of federations. Some are registered, some not. Registration is necessary if the federation expects to hold properties, financial transactions and for legal identification. In the case of land, buildings, office equipment, and so on, it would be best if these were in the name of the federation, rather than in the name of individuals. For that, the federation needs to have its own identity as a registered organisation.

The four laws providing body corporate status to organisations are:

- **The Companies Act:** for organisations whose aim is to provide a service to the larger community; profit and control are proportionate to the investment made by the owners.
- **The Trade Union Act:** for organisations whose aim is to help workers in a specific industry or work place improve their working conditions including wages; organisational profit is not the aim; members have equal voting rights.
- **The Societies Registration Act:** for organisations whose aim is to help members scientifically, culturally, politically, etc., or, to undertake charitable work for the larger public; profit is not the aim but where profit is earned, it cannot be shared by members; members have equal voting rights.
- **The Cooperatives Act:** for organisations whose aim is the social and economic betterment of members through the use of services provided by the cooperative; profit is shared among members in proportion to the use of services by members; responsible and active members have equal voting rights.

As can be seen from above, if a federation's primary aim is to provide financial and/or marketing services to its members, registering as a cooperative may be the most sensible thing to do. If the main aim is the social and political empowerment of the people, to do charity and the federation does not undertake any business, then registering under society may be more useful. As it is unlikely that our members have a lot of money to invest, and members would like to continue to control their federations, registering a company at this stage may not be useful.

Organization of Federation of Farmers' Groups

At the initial stage, major attention need to be paid towards organization of sustainable farmers' groups. After about 1 year or so, the groups can be graded. If more groups are in 'A' grade, then the farmers' groups can be federated at different levels namely, village, block, district, state, national and international levels etc. Farmers' groups working at grassroots level have internal group pressure, technology dissemination, and management of inputs, services and infrastructure. Experience shows that in some villages, farmers' groups are also taking the help of Information and Communication Technology to get the information.

Village Level Federation

It is appropriate to recognize that undue hurry should not be made in organizing higher-level federations of farmers' groups. It may be better if a step wise approach is adopted in which higher level federations are organized only after the stabilization of lower level federations. The higher-level federations may be encouraged to become autonomous bodies through registration under Cooperative societies Act. These federations may sustain themselves through contribution from farmers' groups and village level farmers' organizations against satisfactory delivery of services. If needed, more than one federation may be organized at higher level so that farmers' groups may have flexibility in approaching those, which provide better quality services.

- The village level commodity federation may be voluntary bodies – no election but nomination of the members by general body to the executive committee. But all members with equal status to act as a pressure group to redress or address the problems of a particular commodity.
- Liaison between the farmers' groups and block level federations
- Village level federation (VLF) can develop detailed action plan of village by collecting indents from the farmers' groups, crops grown, needs of the farmers, input requirements, output management strategies etc.
- Based on the detailed action plan, village level federation can procure inputs and distribute the same to the farmer through farmers' groups.
- VLF can manage storage, grading and primary processing facilities at village level and marketing of produce.

Block and District Level Federations

Block level federation may be a registered body under mutually aided Cooperative Registration Act. Two members may be nominated by each farmers' group/VLF at village level to these block level federations. These members will form Executive committee. All members of the FIGs are the general body members of BLF. General body meeting can be held once in six months or once in a year.

Roles and Responsibility of Federations

- Liaison between the district level and village level federations
- Horizontal net working of federations
- Provide high quality seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and other inputs
- Discuss crop related issues in relation to market perspective and perceptions based on expert opinion and placed before the village associations
- Pre-crop, mid crop, pre-harvest and post-harvest meetings are to be convened by these associations without any restrictions on number of meetings to be conducted by the associations earlier
- Federation will act as a pressure group helping policy-framework
- These federations can work as advisory bodies for the commodity groups
- Gradually, these associations can federate at state and national level
- Flow of market information and market extension
- To provide global marketing information to the farmers' groups of society through internet
- Storing, Packaging, grading and marketing can be done through this federation
- To export value added produce
- Developing linkages with all developmental programmes and routed through these federations
- Provide capacity building for these federations on management of federations, linkage with other institutions, management of forward and backward linkages, market linkages, market extension etc.
- The federation can organize workshops, preparation of detailed action plan of the block level federations, provide capacity building to the groups etc.
- Federation can engage a Para worker for the major commodities on service charges-basis by the farmers' groups
- Provide training to the farmers' groups on seed treatment, crop management practices, technical know how, post-harvest management, grading, packaging, processing, value addition etc.

State and National Level Federations

- The state and apex level federations can articulate policy advocacy and lobbying
- They can develop institutional mechanism to identify partners for marketing/ processing/exports
- The federation can integrate the initiatives of APMC – contract farming – Commodity trading
- Build the global competitiveness in post-liberalization/WTO regime in quality parameters and cost of production
- Federation can promote market led extension, marketing of produce etc.

- They can focus on Credit, Interest, Crop Insurance, MSP, etc.

Process in the Formation of Federations

- **Scope:** Federation is envisaged primarily to play the role of a financial intermediary along with other services to the FIGs in Forward and Backward linkages to the farmers, Book keeping, auditing, Bank linkages and other linkages with developmental programs in agriculture and other line departments etc. The federation is also envisaged to take up social issues and other developmental issues.
- **Federation Jurisdiction:** Federation is a network of FIGs in the given village/block/district/state/nation or any geographical area decided by the FIGs and facilitating organization.
- **Situation Analysis:** Before starting dialogue on formation of federation with farmers' groups, facilitators shall assess if there are any other federation or MAC Societies already existing and functioning in the operational area or at cluster level covering that particular village. If any federation of FIGs exists, the process of federation formation should be in such a way that the existing federations are not affected.
- **Common Understanding at Facilitating Organizational Level:** All the extension staff first need to be given orientation on concept of federation, need, advantages of federation, vision of the federation etc. through training and exposure visits to successful federations.
- **Preparatory Facilitation:** Facilitator not less than 2 Years experience in the sector should take responsibility for initiating the dialogue on formation of federations. The process of formation will take place in three or four dialogues spread over two to three weeks. The facilitation to form federation will not start with potential financial benefits, but with appraising the need for support to ensure effective forward and backward linkages to the farmers, book keeping, auditing, bank linkages and other linkages with developmental programs of line departments, conflicts' resolution etc.
- **Federation Formation:** Willingness of the FIG members to come together to form a federation is critical for formation of federation. The members should be given prior information about benefits and likely hardships that they may face with the federation such as more meetings, paying user fees etc., so that they are given an opportunity to make informed choice before federating themselves.
- **Stake of Members:** For formation of the federation, each group may be sensitised to contribute one-time share capital. This corpus amount will be helpful for the federation to access bulk loans from the banks and MFIs. Further, each group is expected to pay an annual membership subscription of Rs. X/- to federation to get the services from field functionaries, book keeping, auditing, facilitation support etc.
- Identify an appropriate place or building for meeting-cum-federation office
- **Executive Committee and General Body:** The federation will have a general body with all the FIG Members as members. The federation will have Executive Committee (EC) with one/two/three representatives from each Group/Cluster (If there are less than 10 Groups/Clusters three representatives, 10-20 Groups/Clusters two representatives and if more than 20 Groups/Clusters one representative). The federation will select 5 Office bearers viz., President, Secretary, Vice President, Joint Secretary and Treasurer

from executive committee.

- **Federation Meetings:** The General Body shall meet at least once in Six months. In the initial phase, the federation may be encouraged to have General Body meeting once in three months. The Executive Committee of Federation shall meet at least once in a month.
- **Setting Norms:** Series of facilitations by Coordinator/Facilitator should take place in setting up of appropriate objectives and norms for the federation. Norms include role of federation in preparation of action plan for development of agriculture and allied sector, modalities for forward and backward linkages, regular scheduled meetings, participation, decision-making, and mechanism for book keeping for FIGs and federation etc.
- **Registration under Appropriate Act:** After this process, the Federation will be facilitated to register under appropriate act. A registration workshop at Federation level may be organised. A request may be made from Federation to Joint Registrar, Cooperative Department, to attend this workshop so that registration of Federation will take place on the second day of the workshop. Sufficient homework shall take place to do this registration at block level. Before registration, the federation will be facilitated to understand and develop appropriate bye-laws.
- **Bank Account and Withdrawal:** While filing for registration, the Federation should be facilitated to open a Bank Account in the name of federation. Two or three office bearers among President, Secretary and Treasurer will sign the cheques to draw the money from federation account. The federation Executive Committee will make resolution for every financial transaction. The federation will write cheque only after resolution from Executive Committee.
- **Bookkeepers:** Each Federation may have a group of three or four book-keepers to take care of book-keeping of its member-clusters. One of these book-keepers will also write the books of accounts for federation for which federation will pay appropriate honorarium to the book keeper.
- **MoU between Facilitating Organization and Federation:** Promoting organisation and Federation would have common understanding and develop MoU on the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners in strengthening the federation.
- **Role of External Agency in the Initial Years:** The facilitator will compulsorily attend and extend necessary facilitation support for every meeting of federation, whether EC or General Body. The facilitator will share the collected required information from FIGs/clusters and submit to federation for decision-making. The facilitator will take responsibility to ensure that regular monthly meetings of EC and General Body meetings of the federation are held.
- **Capacity Building:** The members of the Executive Committee should be given training in Leadership, federation concept, federation Management, financial Management, linkages, input and output management etc.
- **Networking:** The federation will be encouraged to deal with local banks/apex institutions, line departments to access further services and linkages. The facilitator shall take all appropriate steps to encourage federations to participate in the appropriate district/state level forums so that effective networking takes place.

- **Interface with other Federations:** The Federation will be facilitated and capacities should be built to develop and maintain good relations with other federations for sharing and learning.
- **Bank Linkage:** Now the NABARD has developed guidelines for banks to finance the federations. The facilitating organizations should also take a proactive role to link the Federations with banks.
- **Procurement of Inputs:** Based on the collected and consolidated indents from the group, report to be submitted to executive committee/general body of federation. Later, bulk procurement of inputs may be directly done from the wholesaler/company.
- **Marketing of Produce:** Federation can maintain storage facilities. Value addition of output through groups, procurement of produce, marketing of produce etc., can be done through federation.

Finally, we will look briefly at the FIGs themselves – the very foundation of the federations. A true federation, however, cannot be strong if its very foundation, the FIG, is weak. We will touch on a key area that needs nurturing, if the FIGs are to be strong and have a long life. The aim of this material is to help you design/redesign your federation to be more member-controlled and member-sensitive. However, it is important that the contents of this booklet be thought through, debated on, fully understood, and only then applied to your federation.

Let us discuss one successful case.

Case Study II: Onion Growers' Co-Operative Purchase and Sale Society Limited

In Maharashtra, the major onion growing districts are Nasik, Pune, Ahmednagar, Satara, Dhule and Jalgaon. In Ahmednagar district, Parner taluk is leading the taluk for onion area and its production. The onion growing farmers are not able to keep the benefits of production because of dominance of middle men, highly fluctuating prices, poor storage facilities, lack of holding capacity by farmers and post harvest losses like sprouting, rotting and evaporation. Due to this problem, it is necessary to construct the onion shed for storing onions up to 4-6 months period for marketing of onions etc. The Government of India has also declared Ahmed Nagar district as an "Export Zone" area for onions. Taking this into consideration, in Ahmed Nagar, the onion growers have cooperatively established a society named as Ahmed Nagar District Onion Growers' Co-operative Purchase and Sale Society Limited on 10 January 2003. The Society has taken the membership of the NAFED, APEDA, NHB, Maharashtra State Agricultural Marketing Board (MSAMB), Exporters, etc.

Presently there are 1100 members in 30 villages in 4 blocks in Maharashtra. The Society office is at Ahmed Nagar and packaging and grading centre is at Supa in Parner taluk of Ahmed Nagar District. The main objective of the society is to provide technical information, increase onion production, storage facilities, market facilities, marketing information and marketing of onions.

Activities of the Society

Inputs: Seed, fertilizers, organic pesticides and other inputs will be supplied through the society to the members. In case of seeds, there is no credit facility; whereas for fertilizers the members should pay the amount to the society within 2-3 months, for which no interest is charged by the society.

Procurement of Onions from the Farmers: In each block, one sales man, who is a Diploma/B.Sc in Agriculture, was selected by the society. He will go and collect onions from the villages and send them to packaging & grading centre.

Within fifteen days, the farmers receive payment in the form of cheque or D.D. The sales man will get Rs. 2000/- per month as salary and ½ percent as service charges from the society.

Storage: Two types of storage are available. At members' level, 25 tonnes storage units are there which were provided by Central Bank or DCCB on loan basis, with 8% interest. Preparation of bank proposals, sanctioning of loans and assistance in construction of RCC structures are done by the society. Presently 450 farmers are having storage facility of 25-50 metric tonnes. Remaining farmers are following ITK storage facility only. The other storage facility is in Supa.

Packaging: Packaging is done at Supa. Every day, 10 tonnes of onions are packed through packaging machines in 40-60-80-100 mm grading in 25 kgs, 50 kgs and 100 kgs bags. Presently, they have a centre at Supa in Parner taluq and they are also going to open another centre at Umbre in Rahuri taluq and Sangamner.

Marketing: Procured onion is graded and packed at taluq level. The Society gets the information from the Saphal markets through NDDDB channel from Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai etc., through phone call. Bags, transport charges and 2% service charges to the society have to be borne by the farmers only for local marketing.

Export Marketing of Onions: Society received Import and Export code No. for exporting of onions to foreign countries from the marketing board. Presently, the society is exporting onions to UAE and other Arab countries, and Great Britain. The marketing board has given the target to society to export about 10,000 metric tonnes of onions. Bags, packaging charges, shipping rent and 10 % service charges to society have to be borne by the farmers for export marketing.

Training

- Crop cultivation practices of onions will be given by Rajguru nagar Onion and Garlic Research Institute.
- CD had been given to farmers on cultivation practices.

One-day training has been imparted on plantation, weeding, sowing, fertilizer application and cutting of onions

Outcome of the Society

- Sharing of farmers' experiences of problems and solutions
- Easy access to innovations and techniques of common interest
- Accessing credit facilities and enabling such facilities to reach significant number of beneficiaries
- Distribution of improved variety's seeds and other inputs

Information on market trends

Case study 2: Tamarind processing and marketing- Option for livelihood improvement

The Bastar region in Jharkhand state is endowed with plenty of non timber forest produce. Tribal farmers collect and trade it mostly in raw form. Primary processing and value addition activities have potential of improving livelihood. Its collective marketing and little primary processing can significantly improve family income. The farmers were organized in groups for taking up this activity in cluster Pedawada of district Bastar through NAIP support under the subproject "Improving Rural Livelihood Security Through Sustainable Integrated Farming System Model and Allied Enterprises in Bastar Region of Chhattisgarh".

The tamarind was clearly the choice of community in view of availability in large quantity in cluster. The trade of tamarind after collection is entirely in the hands of middlemen at present. Currently, large quantity of tamarind is collected by community and immediately sold to middlemen as raw tamarind pods at very low price of Rs 7 per kg. In this process entire profit goes to middlemen. In view of this, it is decided to start primary processing and trade of tamarind through groups which excludes middlemen.

The process of collection, procurement, and processing was assigned to different groups. These groups organize entire chain of activities with the help of villagers, distributing profit to all the stakeholders. Four male groups for procurement of tamarind pods, and two women groups for processing were formed, involving 60 families. The matured pods were collected by all villagers and were purchased at mandi rates, which is always Rs 1.0 higher than the rates given by middlemen. Thus, collectors were benefited by addition of value at collector level. After procurement of raw pods the male group sold it to women group by adding Rs 1.0 as their profit, which otherwise goes to outsider middlemen. The women group thus acquired raw material at the cost of Rs 8.0/ kg for processing. The raw pods were distributed by group to any farm family interested in dehulling and deseeding of tamarind. They were paid Rs 2.0 per kg of raw tamarind for this processing. This helped in creating employment at village itself for a period of about 4 months. One women can process 20 kg tamarind per day and thus earned Rs 40/ day. The processed material is returned backed to group who pack it in 15 kg bags for marketing. It was sold at the rate of Rs 25-30/ kg of flesh and Rs 4/kg of seeds.

Training and marketing support for this activity was provided by consortia partner Sanjivani. Direct marketing was also done by the groups. The processed material was stored in cold storage and marketed when the price was higher. This added further value of Rs 2.0/ kg of processed tamarind.

On an average each family of collection group obtained Rs 8200. The procurement group earned profit of Rs 48000 per group by sale to processing group. The two processing groups processed 1700q of tamarind and earned a profit of Rs 27000 per group. Rs 3.4 lac is distributed to 92 families involved in processing and 4350 man days of employment is generated. Procurement and processing starts from February and lasts up to mid June. The profit sharing mechanism and management of seed money fund was decided by group.

With the help of project support the groups could procure only 30% of the available tamarind in project villages. This indicated that there is still more possibility of generating income and employment by this activity. It is proposed to replicate this model in Tahakapal, Turangur and Turenar clusters where groups are formed.

In order to further add the value in form of paste, sauce, and candy a support of Rs 14.5 lac is provided by Jila Panchayat for formation of 10 groups. This will help in further increase in profitability in this trade. (Source: NAIP, ICAR, New Delhi)

Limitations and Difficulties in Farmers' Organisations

There are other difficulties, which must be overcome if groups are to develop and flourish in the long term. Often these are problems of day-to-day management such as farmers not having enough time to participate as fully as they would like or having difficulty in finding fees or other contributions required. Farmers will weigh these investments against benefits, but often these and other pressing practical concerns can become a difficulty for farmers' groups. According to the circumstances in which specific organizations are formed, each group will need different types of support, resources and information. Access to this can affect how groups perform. In larger groups or networks, difficulty in reaching

decisions and resulting internal conflict is more common. If objectives are not achieved or results do not come up to expectations, members may lose interest. Groups also have to deal with external pressure or influence, and always have to operate within the local political and economic environment. Challenges faced by groups include ensuring that everyone is involved, avoiding self-interest and dominant voices. Although working together is beneficial in many situations, it must be recognized that organizing for the sake of organizing, or organizing because it is requested by outside projects will not necessarily bring the results expected. Successful groups take some planning, thought and careful consideration of what form they should take in order to reach their goals. Would a co-operative work in the local economic climate? Local or traditional institutions already exist that can be built on or formalized? Members should also look at why it is beneficial to be in a group, and consider all their options.

Successful Groupings

By looking at examples of success, we can begin to draw out some common characteristics of effective groups. Research and experience with groups shows that the most successful are often small, informal groups, formed by people of similar backgrounds or concerns, who have a clear objective and vision, are responding to commonly felt needs, and share a high degree of trust. Members of successful groups also realize that the benefits of organizing outweigh the costs. They are able to secure adequate support, clear rules and responsibilities, hold meetings regularly and communicate effectively by fulfilling the needs of the members. These groups often have focus on income generation, and many have on savings or emergency fund.

Legal status is also usually needed for an organization to be recognized by public authorities or to access public services. It can also be useful when finding partners and institutionalizing into more formal structures – developments which can help an organization to progress and move forward. Supportive local policies and an institutional environment are of critical importance. Power relationships at the local and district level are often complex; those strengthening farmers' voices and making sure they are listened to, are crucial elements of sustainable agriculture.

CONCLUSIONS

Many groups organize themselves as a response to a felt need. If this need is resolved, members may feel that working as a group is no longer necessary, or that they need to change their objectives to suit the new situation. As such, some groups are not meant to last forever and it is valid for them to achieve their objectives and move on. What is important is that a group has a clear vision of where it is going and what it wants to achieve – this vision can be adapted over time. In most circumstances, farmers' organizations are beneficial to those involved, although choosing the most appropriate type of organization and its internal management need careful thought in relation to achieving objectives.

Finally, farmer's organization is critical and central for sustainable agriculture. This works at every level, from farmers experimenting together to locally improve techniques to jointly representing their interests at an international level. Given the difficulties faced by farmers, every effort is needed in order to achieve the improvements needed in their various circumstances. Farmers' Interest groups, networks or federations can all make a huge contribution to raising awareness and campaigning for change. In majority of cases, strong local organizations are, and will continue to be, key to building sustainable development of agriculture.

KEYWORDS

Farmers' Organisations

Groups of Tribal farm women producers coming together to form organisations, based on the principle of membership, to pursue specific common interests of their members – developing technical and economic activities that benefit their members and maintaining relations with partners/co-members operating in their economic and institutional environment.

Upward Accountability

Need of service providers to satisfy the demands of their funders, and in the case of public services, the State. This usually involves meeting criteria such as transparency, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, achievement of policy objectives, and being tied to market forces of supply and demand.

Downward Accountability

Accountability of service providers to local populations and end users of agricultural services. Here it also refers to accountability with empowerment: for example, linkages between agricultural service providers, tribal women farmers and their representatives that are successful in empowering women farmers to control the process of agricultural management.

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