

CHAPTER 4 WORKING WITH GROUPS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

A key principle of the present DAE extension approach is working with groups of farmers. This has involved a shift in emphasis from individual contact to group contact - though this does not mean that individual contact is abolished. Working with groups is an integral part of the extension approach, and can contribute to targeting, responsiveness to farmer needs and decentralisation.

4.1 ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS OF WORKING WITH GROUPS

Table 4.1 shows that there are seven main advantages to working with farmers groups. However, for each of these advantages, there are limitations. **Table 4.1** also shows some tips for overcoming the limitations, and building on the advantages.

In addition to the advantages listed below, working with groups helps build continuity within the extension service. Working with groups is only part of DAE's revised extension approach, it is not expected to be the only means of providing a cost-effective, high quality extension service.

TABLE 4.1: WORKING WITH GROUPS - ADVANTAGES, LIMITATIONS AND TIPS

Advantage	Limitation	Tips
1. Contact with more farmers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one or a few farmers can dominate the group; • lack of direct contact with individual farmers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourage all members to participate; • deal diplomatically with dominant farmers; • encourage groups where members have a shared interest and a similar background; • do not depend only on working with groups - use individual contact when necessary.
2. Groups help targeting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • jealousy from people who are not group members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work with groups of farmers of all types - male and female, large and small.
3. Improves the learning and spread of knowledge among farmers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harder to address individual problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • visit individual farmers who are facing a special problem - but do not spend too much time with individual farmers.
4. Enables farmers to actively participate in programmes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be difficult to arrange meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask farmers to help arrange meetings - use chairpersons or convenors as a contact point.
5. Improves the flow of information about farmers problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • farmers may be less honest in a group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adopt an open and friendly attitude; • facilitate, listen and ask questions, avoid giving long speeches.
6. Provides a forum for farmers to take joint decisions / actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be difficult to reach some target groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seek advice from other organisations which have affiliated groups.
7. Better access to resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • only one farmer may control the resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure farmers share materials in the group.

4.2 PRINCIPLES OF WORKING WITH GROUPS

To guide staff in working with groups, the Department has adopted four principles. A principle is something which sets a framework for what needs to be done and how it should be done. The principles are:

- work with existing groups;
- work with temporary as well as permanent groups;
- work with group members from the same socio-economic background;
- work in partnership with other agencies.

Work with Existing Groups

DAE works with existing groups because there is no point in wasting valuable staff time in forming new groups if there are already many appropriate groups operating. DAE works with existing groups because forming new groups is a complex, time consuming process which requires a high level of social organisation skills which field staff do not have. There are two types of existing groups: those formed by rural people themselves, or those formed by other organisations. Existing groups are likely to be quite permanent in nature, and may be guided by objectives not directly related to agriculture. Existing groups are likely to have group members with similar interests or backgrounds.

Work with Temporary as well as Permanent Groups

There are two types of temporary groups: those where farmers come together for a single extension event; or those where farmers form a group which may last a month, season or year. DAE is already working with temporary groups through field day events, motivational tours and other methods. These groups generally exist only for a day. In this case, the group is purely a collection of individuals at a single extension event, and there is no need for group rules, constitutions, or formal leadership. DAE has some experience with this type of group. Sometimes a temporary group forms the basis for the establishment of a permanent group.

Work with Group Members from the same Socio-economic Background

Group based extension is more effective with groups whose members have similar backgrounds because participants are more likely to have similar needs and problems. Different farmers have different problems, so extension staff should try to work with groups whose members come from similar backgrounds, operate similar types of farm, or have similar interests.

Work in Partnership with Other Agencies

Other organisations, government and non-government, often have affiliated groups. These groups could be encouraged to expand their activities, rather than DAE forming new groups. In this way, DAE could offer a service both to farmers and to other organisations. Other organisations may not refer to their affiliated groups as “agricultural groups” but members are likely to have a farming interest. Groups affiliated with NGOs are particularly important as they are more likely to be made up with members who have similar backgrounds, and can

assist DAE to contact women, landless, marginal or small farmers. The Marginal and Small Farm Systems Crop Intensification Project in Kurigram district is one example of how DAE can work in collaboration with another organisation. Here, Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) assisted the Department in forming small farmers groups to obtain credit from banks, and agricultural information from DAE.

Figure 4.1 shows these principles in a diagram. Each principle is related to each of the others and all the principles have the same importance.

FIGURE 4.1: PRINCIPLES OF WORKING WITH GROUPS

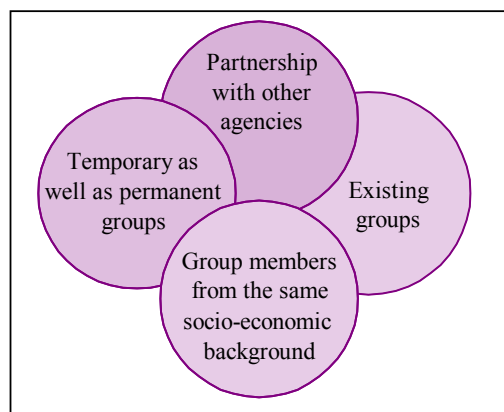


Figure 4.1 also shows that working in partnership with other agencies will increase the chances of successfully working with existing groups. Working in partnership is a key principle of the NAEP (see **Chapter 3**). Working with existing groups, which are likely to be permanent, can be complemented by working with temporary groups. All group based work is more effective if participants or group members have similar needs, interests, problems, backgrounds and aspirations.

4.3 SKILLS FOR WORKING WITH GROUPS

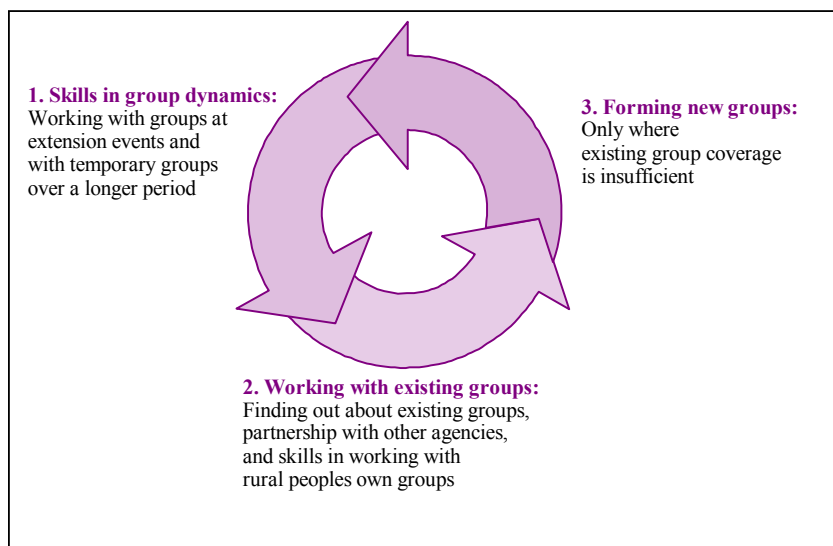
Working with groups requires different extension skills to working with individual contact farmers. **Figure 4.2** shows that there are three skill areas which staff need:

Skill Area 1: **Group dynamic** skills in interacting effectively with a collection of individuals - a group of farmers as opposed to a farmer's group. These skills can be applied immediately in the context of group extension methods which the Department is encouraging, for example, by making field days more effective. These skills are also essential in working with temporary groups which, for example, span a single season. Group dynamic skills are the most basic of all three skill areas and competency in this area is required before working with existing groups or forming new groups. Group dynamics are described in detail in **Section 4.4**.

Skill Area 2: **Working with existing groups**, often in partnership with other organisations. Using skills in group dynamics with farmer's groups which already exist. Skill Area 2 involves developing partnership skills, understanding organisational structures and how other organisations make decisions. It is described further in **Section 4.5**.

Skill Area 3: **Forming new groups**, where staff use their skills in group dynamics, and their experience of working in partnership with other organisations to form new groups of farmers. However, this is only necessary where there are no existing groups. The process of forming new groups is described in **Section 4.6**.

FIGURE 4.2: SKILLS FOR WORKING WITH GROUPS



4.4 GROUP DYNAMICS

Group dynamics refers to the way that extension staff interact with a group of farmers. This relates to:

- personal behaviour and facilitation skills when working with farmers; and
- the methods and techniques staff use.

Facilitation Skills

Consideration should be given to the following points when working with a farmer's group. These points are valid for any group type, at any group event:

- listening before talking and ensuring that what people are saying is understood. To gain a good understanding of an issue, short questions using the five helping question words (What? Why? When? How? Where?) are often useful;
- observing what is happening in the group. For example, what expressions and what body language are people using? What feelings or attitudes or concerns do these show?
- ensuring that group needs are identified, and working out with the group how these needs could be met. Entering into problem diagnosis and problem solving, and trying as far as possible to enable the group to solve its own problems;
- being respectful and taking feelings or ideas seriously as well as being flexible to suggestions;
- not allowing dominant group members to undermine or "put down" others;
- encouraging group members to participate and creating an open environment for participation;
- being patient and relaxed, not rushing the group process;
- not promising anything before it is certain it can be done, always keeping promises or explaining why they cannot be kept.

Extension Methods for Working With Groups

Group extension methods are those which involve more than one person at the same time. Group methods build on interaction among participants and are based on group dynamics. There are a variety of group extension methods covered in **Chapters 10 and 11**. It is important to have a good understanding of each group extension method and how to use each effectively when working with a group of farmers.

4.5 WORKING WITH EXISTING GROUPS

There are two types of existing groups:

- those which are affiliated with other organisations; and
- those which are formed by rural people themselves.

Examples of Existing Groups

In most blocks, thanas and districts, there will be many different groups of farmers. Some will have been established by rural people themselves. Some will have been established by NGOs, and others will have been established by government departments. Some might have been established by DAE. At field level, there could be a wide range of different groups already, such as:

- single category groups: e.g. women, large farmers, small farmers (homogenous);
- mixed category groups (heterogeneous);
- co-operatives e.g. those affiliated with the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) and the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB);
- women's groups e.g. those affiliated with NGOs;
- youth groups or school groups;
- crop specific groups e.g. paddy, wheat, fruit trees, vegetables etc.;
- NGO groups e.g. those affiliated with BRAC or RDRS;
- credit groups e.g. those affiliated with Grameen bank;
- homestead groups e.g. members who grow crops in the homestead area;
- area specific groups e.g. members from a particular village;
- family planning groups;
- agricultural traders groups e.g. seed and pesticide merchants;
- irrigation groups e.g. members of a water pump association.

Information About Existing Groups

In order to establish what groups DAE should work with in a particular area extension staff first need to find out about the types of groups that exist in their locality. Some items of information which should be collected include:

- group name and location;
- contact persons name and address;
- affiliation of the group;
- activities of the group, or type of services offered by support organisation;
- number of members according to target groups;
- objective / purpose of the group.

There is a standard **Group Information Form**, which summarises this information and which should be completed by the BS for every existing group in their block. The form is shown in **Annex VI**. When the Block Supervisor has gained an understanding of each existing group in the block, a decision can be made about providing extension services. Not all groups will either need, or even want, extension support. It is wise to offer support to groups which have:

- requested advice or support;
- fairly small membership who know each other fairly well;
- members who have similar interests, needs and backgrounds;
- members who have agricultural interests, and gain income from agriculture;
- good interaction between members and an ability to share information willingly;
- clear objectives, and an ability to plan jointly to meet objectives;
- an affiliation to an organisation which DAE knows, or can work with.

Partnership with Other Agencies

A key issue is the organisation to which an existing group is affiliated. This is the organisation which has promoted the group, and to which the group is linked. The name of this organisation is recorded on the Group Information Form.

It is difficult to work with an existing group if DAE has not developed a relationship with the organisation to which the group is affiliated. For this reason, it is extremely important that supportive and collaborative relationships are established. Relationships between DAE and organisations which have affiliated groups could be established at any level.

Grassroots Level

Block Supervisors develop a relationship with the group, group leaders and group members. Block Supervisors understand the group and its objectives and activities, the agricultural issues members are interested in, and the agricultural problems they have. Information about the group is recorded, and, where appropriate, services offered on the basis of group needs.

Block Supervisors and thana staff establish a relationship with the group promoter of the organisation. To achieve this, staff can find out who the promoters are, arrange to meet them, introduce DAE's extension approach and how DAE proposes to work with groups. It is often better if a thana level relationship is developed before an organisation's affiliated group is approached.

Thana Level

DAE thana staff establish a relationship with thana level staff of the concerned organisation to gain consent to approach groups. Information regarding the organisation should be collected and recorded by the BS. The TAECC is an appropriate forum for developing relationships. DAE can also visit concerned organisations before, during and after a set of Problem Censuses. A separate liaison meeting with all concerned organisations could be held to explain the new DAE approach to working with groups. Organisations which have several affiliated groups could be encouraged to provide information to DAE, and a format is provided for this in **Annex VI**.

District Level

District DAE staff also develop relationships with other organisations. Sometimes this may be necessary as other organisations may require permission from their higher authority to work with DAE. Ways to build relationships at District level might include; holding an

awareness raising meeting; inviting other organisations to join the DEPC or to participate in the district fair. Again, other organisations could be invited to provide information about their groups, and a format for this is also provided in **Annex VI**. This information should be provided to thana and block level staff.

Regional Level

Relationships could be established by inviting potential partners to the Agricultural Technical Committee. Alternatively, Additional Directors can attend regional planning forums organised by affiliated organisations.

Headquarters and Policy Level

DAE has formed a DAE-NGO Liaison Committee (see **Chapter 3**). This committee should be referred to if there are problems at lower levels which cannot be solved by the District Training Officer or the Additional Director (Region). The Extension Policy Implementation Co-ordination Committee (EPICC) at ministry level seeks to provide a favourable environment for partnership. The development of relationships is most likely to start at thana or district level. Where a link at a higher level is required, the issue should be referred to the regional office.

Rural People's Own Existing Groups

Quite often in rural areas, people have formed their own informal groups. These are not affiliated with any outside organisation, but fall into the category of existing groups. Informal groups exist and many have an interest in learning about new agricultural issues and ideas. The Group Information Forms in **Annex V** can be used to record information about these groups. An advantage with rural people's own groups is that there is no need for complex liaison and linkage between DAE and another organisation. However, extreme care should be taken not to disturb the group, or divert it from its main purpose. Rural people's groups play an extremely important role in social development, to which agricultural extension can contribute only if the group is willing.

Supporting the Process of Group Development with Existing Groups

Extension staff can help existing groups to **plan** and **keep records**. This contributes to group development and self reliance, and also helps Block Supervisors to identify specific areas where farmers groups need agricultural services.

Group Planning

Group planning enables groups to set priorities, activities and means of measuring progress, but is of no use with a single event group. Group planning is facilitated by field staff, but controlled by the farmers who make up the group, or the organisation to which it is affiliated. With existing groups, staff must take care that there would be no problems if they facilitate group planning. Group planning can help set types of extension activities that need to be implemented, at what times and where, and for what reason. To facilitate group planning, the following guide can be used:

STEPS FOR GROUP PLANNING

Issues: Ask the group to list what issues are most important to them or list most important problems they are facing in relation to a particular issue.

Objectives: Ask the group to write specific objectives for each issue or problem. For example, if a problem area relates to seed preservation, how much seed of what quality needs to be preserved

for local use? If a problem area relates to the use of organic manure, how much compost is required for what uses and when.

Activities and Resources: Ask the group to list what is needed to achieve each objective. What resources are required - in terms of labour, land, capital etc.? Who would need to do what and when? What inputs are required and where will they be found? Group planning attempts to promote locally sustainable actions, so anything which requires a lot of money may not be sustainable. For this reason, some objectives may be easier to attain than others. To help decide which objectives are truly realistic, ask the group what advantages and disadvantages there are for each objective.

Time Schedule: Ask the group to rank the activities and make a tentative time schedule. What should be done first, second, third etc. Precisely when should each task be done

Reviewing Progress: Decide at what points to monitor and evaluate, and how. Who will monitor? What criteria will determine success? At which times is monitoring critical? When should evaluation or review be conducted?

Block Supervisors and thana level staff should record which parts of the group plan they are involved in. For example, when should a field day be held, at what time and where? What other assistance is needed by the group and when? When should meetings be held? This information should be recorded in the BS diary and fortnightly staff work programmes.

Record Keeping

Extension staff can help existing groups to keep records, so that:

- members remember what has happened, what has been discussed or done;
- information and data to monitor progress is maintained;
- information and data for evaluation is maintained;
- agricultural problems and information needs are correctly recorded;
- information provided by DAE is recorded for future use.

With existing groups, there will probably already be an established system of record keeping. If so, extension staff need to fit into that system. If not, they could suggest one, but only in co-operation with the organisation to which the group is affiliated. If there is an established record keeping system, and it proves impossible to fit agricultural extension issues into it, DAE staff could suggest that a separate "extension book" is kept with the permission of the concerned organisation, and in partnership with the farmers.

In this case an extension book might be a small note book which is used by the group to record:

- what activity or activities have been discussed;
- what has been agreed;

- progress on an activity;
- any problems found by the practising group members;
- any new information provided by DAE which will be of use to the group.

DAE does not supply such books. The group can be encouraged to get one themselves, to record requests for information, dates and times of extension events, information they found useful, and follow up actions that were agreed at any extension event.

4.6 FORMING NEW GROUPS

Occasions for Forming New Groups

Since DAE needs to reach all target groups, staff must be sure the existing groups that they decide to work with will cover enough of these people. If not, the Department runs the risk of working only with certain types of farmer. If particular target categories such as women, young people, the landless or minority groups are under represented, new groups may need to be formed. Similarly, if particular thanas, blocks or villages do not have acceptable existing groups, new groups may need to be formed. Where another agency has an established programme of group formation or experience of working with a particular category of farmer, it may be appropriate to encourage that agency to expand its activities in order to cover the gap. DAE can then provide technical support and advice to any new groups that are formed as part of the agencies work.

The Department will only form a new group if:

- ***a specific target group is not represented in a particular area, or***
- ***a particular area does not have any existing groups, or***
- ***a local organisation is unwilling to expand group formation in the area, with the particular target category.***

Role of DAE Staff

DAE staff should not have any formal position within a group. The role of the extension staff is as a facilitator not a leader. The normal role for the Block Supervisor is to encourage farmers to meet, ask views and listen to responses, to encourage the active involvement of farmers in the process of group formation and agricultural development. Block Supervisors may need support from thana level staff when forming new groups.

Size and Structure

There is no fixed size for new groups. In general, groups larger than 30 are quite difficult to manage and tend to have less interaction between members. Equally, groups smaller than 6-8 can be time consuming to work with and lose many of the advantages of the interaction between members in larger groups. There is also no fixed structure for new groups. Rather, there are options which farmers can choose from, or decide themselves. These include a management committee made up of a chairperson, secretary, and, if money is involved, a treasurer. Alternatively, there may simply be a convenor or contact person. Convenors are a better option for temporary seasonal groups, such as those based around a series of field days. In this case, the Block Supervisor simply makes contact with one group member, who will inform the other members of scheduled field days.

Stages in Forming New Groups

Box 4A shows the stages involved in facilitating the establishment of a temporary group. A temporary group might at some stage decide that it wishes to become permanent. If this is the case, DAE may be able to provide assistance. **Box 4B** shows the steps involved in facilitating the establishment of a permanent group.

BOX 4A: STAGES FOR FACILITATING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A TEMPORARY GROUP

Plan Initial Meeting: Invite potential members to a meeting. Potential members have similar backgrounds, land holdings, problems and interests. Set a date, time and location for a first meeting which is convenient to farmers.

Hold Initial Meeting: Stimulate a discussion of common problems. Discuss solutions and make potential members aware of extension activities going on in the area, or other activities which could be initiated. Decide if a temporary group could be formed. Decide follow-up meeting date, time, location.

Decide Structure/ Make a Plan: At a second meeting, discuss options for group structure. Explain that the simplest option for a temporary group is a convenor. Decide how long the members

Wish to work together as a group - a month, a season, a year? Define what the purpose of the group is, what agricultural issues members are most interested in, and what development options are most appropriate. Decide what extension activities will be necessary - a series of field days at a demonstration plot? A trial of a technology on a farmer's field? A series of farm walks? Decide what criteria would measure the success of the temporary group. Include decisions in the annual plan or work programme.

Implement Plan: Implement the extension activities with the group, and monitor progress and achievement in relation to the stated group purpose and criteria for success.

Final Meeting: Once the planned duration of the group has passed, hold a review meeting. Discuss what had been planned and what had been achieved. The members may wish to develop a new set of activities (i.e. extend their duration for example, by a further season). The members may wish to form a permanent group. Find out what the farmers wish to do, and assist them if possible.

BOX 4B: STAGES FOR FACILITATING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERMANENT GROUP

Formation: Individuals come together and express their willingness to work together over a long period. Facilitate this process by identifying potential members. Field staff need to gain the confidence of farmers, gain an awareness of issues they are concerned about, and help farmers share things with each other.

Setting Goals: Individual members discuss ideas and agree goals together. Savings and credit often provide a core reason for group existence. Group members begin to explore other interests they may share, such as common concerns. This might happen through a series of meetings facilitated by Block Supervisors with support from thana level staff. A simple goal statement, or a motto, can help a collection of individuals develop a common identity. The group starts to make plans to attain goals.

Adopting Structures: Members start to adopt roles within the group. These roles may include formal positions such as chairman, secretary, treasurer. A management committee may be formed. Block Supervisors can help by providing different options for structures, or by providing options for how people might be chosen to perform particular roles in the group. The Block Supervisor has no formal role in the group, does not select the structure, and does not select or appoint group members to positions. Support should be readily available from AEOs or TAOs.

Decision of Structure: Discussions and debates settle down. Members accept different roles in the group. Common rules are made and accepted by members. The group starts to put plans into action. Joint group planning can help this process, and field staff can work with groups to enable them to plan activities to attain the group goal. Some of the activities are likely to involve the implementation of group extension methods with the group members - field days, participatory technology development, fairs, folk media and so on. Unlike a temporary group, these activities are not the core reason for the groups existence. The extension methods will, however, help group development.

High Performance: The group settles into a way of working with accepted roles for all members. Tasks are shared out through agreement. This may include changing roles and rotation of positions among members. A strong and stable group acts as a team which works together to achieve agreed objectives. Field staff may even withdraw or reduce their involvement as the group will have attained a measure of sustainability. The group will be able to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate alone, and extension staff will have stimulated improvements in farmer to farmer extension. The group may develop new roles and take on new tasks that are only loosely related to the original reason for establishment. Group membership and leadership may change.