

A STRATEGY FOR MOBILISATION OF AN EFFECTIVE SELF HELP GROUP

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Social mobilisation through 'Self Help Groups' is inevitable for economic empowerment and poverty alleviation. The concept of 'Self Help Group' exists prior to any intervention. The members are linked by a common bond like caste, sub-caste, blood, community, place of origin or activity in these 'natural groups' or 'affinity groups'. It is imperative that the Self Help Group should be promoted in the way that facilitates a cooperative, participative and empowerment culture.

The 'Self Help Groups' provide the benefits of economics in certain areas of production process by undertaking common action programmes like cost effective credit delivery system, generating a forum for collective learning with rural people, promoting democratic culture, fostering an entrepreneurial culture, providing a firm base for dialogue and cooperation in programmes with other institutions, possessing credibility and power to ensure participation and helping to assess the individual member's management capacity (Fernandez, 1995). SAPNA (1997) emphasised that poverty can only be eradicated by mobilising the poor to solve their actual problems in the form of organised Self Help Groups.

Lewin (1936) popularised the term Group Dynamics to mean interaction of forces among group members in a social situation. It is the internal nature of the group as to how they are formed, what their structures and processes are, how they function and affect individual members, other groups and the organisation. (Lewin et al. 1960). In an intensive study of Group Dynamics, Pfeiffer and Jones (1972) identified the Group Dynamics factors as to how the group is organised, the manner in which the group is led, the amount of training in membership and leadership skills, the tasks given to the groups, its prior history of success or failure etc. The identified indicators by them for analysing Group Dynamics are participation, styles of influence, decision making procedures, task functions, maintenance functions, group atmosphere, membership, feelings and norms.

In the light of these, a study was planned to understand Group Dynamics and the dimensions influencing the effectiveness of Group Dynamics of Self Help Groups constituted under Kerala Horticulture Development Programme (KHDP) and develop strategy for mobilization of an effective SHG. It is a joint venture of Commission of European Communities (CEC) and the Govt. of Kerala (GOK) signed on 17.01.92 with the total financial outlay of Rs. 131.44 crores (KHDP, 1997).

METHODOLOGY

KHDP is aimed to create replicable models of horticulture enterprise in selected geographic locations in Kerala. All the programme activities are converging into voluntary neighbourhood groups of about 20 farmers organised into Self Help Groups within the pilot project areas. Each of these SHG's has master farmers in Production, Marketing and Credit, who are trained to take up lead role and act as facilitators. This strategy is aimed to provide sustainability to the developmental process and ensures greater farmers' participation.

The study was undertaken in three districts of Kerala namely Ernakulam, Trivandrum and Kottayam where actively growing Self Help Groups are in operation. From each of

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these districts, four SHG's at random were selected and 15 farmers from each SHG were personally interviewed with a pre-tested well structured interview schedule to study the Group Dynamics.

Experiences and observations have already indicated that generally, for a group to be mobilised as a Self Help Group, requires a minimum period of three years. All past reviews highlighted the need of mobilization process as a prime requisite as the essence of development. The strategy to be followed for mobilization of horticulture farmers into Self Help Group passes through the following three phases.

1. Identification and Group Formation Phase : 0-4 months
2. Group Stabilization Phase : 4-15 months
3. Self Helping Phase : 15-36 months

After intensive interaction with subject matter experts, national and expatriate specialists of KHDP, and the technical officials working in the field, a draft guideline was prepared and distributed to twelve technical officers and twelve master farmers of the selected SHG's for the study in addition to six specialists of various units of KHDS. for their valid comments for improvement. The significant inferences and implications drawn from the research findings of Self Help Group Dynamics were incorporated in the final guidelines and thereby, the strategy for mobilization of an effective Self Help Group was developed. Steps this strategy in KHDP context were prioritised by these 30 respondents through three phases of group development such as group initiation/ formation phase, building up phase and self helping phase. Out of 30 respondents, 16, 22 and 29 respectively incorporated changes in group formation, stabilization and self helping phases respectively. The response of all the respondents is presented in table 15.

Table 1. Response from 30 respondents for developing a strategy for mobilization of SHG.

S.N.	Phase of SHG	Subject matter specialists (6)	Technical officers (12)	Master farmers (12)	Total (30)
1.	Group formation phase (0-4 months)	3	7	6	16
2.	Stabilization phase (4-15 months)	4	9	8	22
3.	Self helping phase (15-36 months)	6	12	11	29

The following is the strategy developed in three distinct phases with the critical features for mobilisation of an effective Self Help Group.

A. Group Initiation/Formation Phase (0 to 4 months)

1. Visit of project staff to the panchayat for rapport building.
2. Interaction with Extension Officials, farmers etc. to gather relevant information.
3. Awareness creation about the programme and its activities.
4. Identification/location of farmers who evince interest in the programme during the initial contact.

5. Conduction of general meeting of the farmers with agenda of objective, introduction of location specific problems of farmers and solutions, action plan etc.
6. Fixing the date, venue and agenda for the next meeting to one or two selected farmers who showed genuine interest and actively participated in the meeting.
7. Assigning responsibility of organising the next meeting to one or two selected farmers actively involved and genuinely interested in the programme.
8. Recording and documentation of deliberations in the first meeting by the selected farmers and extension staff working as facilitator.
9. Assisting the selected farmers to mobilise genuine farmers for the second meeting.
10. Conducting the second meeting of the farmers by the field extension personnel with agenda on analysis of problems and possible solutions, intervention programmes and action plans.
11. Recording and documentation of the deliberations in the second meeting by selected farmers.
12. Preparation of action plan including supplies, programme interventions etc.
13. Execution of the various activities as per the action plan. The various activities which the field extension staff can initiate are; arranging planting materials; other supplies, soil testing, advisory services on agricultural practices, marketing information etc.
14. Conduction of fortnightly/monthly meetings of farmers to review the progress of action plan and selection of members for the formation of Self Help Group.
15. Selection of master farmers (leaders) in respect of production, credit and marketing aspects. The group members must nominate the right persons based on involvement, interaction, experience and acceptance. The selected farmers should act as master farmers to guide and help fellow farmers.
16. Completion of the collection of basic details about group members in the data sheet by extension staff.
17. After the group formation, the field extension staff can undertake some group activities like campaign, group discussion, visit to demonstration/experimental fields, soil sample collection etc. for free interaction among members so as to develop a sense of unity and favourable group atmosphere.
18. Conduction of the first basic field training to group members at this stage (preferably if the master farmers have already been given the basic training) followed by their training need assessment for the successive training programmes on production technology and management aspects.

Critical features at the end of Phase I (04-months)

- a. Each SHG must maintain a minutes book wherein the names of all farmers who participated in each meeting will be recorded. One of the farmers nominated by the group may chair the meeting till the master farmers are selected.
- b. All decisions taken, activities to be done, responsibilities given etc. must be recorded in the minutes book. The extension personnel should note all these points in his/her own diary also and follow it accordingly.
- c. An SHG is formed with about 20 farmers willing to collaborate with the programme objectives and activities for optimisation of their income levels.
- d. The members should be willing to abide by group decisions without breaking bonds and they express confidence and trust in one another.

- e. The Master Farmers must be selected by the farmers themselves, who can serve as trend setters and they clearly know their role and responsibilities.
- f. The extension official should develop a status report on the SHGs containing location, name, present state of cultivation, problems identified and interventions for improvements along with the list of farmers and data sheets at the end of this phase including an action plan for the next 3 months also.
- g. Extension official should act as facilitator in entire process of group formation and intensively monitor its progress.

B. Building up or Stabilisation Phase (4 to 15 Months)

This phase starts from 4th month onwards up to 15 months in which the stabilisation of the SHGs following its objectives takes place.

1. Regular fortnightly group meetings on need based manner for carrying out group activities with participation of extension staff. Attendance is to be maintained by the Master Farmers.
2. Training of Master Farmers on production, credit and marketing aspects of the programme Master Farmers must take up the responsibility assigned to them and follow the sound methodology for delivering its services and inputs.
3. Master Farmers must project their leadership qualities and have confidence to take the group members along the programme. If they can not rise to the occasion, they can be changed and new Master Farmers can be selected.
4. Implementation/execution of programmes of action plan as per schedule of technical, credit, training, marketing and allied units.
5. Identification and execution of group action programmes like soil testing, procurement of seeds, method demonstration, marketing, IPM etc.
6. Development of procurement plan for planning the production activities.
7. Development of production plan for execution by SHGs as per specific intends of procurement.
8. A market synchronised production planning at later half of the building up phase. By this time, SHGs should be tied up to field centres or consumer markets.
9. The Training, Credit, Technical, and Marketing Units of project should have focus on carrying out production plans.
10. The Master Farmers should be imparted intensive technical knowledge to carry out activities of each unit. They should also be equipped with necessary training kits for imparting training and knowledge to other farmers. This could, in turn, develop self-confidence among group members to develop contact with government and non-government extension agencies to seek information support.
11. It would be better if all the three Master Farmers for a SHG are changed after a period of one year, so that other potential leaders will also get a chance to influence the group members in a variety of styles of influence, which forms a major determinant of Group Dynamics Effectiveness.

Critical features at the end of Phase II (4 months to 2 years)

1. The members should acquire necessary skills for efficient management of their farms, conducting meetings and developing close linkages with institutions.

2. The group members should develop capability to organise common action programmes.
3. Training of group members in technical aspects and management of groups should be undertaken. Training must be relevant, significant and meaningful to the farmers.
4. A feel for the Group Dynamics, i.e. remaining alert for the various indicators of avoidance is a must among the group members. The important indicators of Group Dynamics Effectiveness are participation, influence and styles of influence, decision making procedures, task functions, maintenance functions, group atmosphere, membership, feelings, norms, empathy, inter personal trust and achievements of SHG which should be given due consideration.
5. In the meeting, effort should be made to analyse the possible causes for avoidance and decide how best to tackle the situation. The indicators suggested above may be looked into.
6. The meetings should be made more lively to deal the problem with the groups and encourage others to reflect on their involvement and commitment.
7. There should be an informal climate for free interaction for making farmers respond when the problems for their avoidance are reflected to them.
8. There should be high conviction among the members about the programme. For this, the activities should be need based, practical and economical. The return accrued should be compensatory for the time, energy and money spent by the members. This is very much essential to maintain group momentum.
9. In the building up stage, the greater the initiative taken by the farmer, the better it is. The extension personnel should become basically an "Enabler" in the process. Based on suggestions of the study, the action steps and the expected outcomes in this stage are as follows :

Action Steps	Expected Outcome
Inculcate commitment	— People willing to go along
	— Ready to share responsibility
	— Plan of action emerges
Promote action	— Action leadership takes shape
	— Implementation taken up
	— Adjustments, modifications done
Encourage monitoring & evaluation	— Leaders monitor & evaluate
	— People share assessment
Prompt a review and	— Successes satisfy people
	— Failures yield lessons
Next Venture	— People keen on next venture

C. Self Helping Phase (15 to 36 months)

1. Development of fortnightly action programme by Master Farmers in consultation with group members.
2. Collection of fortnightly action programme of different SHGs by extension staff and consolidation into the site calendar.

3. Constitution of Master Farmers' Committee of different SHGs to monitor the site calendar.
4. Organisation of group meetings for sharing experiences of group members for farmer to farmer technology transfer.
5. Close liaisoning by extension personnel with the collaborating institutions and Master Farmers.
6. Facilitating role of project personnel for the refinement, improvement and problem solving about various activities of SHGs through Master Farmers. The extension personnel can gradually reduce their presence at group meetings organised by Master Farmers.
7. Full information support and organisational support for actual transactions by the farmers themselves within the SHG.
8. Development of new set of Master Farmers after a tenure of one term for paving the way for leadership development among the members in the SHG in due course.
9. Organisation of inter-SHG contests at the site for developing a healthy competition spirit for achievements of SHGs. Achievements of SHG is observed as a crucial dimension determining Group Dynamics Effectiveness.
10. Setting norms for exercising group pressure and group control by Master Farmers in the case of defaulters. They can seek the support of the bank personnel and credit officials also if needed.
11. Ensuring active participation of members in every activity of SHG for the sustenance of SHG. Good participation in the SHG activities brings about effective Group Dynamics.

Critical features at the end of Phase III (After 2 years)

1. The group of farmers become a team, which can stand up on its own, without the help from outside. The SHG so formed will possess all the identified twelve sub-dimensions of Group Dynamics Effectiveness.
2. An effective SHG thus formed will have the following characteristics.
 - a. It establishes and works towards clear objectives i.e. to achieve targeted yield and returns.
 - b. It has open relationships between members-everybody is satisfied-through production planning. They don't compete with each other but collaborate producing as per market demand and their capabilities.
 - c. It grows stronger by sharing different viewpoints and gains.
 - d. Members show a high level of support for each other.
 - e. Personal relationships are based on personal knowledge and trust.
 - f. People work together to get things done - in credit, marketing, planning materials, plant protection etc
 - g. Potentially damaging conflicts are worked through and resolved.
 - h. Procedures and decision-making processes are effective.
 - i. Leadership is skillful and appropriate to the needs of the team.
 - j. It regularly reviews its operations and learns from experience.
 - k. Individuals are developed and the team is capable of dealing with a variety of personalities.

- I. Relations with other groups are co-operative and open-site level collaboration begins to emerge.

CONCLUSIONS

The study focussed attention on Group Dynamics Effectiveness of Self Help Groups of horticulture farmers. An attempt was made to develop a strategy for mobilisation of an effective Self Help Group. The strategy developed consists of forty steps and is followed in three distinct stages of Group Formation, Stabilisation and Self Helping phases. This strategy can be used as a practical manual for mobilising Self Help Groups in any other key areas like Fisheries, Forestry, Floriculture, Agro-based technologies, Watershed development etc. on a sustainable basis.

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