

Guidelines for promotion of Farmers Interest Groups (FIGs)

The core functions of FIG are

- Acting as collateral through group pressure for loans availed from FPC or FPO
- Ensuring optimal production planning, meeting the market and household food security needs
- Maintaining common infrastructure - farm ponds, borewells, tractors and other 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 access NREGA, Watersheds and other agriculture development funds.

Characteristics of the FIG

- ✓ Number of members in a FIG – 15 to 20 (in small habitations, the number may be 15 only). This is keeping in view the experiences of SHGs promotion in the country.
- ✓ Age – above 18 years
- ✓ Resident of the village
- ✓ While promoting 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.

- ✓ FIG 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 one person can be a member in more than one FIG. From the perspective of equity this is important. If there is joint family, multiple memberships is possible on the basis of one member per 'chula'.
- ✓ There will be 1 leader and 1 represent for each FAG. The FIGs should choose their 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 a Representative.

- ✓ 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 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 a mini micro watershed area 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.
- ✓ 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 the 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.
- ✓ The FIGs must maintain a set of records relating to their financial transaction, membership register, minutes book, etc. This will vary in accordance to the nature of the groups. It is suggested that the RIs to be in touch with the organisations who have been promoting such primary groups and take their help in developing the record system at the groups.
- ✓ For different activities (like formation of FIG, 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 FPC. Services to the members will primarily be provided at FPC Savings, credit, Insurance, procurement, marketing, trading, storage, processing, land, soil & water resource management.
- ✓ Admission/Removal/Resignation of members can formally be done at FPC level. These can be recommendations from FIG but final decision must be taken at FPC board level.
- ✓ The expected costs/ contribution/ role of FIG member vs benefit that she/he gets by being member in FIG/FPO has to be clearly communicated in a convincing way. It is better to clarify on member disqualification criteria also at the time of member mobilisation itself.
- ✓ Smart cards ensure production planning at the FIG level.

Services FIG will provide:

1. Trading
2. Insurance
3. Credit Linkages
4. Storage / Ware housing
5. ICT- Market Information, Price information, Technology
6. Processing
7. Input Linkages- Fertilizers, Manure, Irrigation, Equipments, Pesticides
8. Water shed
9. Capacity building
10. Seed processing and seed bank
11. Technical support
12. Fund mobilization
13. Government linkages
14. Exposure Visits
15. Short, Medium, and long term credits
16. Seed banking and processing
17. Marketing and Exporting

Functions of FAG:

1. Demand estimation
2. Distribution
3. Soil testing
4. Book Keeping
5. Thrift collection
6. Crop plan FAG wise
7. Group Management
8. Processing units
9. Grading
10. Farmer Field School (FFS)
11. Selection of Representatives
12. Loan Guarantee
13. Knowledge Sharing
14. Managing common Infra structure



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