



Strategies for Effective Group Functioning in Rural Development

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ABSTRACT

Groups in rural areas have become a vehicle to pursue diverse development agendas and over for profit motive. To avert such a situation, growth with quality is achieving importance to ensure sustainability of group movement in India.

Group approach to rural development is the only way to move towards Greener and Safer India. A tool to measure effectiveness of any rural groups is a sum of measure of Group performance (process) and Crop performance (product). Group performance needs to take into account – physical, financial performance of group, assessment of livelihood, goal achievement, social status improvement and entitlement access facilitation. Crop performance is the sum of adoption quotient, crop yield index and cropping intensity. Certain enabling conditions if created, makes the group effective by nullifying factors hindering their effectiveness. The creation of skilled manpower and linking them with Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) of ATMA would better ensure agri-input availability, machinery maintenance and agri-entrepreneurship development at village level as to achieve self-sufficiency, self-reliance through safe-food production.

KEYWORDS : Group performance, Crop performance, safe food production

Introduction:

Groups are being promoted by government and non government organizations in rural areas. Self help is the phenomenon where in people develops themselves out of their own determination and efforts. The group based model of self help is widely practiced for rural development, poverty alleviation and empowerment of women. Self help as a strategy for social development places emphasis on self reliance, human agency and action. According to NABARD (1994) there five stages in development of groups: Pre-formation (1-2 months), Formation (3-6 months), Stabilization phase-I (7-12 months), Stabilization phase-II (13-18 months) and growth and expansion (19 months and above).

This paper focuses on certain enabling sustainability of self help groups so as to make the, effective. Effectiveness of any group can be measured by summing group performance (process) and crop performance (product). Several rating systems have been developed for measuring group performance. They employed indicators only on the performance on basic functions and credit absorption capabilities. Social empowerment and behavioral aspects of group functioning did not find a place in the rating system. Quality parameters would include not just indicators on financial performance and physical performance of the group, but also parameters to assess economic and livelihood goal achievement, social status improvement and entitlement access facilitation. Rating of these groups i.e Farmer Interest Groups, Rhythu Mitra Groups (formed by government) and also groups formed by Non-governmental organizations, assumes importance as it is only a self-monitoring yardstick for groups themselves for self-evaluation which is a continuous process. Quality assessment of groups has come to be accepted as an important tool to ensure standards and to achieve purpose of formation of these groups.

Crop performance which is viewed as outcome of farmer groups is measured by sum up of adoption quotient, cropping intensity and crop yield index. Thus effectiveness is sum of all the normalized (Z) scores calculated on these two aspects group and crop performance.

In practice, without judging credit worthiness of groups, they are sanctioned loans from banks. Thus, without capacity building of group in any activity of their interest the loans is sanctioned they are not used for the cause. The loan granting is linked to capacity building would lead towards income generation of group through enterprise development viz seed production, bio-input manufacturing etc thus development of para-agricultural workers for repairing and maintenance of agricultural implements, testing of agricultural inputs at village level is the urgent need to keep agriculture occupation green. Hence, banks should allocate funds for capacity building of groups. They can also recruit special manpower for groups, maintain group database and their progress periodically. Care should be taken to consolidate the group and make them more sustainable, before distributing additional credit to the groups. Factors which are found to be affecting the quality of farmer groups are:

1. Target oriented approach of government.
2. Inadequate incentive to NGO's for nurturing their groups.
3. Lack of proper monitoring.
4. Absence of quality enhancement mechanism.

Hence, there is a need for national level organizations to co-ordinate the financial resources to groups and capacity building resources to the organizations (government/non-government). Hence a separate independent organization focused exclusively on groups will be more effective and efficient in building a strong, sustainable and self-reliant group movement. Thus, these groups which have taken up an enterprise can be linked up with FIGs of ATMA to assure quality inputs in agriculture, earn income, achieve self reliance and build up green villages.

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