



Participatory Approach of Mobilizing Smallholders into Producers' Organizations

[adapted from article [Establishing and strengthening farmer organizations](#) wrote by Shankariah S. et.al, FAO]

Smallholder Producer Organizations (POs) plays pivotal role for any investment projects especially for providing extension services and reaching out-of-the-reach community. During 2012-2013, FAO – Bangladesh has conducted **Farmers Organization (FO) Mapping and Capacity Assessment** to fill the knowledge gap around FOs in Bangladesh. The report unveiled 198 114 FOs of various types were identified. Eighty-one percent were formed with support from government agencies, 14 percent from national NGO s, 5 percent from international NGOs, less than 0.01 percent – only 12 organizations – were formed autonomously and just over 2 percent of FOs are federated at any level. The mapping exercise revealed major challenges faced by FOs which are: (i) the bulk of FOs are small and disconnected; (ii) most FOs are externally promoted by government agencies, NGOs and projects; and (iii) key principles (autonomy, inclusive leadership, strong membership base, needs based service provision and clear, owned purpose) are not applied systematically. Moreover, the study also explored that field extension manual are albeit rich on technology dissemination but apparently there are no contents for mobilizing strong producers organizations (POs). Therefore, this guideline has been prepared for Farmer Business Facilitators (FBFs)/Community Organizers (CO)/Extension Workers of SBKS with an aim to mobilize strong and inclusive producer organizations.

When an extension worker enters in a village, he/she may face two scenarios: (a) village without PO (where no PO exists) and (b) village with PO (where other investment project/agency already mobilized PO). Under scenario 1, participatory identification of different categories of smallholders farmers is the crux of all extension activities. Since homogeneity among members is one the principles of mobilizing a PO, a meticulous targeting process through community consultation are inevitable following different participatory tools. Extension workers can use participatory tools, such as transact, resource mapping and identification of smallholders' man and women who have been practicing crop, dairy, goat, scavenging poultry, fishing, etc. to select target smallholders of different categories. This would facilitate projects to identify target smallholders of homogenous commodity to be mobilized into POs (i.e. Commodity Based Producers' Organizations).

SCENARIO 1: VILLAGE WITHOUT PO

Step 1: Rapport building with government extension agencies (FIRST DAY)

The FBF shall first meet with relevant Upazila Extension Officers and field-level extension workers (e.g. upazila DAE office for crop, DoF for fisheries, DLS for livestock, etc.) and present his/her credentials, explain responsibilities which embraces support to the XXXXX project for mobilizing smallholders into producers organizations. In doing so, FBF shall request upazila officer to assign one extension officer or sub-technical officer with him/her. Following information is necessary from upazila office for proceeding next steps:

- a) List of priority villages where smallholders have potentials to mobilized into groups according to commodity (HVC, fish, large ruminant, small ruminant, scavenging/backyard poultry, etc.)
- b) List of Producers Organizations already mobilized by existing/earlier projects [*NB: prepare an inventory/ category wise group list for large ruminant, small ruminant, scavenging/backyard poultry - go for **SCENARIO 2***].



- c) Based on the list prepared under serial (a), select villages where there are no PO but potentials for target commodity [NB: village where PO exists – FBF need to discuss with project whether to strengthen following scenario 2]
- d) Collect Upazila annual report on crop, livestock, fisheries, HHs, registered farms, extension services, presence of private sector, presence of NGOs, banks, transport, etc.
- e) Collect upazila map from LGED/print it from [LGED website](#) and identify location of PO and non-PO villages in the map

Step 2: Rapport building with community (SECOND DAY)

- FBF should enter the selected village with an open mind and understand the community structure such as: power structure, social status of entire farming community including smallholders and marginal men and women farmers, constraints with farming, opportunities for development, etc.
- with the help of assigned field extension worker or key informants, select a place where farmers gather (may be village market, tea-stall, input shops, etc.). If village is large, select two or three such meeting points, which represents the village well; such as in northern part, you may select a market, southern part may be an input shop and a tea stall in eastern/western part. but you are free to select meeting places at your common wisdom.
- after reaching the location, try to mix with them, gossip with them, if they ask: why you here? FBF can explain his responsibility, tell them you are new in this village, the project you are working with would like to develop smallholder farming communities, etc. Besides, FBF can talk on different issues like which crop grown well here, status of agriculture in the village, challenges in agriculture especially selected commodity/cropping patterns, any disaster they experienced in recent years or earlier, any disease outbreak, who face challenges most, any service providers for agriculture available in this village, is there any school/community club/farmers club etc. FBF can request them to help in selecting few model/successful smallholder farmers in this village.
- FBF will also use simple Sociometry checklist to identify village/cluster leaders from people opinion: at least 3 positional leaders¹ and 3 opinion leaders². [REMEMBER: The project is not going to select Positional Leader as leader of the FO to be mobilize in this village. It is important to sensitize them before starting work in a target village, since leaders possesses social status and respect.]
- meet with identified leaders and seeking cooperation: FBF will introduce with leaders, brief them on project and their responsibility to organize a farmer/producer organizations for smallholders. FBF can explain importance of POs for smallholders because they cannot mobilize resources in comparison with rich and medium farmers. Since upazila extension office identified this village as potential for (HVC/fish/dairy/goat/backyard poultry), FBF would humbly ask community leaders following questions:
 - a) How many households are there in this village? Of them, approximately how many are engaged with (HVC/Fish/dairy/goat/backyard poultry)?
 - b) Does the community have a farmer organization? (if yes, please follow steps delineated in **SCENARIO 2**)
 - c) If not, is there a need for such an organization? [Before asking, FBF can explain government policy on FOs. Since smallholders consists 85 percent of the farming community, it is easy for government extension agencies to provide services if they

¹ either political or leader of village clan – ideally positional leaders are holding leadership positions [Ref. [Chamala S., FAO](#)]

² Opinions or ideas of opinion leaders on agriculture have influence farmers and community leaders. They may be stratified by opinion leaders of large, small and marginal farmers [Ref. [Chamala S., FAO](#)]



mobilized into group. Moreover, a PO can mobilize 'economy of scale' either for input or produces which are attractive for private sector to be linked-in. You can provide some example of MMI supported POs in other communities helped smallholders in providing business services (VCC, CFC, etc.). It is important to provide facts and figures to convince potential leader of the possibilities and approaches for increasing the income]

- Inform community leaders that the project of SBKS is going to mobilize one producer organization on [HVC/fish/dairy/goat/backyard poultry] in this village. Explain that the project with limited resources will work ONLY with SMALLHOLDER farmers using participatory approaches to mobilize a HOMOGENOUS GROUP of farmers those are out of the reach of services and women will be given priority.

Step 3: Call for community meeting [THIRD DAY]

- At this step, FBF and sub-technical officer with the help of model farmers and opinion leader for smallholder farmers (identified in step 2) shall call for a community meeting. Objective of this meeting is twofold: (i) campaign for the project, its scope of work, project investment for enhancement of livelihood of smallholder and marginal farmers and (ii) sensitize community for their cooperation to organize a producer group comprising XXXX smallholders families with homogenous nature in terms of asset holdings³.
- Since project resources are limited, FBF should explain that the project would only work with the selected smallholders families those who have potentials as entrepreneurs but poor. Smallholders may be selected proportionately from all *Para* (village segment), e.g. if there are four *Para* in this village: 6-7 smallholder households would be selected from each *Para*. One male/female members from each household will join as a member of the PO depending on the nature of group. The rich and medium farmers will be excluded from this endeavor as they can access to resources.
- FBF should explain categories of groups such as HVC groups, fishers group, dairy producer groups, goat/sheep producers group and backyard poultry producers group. Based on nature of farmers, **one PO of any type/commodity would be mobilized in one village within a cluster⁴**.
- From the community meeting, core group leaders are elected or nominated by the villagers.

Step 4: Participatory exercises with the community for formation of PO [Fourth Day]

- With the help of nominated group leaders, smallholders' opinion leaders, identified 2-3 model farmers and some general villagers from different *Para* (altogether 10-12 community people), FBF will start following participatory exercises (Participatory Rural Appraisal – PRA) to understand the village, its *Para*, institutions, community, farming practices and constraints:
 1. *Transect walk*: to explore and map of land pattern (high, medium, low/marshy), land uses, soil type, cropping pattern, pasture land, river/khal bank for fodder cultivation, forestry, pond/river/canal/water bodies, human settlement, and other natural resources
 2. *Social mapping*: to map social institutions of village (school, mosque, pagoda, settlement, market, NGO, inputs shops, and other institutions)

³ The smallholders having less than 1 acre land (1 acre = 100 decimal).

⁴ The clusters are made up of an informally integrated group of enterprises that produce similar products within a specific geographic location. For example, a cluster of mung bean-related enterprises in Patuakhali, cucumber clusters in Ramgati and Charfasson or a pond fish cluster in Mymensingh. Within the cluster the enterprises produce for, or buy or sell from, each other in order to supply products or services to final consumers. Currently, the enterprises involved range from input providers to producers to brokers from the same value chain. As the clusters strengthen, they should also engage financial institutes, processors, packers, transporters, wholesalers and retailers.



3. *Timelines*: history of agriculture of this village - when modern seed/breed introduced, technology such as improved irrigation, farm mechanization, vaccination/artificial insemination/improved cultivars of fodder crops introduced, Service Providers extension officer/veterinary doctors/para-vet/artificial inseminator commercially start works, any disease outbreaks happened in last ten years for crop, fisheries, livestock and poultry.
4. *Constraints associated with farming*: local constraints associated with inputs, farming practice, access to finance, technology, information and market.
5. *Wealth ranking*: This exercise is the bedrock of all activities of FBF to perform in the village towards forming a homogenous PO with the help of PRA participants. FBF should explain different categories of farmers and prepare an inventory of only smallholder and marginal farm households. Second stratification will focus on selecting smallholders those have been practicing selected commodity for which this village/cluster was selected. Of this list, FBF will select required number of representative households from small and marginal category. Membership size and gender distribution would be following:
 - Crop PO: at least 70% women
 - Dairy PO: at least 30% women
 - Goat /sheep PO: all women
 - Backyard poultry PO: all women
 - Beef Cattle PO: male and female
 - Fish PO: at least 30 percent women
6. *Membership profile*: a tabular matrix which has two parts: (i) demographic table contains information of each member household, family size, adult, student, U-5 members, schooling of children, how many members involved with farming, primary and secondary income sources, annual income from primary and secondary sources, land holdings, major crops, etc. (ii) information on crop lands/ponds/livestock, herd/flock size, heifer/calf/male cow/female cow/DoD/DoC/Pigeon/birds etc., information on services, income from farming, etc.

Step 5: First General Meeting [Fifth Day]

FBF and Sub-technical officer will help the community to call for first meeting of POs with presence of all members. The agenda would be:

- introduce with each other
- Why we form this group
- Project objectives
- Project activities with PO
- Project expectation from PO
- PO's expectation from Project
- mission and vision of PO
- Structure (Executive Committee, General Committee – formation, rules and responsibilities of committees)

Step 6: PO Strengthening (Regular work over the project period)



The project will organize following training which are mandatory for all POs. A performance score card (PSC) will be used for monitoring and ranking of POs for getting project assistance:

- Strengthening of Farmers Organization and networking (5 days Training of Trainers - ToT)
- Negotiation (2 days ToT)
- Confidence building (2 days ToT)
- Financial Literacy (5 days ToT)
- Inclusive Leadership Development (2 days ToT)
- Farmers Advocacy and Consultation Tool (FACT) (5 days ToT)
- Study Circle on policies, citizen charters, access to services (5 days ToT)
- Establishment of collective businesses within PO

SCENARIO 2: VILLAGES WITH POs

Step 1: Rapport building with Upazila Livestock Office (FIRST DAY)

Same as step 1 for scenario 1. During rapport building with Upazila Extension Office and/or community, if any PO of target commodity already exists in the targeted village, FBF and assigned sub-technical officer will visit the PO, meet with leaders to call for a general meeting.

Step 2: General meeting with PO [Second Day]

FBF will introduce himself/herself with leaders and all members and discuss on following agenda:

- Introduction of PO (when it was formed, by which project/agency or autonomous, when project phased out them, registration status, bank accounts)
- Project objectives
- Project activities with PO
- Project expectation from PO
- PO's expectation from Project
- If the project needs any restructuring whether PO allows
- Structure (Executive Committee, General Committee – formation, rules and responsibilities of committees)
- Finally performance score card (PSC) will be used to assess their institutional maturity

If PO obtain a standard PSC score, FBF will go for second step. Otherwise, FBF will thank participants and request PO members to improve themselves in identified weak areas.

Step 3: Participatory exercises with the PO members [THIRD Day]

Except wealth ranking, FBF will follow all PRA tools discussed in step 4 under scenario 1. and finally prepare membership profile following step 4 (SI no. 6).

Step 4: PO Strengthening (Regular work over the project period)

Similar to step 6 of scenario 1.