A Practical Guide to Farmers Research Groups

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Acknowledgements

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1. Background

Recent research work in Ethiopia and beyond has shown that technologies that were developed at the research stations without the participation of farmers are often refuted by these farmers. This is due to the fact that, technologies that were generated from the viewpoint of researchers had a little chance in meeting actual farmers’ needs and solving their critical problems. Because of this, the rates of adoption of the technologies developed in research system were found to be very low and the return is said to be insignificant when one compare the investment incurred in research and the outcome from research. In the past, farmers were considered as passive recipient of technologies developed in the research stations despite their rich experience, knowledge, and capacity to both investigate and generate useful ideas that would guide research. This issue becomes an important concern and focus of attention by individuals, policy makers and few social researchers that ultimately led to the turning point to participatory research.

The word ‘participation’ and ‘participatory’ entered in the research vocabulary in the 1980s (Chimdo et al., 2005). Since then, an array of participatory research and extension methodologies aimed at involving beneficiaries in technology development and dissemination process has been developed and being used at a wider scale. For instance, Farmers’ Participatory Research (FPR), Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Participatory Technology Development (PTD), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Client Oriented Research (COR) can be mentioned as examples. These participatory research and methodologies yielded significant output in terms of improving the top down nature of the research system and in involving farmers in the research process though their output varies from methods to methods.

In the late 1990s, others new participatory methodologies that enhance active participation of small groups of farmers in research emerged and become popular in many countries. This new methods of approaching farmers in the research process was found to be an entry point for minimizing the existing wider gaps between research and farmers, a turning point to active participation of farmers and a means for matching needs and potential technologies developed in research. These are known as Farmers Research Group (FRG), and Farmer Research Extension Groups (FREG)
In 2007, a project known as Rural Capacity Building project (RCBP) in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD) has been initiated to support participatory research and extension through strengthening Research-Extension Farmer Linkages (REFL) and enhancing FRGs/FREGs in nine regional states where the project is designed to be implemented. It is believed that, the involvement of farmers by way of FRGs, effective coordination of REFL, appropriate technologies would be developed, transferred, and consequently this would increase the rate of adoption of the technologies by these farmers.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE GUIDLINE

It was noticed that the concept and philosophy of FRG/FREG is new to most of the Subject Mater Specialists (SMSs), Development Agents (DAs) and to other development actors working in the project regions. In addition, many practitioners working in rural development programs are repeatedly grappled with the concepts of ‘Farmers Research Group’ and ‘Farmer-Research Extension Group’. This short guideline is therefore, prepared to give common working definitions and create common understanding via highlighting some of the basic concepts and philosophy of Farmers Research Groups (FRGs) and why this days FRGs become an important approaches to participatory research and extension programs. Likewise, an effort is also made to clarify on how FRGs and Farmers Research Extension Groups (FREGs) can be established following some necessary steps and consequently how FRG members perform their duties in the process of participatory innovation generation and dissemination.

Hence, this guideline is designed and written to be used for SMSs, DAs, researchers, and other professionals working in rural development programs and others who are interested to work with FRGs. The guideline is designed to be simple and easy to understand. It can be also helpful in teaching at agricultural universities and ATVET colleges. Nevertheless, the writer of this guideline does not believe that all-important information for FRG is included and every issues of FRG are fully covered. But, he believes that, for the time being, this guideline will give sufficient information for practitioners and subjected for improvement based on comment from users and expertise working in the field of participatory research and rural development interventions.
3. INCEPTION OF THE FRG APPROACH AND BASIC CONCEPTS

The concept of FRG as an extension methodology was first introduced in Latin America by local agricultural research community as a focal point for participatory technology development and verification (Chimdo et al., 2005). As time goes on, the concept of the FRG has spread first to Asian and from Asian to African countries. When the concept of FRG was introduced to Africa, there were resistances particularly by natural scientists who were biased in favor of applied research. At that time, in fact, different people gave different meaning to the FRGs. For instance, some said FRG is a group of people who does just similar activities what researchers do in their normal jobs while, others said FRG is a group of farmers who used as a tool for ‘Transfer of technologies’ developed in the research centers. Some others also said FRG is a group of farmers that are established for political purpose. Nevertheless, as the time went by and awareness created, many practitioners indeed realized as the meaning given to FRGs by the natural scientist neither reflect the idea behind why FRG is needed nor clearly define what FRG is all about.

4. DEFINITION OF FRGs AND FREGs

Currently, many practitioners or development facilitators define both FRG and FREG synonymously as the same. In fact, there are no as such differences between the two, when one looks in terms of their objectives, goals, and frame of reference. However, when one sees from the dimensions of their developmental stages and the extent of their links with research and extension, in fact there are some differences between the two. (Table 2). In short, the following paragraphs will give definitions of FRGs, FREGs and the basic idea why both are advocated in the current rural development programs.

5. WHAT IS FRG?

Farmers Research Group (FRG) is a small group of farmers (10-15) who are interested to work in groups in collaboration with research, extension and with other non-public organizations in the process of participatory technology generation, verification, demonstration and improvement. In other word, FRG
is a group of farmers who are willingly organized to solve their problems in collaboration with relevant stakeholders in particular with research and extensions and consequently manage their problems through establishing a wide knowledge base.

Therefore, the ultimate goal of organizing FRG is to build their capacity so as to manage their own problems and empower them for self-help development while the immediate objective is to improve the production, productivity and livelihood of the groups through joint and co-learning with relevant stakeholders at field conditions.

In nutshell, FRG is a method for an entry point for intimate integration between relevant groups and a forum where farmers and researchers learn from one another at on-farm conditions and consequently develop appropriate technologies that suit to their farming conditions. In this process, members in one FRG and other supporters usually treat each other as true partners who join hands in the journey to find solutions for their problems. To this effect, FRG members meet around tables or discuss their communal issues under the trees and jointly plan to alleviate them as shown in Figures 1 and 2.
In doing so, FRGs assess importance of the technologies demonstrated by research through participatory way in terms of their existing scenarios i.e. critical problems, needs and consequently make a choice to accept, modify/redesign and/or even totally reject them.

Therefore, FRG approach is very useful for co-learning and complementarities of the indigenous knowledge and scientific knowledge. Due to this fact, in FRG approach farmers and researchers are usually considered as a resource for each other in the process of participatory innovation generation and dissemination. Towards this process there must be a frequent contact and communication between the two or multiple parties so that one will share different types of knowledge and skill. This knowledge and skill are the one that are tested and consequently developed based on real conditions of farmers. That is why FRGs can be called as a ‘school without wall’.

6. WHY FRGs?

As I have tried to mention above, FRG is important because:

- Farmers didn’t adopt technologies generated by research since research agenda’ is framed from the view point of researchers,
- Less opportunity to know farmers needs and problems by the traditional culture of research (top down),
- Innovation development is too costly, lengthy process and poor in meeting the desired needs,
• No opportunity for the development of location specific technologies, and
• No opportunity for refinement of technologies developed by the research
system.

7. GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF FRG

There are four guiding principles in FRG formation, the group:

• Need to be formed based on interest (Top down enforcement usually end up
with invisible output),
• Should be manageable or small (All members must have a chance to speak
and actively participate),
• Should be homogenous (Members usually must have the same vision and
trust each other), and
• Must engage on priority needs and problem of the group and innovations that
improve their capacity to produce more and generate income for the group.

8. WHO CAN BE A MEMBER OF FRGs?

Farmers with variety of background can be a member of the FRGs if they have
a common problems/ needs and can understand each other. Membership must
be based on voluntary and enforcement by outsiders is not advisable. Thus,
major criteria to be a member in a given FRG are those who are engaged in
farming activities, known to the community, and interested to work in groups.

DAs, SMSs, researchers, politicians, NGOs, rural development facilitators,
analytical university instructors and other representatives from different
organizations are usually considered as a team members who are supporting
and working with FRG mainly to give technical support or facilitation as
shown in diagram1. Thus, these team members are not expected to play a
leading role in any meeting of FRGs and in maneuvering the decision of the
FRGs. Their role is limited to facilitation and giving technical assistance for
self help development and group empowerment. To be a member as well as to
give facilitation, first and most importantly, individual members and
facilitators need to get acceptance by the groups and community.
Membership in FRG can be limited based on:

- The experience of the other FRGs,
- The outcome of the previous FRG,
- Positive spillover effect of the FRGs established before, and
- Leadership and the extent of transparency in overall process of group activity.

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9. WHAT IS FREG?

Farmers–Research-Extension Group (FREG) is also a small group of farmers who are gradually graduated from FRG to FREG after fulfilling certain criterion. As a principle, FRG to be promoted to FREGs must jointly work with researchers at least for one or two cropping seasons and acquire all necessary skills and techniques on improved farm management practice and able to show the practice they acquired to their fellow farmers.
In other word, when the researchers and extension think that the FRGs groups have attained their initial objectives and goals or when the group has gained all necessary skills for instance on crops, livestock and natural resource management and the like, then FRGs members are expected to be graduated or promoted to FREGs. When the FRG members are promoted to FREGs, researchers gradually need to minimize their day-to-day communication and regular contact and in place they give more attention to organize new FRGs who could not get the chance to work with researchers. This is particularly true when resources and skilled workforce i.e. when shortage of budget and technical expertise are limited to continue the work with FRGs.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that the researchers should totally terminate giving technical backups on innovations to FREG members. It is to say that the contact and communication is not as frequent as it was in FRG. That is why the word 'R 'representing research is still maintained in FREG. In place, the extension workers took more responsibility in giving the technical support and in facilitating the FREGs activity particularly to scaling up and sustain the knowledge and skill gained at the FRG stage.

Those FRGs who are qualified for FREG are usually provided with ‘green certificate’ that ensure he/she or the group has gained necessary knowledge, skill and capacity to manage their own activities by using new knowledge gained and innovation developed while working in FRGs stages. Thus, the FREGs are gradually moved towards ‘colligate researchers’ (Biggs, 1989) in which farmers are reorganized as innovators and experimenters and become equal partners of scientist and extension workers (E Jonfa & AWaters-Bayer, 2005). Therefore, members in FREGs are treated as experts who are equipped with necessary skill and knowledge and can be used as an extension agent who can teach other followers farmers. Thus, right after FRGs is prompted to FREGs DAs are expected to organize follower farmers under each FREG in order to enhance farmer-to-farmer technology dissemination and co-learning as shown in Fig.3. That is why FREG are called as a ‘school with permanent wall’
10. COMMON FEATURES BETWEEN FRG AND FREG

Both FRG and FREG share common features. Firstly, both are an entry point for social learning. Secondly, they are small working groups who are willingly organized themselves to work with research and extension in the process of participatory technology generation and dissemination. Thirdly, they are organized to build their capacity and manage their own activities by way of investigating, generating, and adopting and make use of innovations. Both require teamwork. A team is a group of people who share:

- common vision with a goal to achieve,
- responsibilities and duties, and
- Knowledge, skill, experience, resource, and results.

The main difference between them is that, FRG is mainly for technology generation and hence there is intensive contact between research and FRG members’ while FREG is for promoting or wider use of the knowledge gained at stage of FRG and thus there is frequent contact with extension than with
research. In nutshell, organizing FRGs and equipping them with new technical skills and knowledge is mainly the responsibility of research while, technical backstopping to sustain as well as to scale up the technical skill gained by the FREG is the responsibility of extension. For detail understanding, please see Fig 4 & Table 1.

Fig.4. Developmental stages of FRG and FREGs

Table-1 some points that illustrate the similarities and differences between FRG & FREG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FRG</th>
<th>FREG</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Mainly for technology generation</td>
<td>- Mainly for technology dissemination</td>
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<tr>
<td>- A group of farmers who join to work with research for the first time</td>
<td>- A group of farmers who gradually promoted from FRG into FREG and continue to work with extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Frequent contact between FRG members and researchers</td>
<td>- Frequent contact between FREGs members and extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Members are treated as a true partners to investigate and to learn both at on-station and on-farm</td>
<td>- Members are treated as an expert who are equipped with necessary skill and knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Members learn through sharing indigenous knowledge and scientific knowledge</td>
<td>- Members teach other follower by taking leadership in demonstrating the best knowledge/practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>- An entry point for participatory window for matching needs and potential technologies</td>
<td>- An entry point for scaling up/out of the best fitted technologies and wider impact</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Generally, a School with out wall</td>
<td>- Generally &quot;moved towards ‘collegiate research’&quot;</td>
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11. FORMATION OF FRG

FRGs can be formed either through internal and external initiatives (Chimdo, et al. 2003)

11.1 Internal initiation

Internal initiatives happen when farmers themselves take self-initiation to organize themselves in groups to solve their common problems and request the researchers or the extension for technical support. In this case, the group which takes self-initiation is expected to identify and prioritize problems on its own with the facilitation of the research and DAs.

On the other hand, research and extension organization could also take an initiation to form or organize FRGs based on specific objective to be attained. For instance, the objective could be to involve farmers in technology generation, verification, and transfer and adoption. When the groups are formed through this method, the research and extension are expected to demonstrate specific technology and/or provide technology option that could fit the needs and interest of the groups. Such technological options can be developed by participatory planning and knowledge sharing among the group members. This approach potentially transforms the research process from consultative to more collaborative or collegial mode of participation (Abera & Habtamu, 1998).

11.2 External initiation

The other possible way of forming FRG is through external initiation of donors' and NGOs with specific objectives to support the groups. For instance, projects such as JICA FRG, RCBP of the World Bank and CIDA, UNDP, IFAD and NGOs such as SG-2000, WORLDVISION-ETHIOPIA, SELF-HELP INTERNATIONAL, AGRISERVICE-ETHIOPIA, PROLINNOVA, FARM AFRICA, IPMS and the like. These organizations through their agencies could take an initiation to organize farmers in small groups in order to achieve certain objectives. In Ethiopia and beyond, these organizations played a paramount role in soliciting and providing funds for capacity building and in building farmers innovation by allocating budget as an incremental support to the government budget in which RCBP could be mentioned as good example.
The most effective FRG is likely to be, those groups that are formed through their own initiation and that build upon local forms of organization since it is bottom up in nature and is likely to address local felt-needs.

Whether the group is formed through internal or external initiatives, the following care has to be taken during group formation:

- Social issues (it should not violate the cultural and social arrangements)
- Proximity/agro-ecology
- Diversity of actors (male and female)
- Preference and interest of farmers

12. STEPS IN FORMING & OPERATING WITH FRGs

The process of FRG formation and establishment involves series of steps and these are summarized as follows:

Step-1 GETTING STARTED (Situation analysis and identification of needs):
During the situation analysis, the existing scenarios are assessed and opportunities, potentials as well as gaps are identified through the use of appropriate PRA tools. This could be possible by calling and organizing orientation programs for the proposed members to discuss on the problems of the groups/community and the need for group formation. The meeting should focus on the general idea of assessing the problems and the needs only. The facilitator may start the discussion as brainstorming, but then he/she should encourage people to speak. It is indeed good if the situation is analyzed in the presence of all relevant stakeholders whom we think are important members as well as in the presence of all other facilitators who are willing to support the envisaged group.
Lack of making critical assessment on farmers' problems and priority needs before attempting to the provision of extension service is often cited by many stakeholders as a critical problem. This is one of the main reasons that most technologies and extension services are not adopted and implemented as recommended. Therefore, during assessing situations, it is advisable to identify priority problems of the groups and consequently find solutions for the problems using the formats shown in tables 2 and 3.

Farmers' problems can be identified using different participatory tools and approaches. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is one of the methods selected for such practice. PRA is generally helpful to make situation and opportunity analysis where the existing scenarios of the given community are critically assessed in groups and solutions are identified together with farmers.

| Table 2. An example of the identification of problems and their prioritization |
|-----------------|----------------|
| No  | Problems | ranking |
| 1   |           |         |
| 2   |           |         |
| 3   |           |         |
Table 3. Problems solving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of main problems of the FRG</th>
<th>List Possible solutions</th>
<th>What prevents them from solving the problems</th>
<th>What will help the group to solve the problems</th>
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Step-2 FORMING FRGs:
Based on the result of the situation analysis, groups are to be formed on a particular problem to be addressed by the groups. Members to be organized in one FRG are briefly indicated below under the sub topics of group composition. Nevertheless, one has to notice the following point during group formation.

- Members should have common interest and clear objectives,
- Members have to be honest to each other,
- Members are from the same socio-economic status and respect each other,
- Members equally participate in discussion, decision making, doing activities and sharing benefits,
- All members in a group have equal chance to elect and to be elected, and
- Members obey rules and regulations and the regulation is equally applicable for all group members.

Right after formation of the group, it is advised to collect baseline data of the group members mainly to easily measure the impact achieved by the group members after the implementations of group activities.

Step 3 PARTICIPATORY PLANNING.
Participatory planning is when all group members who are organized under one FRG come together to analyze their activities, set timetable, establish group norms, develop proposals and plan on how to do field activities and accordingly share responsibilities. In FRG approaches, participatory planning is strongly advised and those activities that are planned on top down nature following the traditional system will not be accepted. During planning the two most important issues to be considered are proposal formulation and activity planning.
Proposal formulation is when group members are jointly identifying their problems and design strategy to solve them. In FRG approach, the proposals to be developed are not expected to be something like that of scientific one. It must be simple, short (two or three pages) and even not typed. What is rather important is that, the proposal should be a practical one and of potential value to solve farmers problems. With this regard, much is expected from research, extension, and Woreda team in advising and supporting farmers to do so.

Activity planning is based on the proposal developed and general group activities during the lifetime of the FRG. During activity planning issues such as, what to do, when to do, who will do what, how to do, what is available, what is not, and the like needs greater attention. As a principle, it is advisable to plan on what you have than intending to plan on what you do not have or expect to have.

Step 3.1 WHO WILL DEVELOP PROPOSALS?
In FRG activity, the traditional system where proposal are developed by researchers with the notion of “I know for you “does not work at all. Thus, proposals for FRGs are usually prepared jointly by all group members (FRG members, researchers, extension and other supporters). I argue that no one knows farmers problem better than him/her self. In fact, farmers have a capacity to develop proposals if they could get good advice and facilitation.
In their activity farmers were always doing research through trial and error and used to manage their problems by their own without assistance from the externals. What is rather a problem is that; farmer may not able to write their proposal on paper because of illiteracy. However, one should not also forget that farmers usually record their proposal by their hearts. Hence, when working with FRG it is a matter of retrieving or harvesting this information and putting on paper. In connection with this, two methods for proposal formulation are suggested.

One method is farmers who are organized under one group could select few representatives' members from the group, who have a capacity to develop proposals and generate relevant ideas for the group. Proposals developed through this method need to be brought back to all groups members for final approval and additional comment before submission.

The other method is, FRG members can contract professionals who could develop proposals on behalf of the group. This method is only advised when there are no group members who can read, write, and consequently develop the required proposal. In this case, since the service for developing proposals will be paid by the FRGs, care must be taken on the amount of money requested by the technical assistance. The cost should not be beyond farmers' capacity to pay. The cost for the technical assistance will be paid only when the project developed by the expert is to the satisfaction of the group members.

In general, weather the proposal is to be developed by the group members themselves or by the technical assistance, the proposal must clearly address farmers' problems and priority areas. In this regard, the support from research and extension are extremely important and this is one of the most important roles played by them.

**Step 3.2 MAJOR CRITERIA FOR FRG TOPIC PREPARTION**

The following criteria are used for assessing proposals of the FRG

- FRG problems are clearly stated,
- There is a high probability of tangible output that benefit FRG members,
- Participatory research/extension period should not be more that 2 years,
- Cost of participatory research/extension activity is affordable to the RCBP,
• Role of farmers, researchers, extension and other supporters such as farmers cooperatives, NGOs are clearly stated,
• The activity to be done by the project is inline with the objectives and overall goals of the RCBP, and
• The proposal is accepted by group members and advisory council meetings

Step-4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTIVITIES:
In general, FRG member including researchers, extension agents and other supporters are responsible to implements activities of the FRG exactly as planned by the group members. Sample activity plan format is presented in Table 3.

Failure to implement the activities as it is planned could result in poor outcome of the group and finally lead to group cracking. It is indeed important to notice that, the activity of FRG is not as others in which it is planed by leaders and implemented by farmers. As it is indicated above, it is jointly planned and jointly implemented. Therefore, each member in a given FRG and other facilitators are responsible and accountable to implement what is jointly planned and agreed upon by the member in a group.

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<th>No</th>
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<th>When (months)</th>
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<th>Resource needed</th>
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Step 5 ORGANIZING CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMS

Once farmers are mobilized and organized into different working groups, identify their needs and plan for their activities, the next step is to organize different capacity building programs in relation to the problems or critical gaps identified by the group and activity to be done by the group. Capacity building program under RCBP aimed to empower resource poor farmers especially women farmers and other vulnerable groups to innovate, use improved/appropriate technologies, and organize themselves to demand agricultural advisory, to monitor and evaluate their own performances and that of the service providers.

Nevertheless, the most important point to be noticed is that, capacity-building programs for instance training should not be given for the sake of
training. Thus, before organizing any kind of training the capacity profile of DAs, SMs, farmers and facilitators need to be assessed and thereafter, training workshops need to be organized based on the gaps/priority interest of the groups.

Whatever the case may be, capacity building program need to focus on real problems of farmers and farming situations. For instance, it will include the following among others:

- Practical training on improved crop and livestock production and management,
- Post harvest handling of high value crops (processing, grading, and packing), marketing and saving,
- Skill training on Artificial insemination (AI) service, management of demonstration plot, preparation of bee hives and preparation of compost,
- Training on participatory problem identification, planning, implementation and M&E,
- Training on participatory extension methods & approaches and communication skills,
- Training on farm record keeping and saving schemes, and
- In addition, other activities that will contribute for capacity building programs such as experience sharing and joint field visit within the region and beyond are encouraged.

Likewise, DAs working at FTC will get training on new areas that were not covered in ATVET training. Such training will include practical oriented participatory research and extension approaches and methodologies, extension communication and knowledge management's skills, improved field plot managements skills, farm record keeping and reporting. Training program should be planned based on cropping system of the farmers and the activity calendar of DAs and SMSs following the training flow format and training methods shown in figure 7 & 8 as an example.

During farmers training, it is also very important to notice that farmers' training is quite different from DA training in terms of the methodology, its content, and style of presentation. But, in some regions it was observed that both DAs and farmers are receiving the same training together. This kind of training is not actually advised in FRG approaches. Because, FRG members
are adults and adult training has its own methods, procedures, and steps, which are often different from the DA training. Figure 8

### Crop calendar (Land preparation, sowing---)

- FRG meeting to select training topics
- Final evaluation and training Assessment
- Experience sharing visit to sister FRGs
- Training 1 (Topic-1)
- Training (Topic-2)
- Training (Topic-3)
- Study tour visit to advanced areas
- Training output Evaluation

**Fig. 7. Schematic flow of training program for FRG**

### Training Methods

Training method is a method used to train farmers or the methods through which new information is communicated from trainers to trainees and from trainees to trainers. The training method can include introductory talk or presentation and discussion session, experiment, practice, study tours and the like.

In RCBP, training course is expected to be conducted with a combination of all methods. In the introductory presentation invited professional and technical consultants as well as advisors give the current up-to-date information on crop, livestock natural resource management, and gender. In experiments and practical, skill will be delivered to the participants through hand-on activities in the fields or laboratory. In study tours up-to-date research and its application in the real context can be shown.
So, the trainees will learn the theory by the introductory talk or presentation and discussion sessions, master the skills by experiments & practice, and understand the practical application of the technologies by study tours as it is illustrated in Fig. 7

Training methods

- Talk & discussion session
- Experiment & practice
- Study tours

*Fig. 8. Training methods*

**Training evaluation**

Conduction training evaluation is one of the most important activities to be considered but often what was lacking in most of the training sessions. Conducting training evaluation has three purposes.

- To evaluate whether the content of the training given is in line with the interest of trainees or not,
- To evaluate whether the trainer has equipped the trainees with expected knowledge and skill or not, and
- To know whether the trainees are understood the subject or not.
FRG Project: Training Evaluation Form for the trainers.

Name of the presenter: ____________________________ Date: __________
Subject: ____________________________ Overall score __________ out of 100

1: very poor, 2: poor, 3: satisfactory, 4: good, 5: excellent

A. Content

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<th>Subsection</th>
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<td>Conclusion</td>
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B. Delivery

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<tr>
<td>Eye-contact</td>
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<td>Gestures, body language</td>
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<td>Is the voice loud and clear?</td>
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<td>Is the term used easy to understand?</td>
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<td>Is the question properly answered?</td>
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<td>Is there enough interactions/ participation?</td>
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<td>Using of visual aid/samples/spacemen</td>
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<td>Hand-outs provided</td>
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<td>Time management</td>
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C. Attitude

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confident in training the subject matter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender consideration</td>
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Comments: ______________________________________

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Step 6. PARTICIPATORY MONITORING & EVALUATION (PM&E)

PM&E is mainly to:
- Measure group progress towards the designed objectives and goals,
- Check whether the group activities are implemented as planned or not, and
- Know whether the members in a group are performing their duties and responsibilities in accordance with the shared task or not.

Such PM&E exercises need to be carried out on a regular base by all group members as a self-evaluation. To ensure this, each member in a group should be aware of it and need to participate equally in all process and operations of the FRG.

Apart from self-evaluation by the group members, evaluation by non-participants farmers and leaders of the community are also encouraged.

In FRG approach, members must able to openly discuss and air out their internal feelings about the constraints they encountered in their group activities. In particular, issue such as the root causes of the problems and how the problems could be resolved should get adequate attention. Added to this, low participation of some members on group activities such as in attending group meetings, managing their fields and in putting the advice or recommendations into practice must get due attentions.

Members who did not performed their tasks must be criticized in front of group members but taking serious measure(such as punishment) against those poorly performed individuals in group is not advisable since it mostly leads to group cracking and lose of internet. Instead, designing different mechanisms and strategies that could help to improve the performance of such group is very important. For instance, organizing an award ceremony for those members who have performed good and shown visible impact and organizing training for poorly performed members can be suggested as a good strategy.

During PM&E, FRG members are also expected to evaluate the performance of the technologies from research by comparing them with
local practices in terms of yield, acceptance, market, and general contributions to FRG members. Fig. 9

![Fig 9 FRG members while evaluating their outcomes.](image)

**Step 7. SHARING RESULTS WITH OTHERS:**
Once the FRG has gained certain knowledge and experience or benefited from the group performance, it is advisable to organize experience sharing forums within the group and with others so as to enhance farmer to farmer learning as shown in Fig. 10

![Fig. 10 knowledge, experience and information sharing flow between farmers and farmers groups](image)
In general, steps in forming FRG and other related activities are summarized in Fig. 11. These steps are not rigid ones in which every FRG members must go through one by one separately. Thus, two or more steps can be simultaneously conducted depending on the level of farmers understanding and awareness on participatory research and group work.

14. SIZE OF FRGs / FREGs

There is no as such standard rule that obliges to have a certain number of members in a given FRG or FREG. As a result of this, the number of group members in one FRG/FREG often varies from place to place and from country to country based on socio-cultural and agro-ecological settings. For instance, in Ethiopia the number of group member in a given FRGs varies from 5-20 (Chimdo, et al, 2003) (JICA FRG project a maximum of 20 and FARM AFRICA, from 5-7), while in Africa such as in Tanzania from 45-130, in Kenya from 25-30 (Abera and Habtamu, 1998).

In fact, the size of a group does not have that much significant effect on FRG/FREG activities and performance if there is mutual understanding and common interest among the group members and as long as the size is manageable. Nevertheless, in most cases, it is advisable to have an average group member of 10-15 than having a large number of members in one group for many reasons (ease of communication, active participation, and exchange of information etc).
15. FUNCTIONS OF FRG

The daily function of FRG has to focus on the objectives and desired goal of the group members to be achieved. To achieve this, it is advisable to prepare group action plan jointly prior to any further steps of the FRG. The action plan needs to be based on the objective of the group to achieve. In practice, the function of FRG is often needed to be framed to on-farm activities that empower group members for self-help development and improved livelihood. Likewise, the function of FRG should not be limited to technology” intake” that come from the researchers, but, it has to be also able to initiate new ideas, system and innovations that fits to changing needs of farmers through influencing research agenda so as to fit the needs and interest of the groups. The daily function of FRG should also be focused in generating income for the
FRG members and on activities that support to build the capacity of the FRG members.

16. ELECTING MANAGING BOARDS

FRGs need to be managed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their activities and entire innovation process. Thus, as it is indicated below under the sub-topics of conflict management, all complicated problems, worries, and enquires of the group need to be managed wisely, fairly and rationally as soon as possible. This of course requires strong leadership and commitment of the leaders. Strong leadership is especially crucial in building and maintaining of cohesive farmers groups. Right after the formation of FRG, members are encouraged to elect their leader i.e. chairperson, secretary, and treasurer following the culture and democratic election process.

Fig. 12 FRG members while electing their management leaders.

During the election of the leadership, external supports /facilitators such as researchers and extension agents are not advised to be involved. The following are the desirable qualities of group leaders and managing boards:

- Able to work in groups,
- Able to communicate with others,
- Honest, patient and respectful,
- Able to keep group secrets, and
- Active and energetic.

The Main responsibilities of group leaders are:

- To make daily follow up of group progress,
- To ensure group regulation and constitutions are obeyed,
- To encourage participation of group members in discussion and decisions,
- To report on regular bases on the activity of groups to members and supporters,
• To introduce new innovations into the group and encourage member who are innovative
• To create liaisons within and with other external supporters, and
• To represent the group on special occasions.

17. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN FRGs

Social system is filled with worries, tensions and multiple conflicts. Thus, one has to assume that all these kinds of problems will appear starting from the formation of the FRGs. Therefore, conflict resolution and management need to get high emphases in FRG activity since conflict or contradictions are among one of the critical problems that often affects group stability and unity. Usually, conflict or contradictions are a sign of changes and needles to worry much about why they are appeared or created. But, what we need to worry is that, such contradiction should not be maintained or kept in FRG. We need to resolve them as soon as they appear. If otherwise, small and minor contradictions that are created in a group will expand from time to time and reach at the level of difficulty to manage or to resolve. In this regard, each member in a group is highly expected to point out the main reasons for the causes of conflicts and must show commitment and determination for managing them. For example, things like jealous and negative attitude to one another should be avoided in any group work as they badly affect group unity and integrity.

For managing group conflicts, it is advisable and as well as wise to resolve them through cultural and traditional conflict management methods than going to appeal small and minor group issues to the legal entity.

18. TIMING OF FRG MEETINGS:

For group work, frequent meeting is critical and this has to be manifested in the rulers and regulations of the group. Meeting dates, time, and place should be notified in advance and all group members need to be informed as early as possible. Group meeting should be done at a time when it is convenient for most group members. All group members, other supporting agencies and facilitators are expected to attend group discussion and respect whatever the group has decided as explained above under the sub topic of group function. Problems and enquiries that arise from the group members need to be carefully treated and must get solutions during each FRG meeting.
The decisions given in each meeting should be communicated to all members after carefully documenting the minutes of each meeting by using the following sample format.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major agenda for discussion: 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agenda 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision given:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agenda 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agenda 2</td>
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<td>Action to be taken:</td>
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<td>Agenda 1</td>
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<td>Agenda 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name of facilitators:</td>
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<td>Name of Group leader 1:</td>
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<td>(Chairman)</td>
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<td>2:</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(secretary)</td>
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19. LIFE TIME OF FRG

In most cases, FRG is established for a short period. Nevertheless, the lifetime for FRG varies from place to place and objectives of the group to be attained. For example, the lifetime for farmers field school (FFS) which has more or less similar objectives to FRG is a one year while the life time for other participatory technology development (PTD) are more than one year. Thus, the lifetime of a given FRG entirely depend on the type of activities that the group would like to engage in and on short and long-term objectives of the group. For instance, activities such as livestock production, perennial fruit production, integrated pest management; integrated natural resource management etc requires long time group collaboration, while short life time may be needed for annual crops such as vegetables and cereals crop production.

20. LINKS IN FRG/FREG

FRG/ FREG are expected to have a close link and intimate collaboration within the group and with members of the other groups. Therefore, developing
linkage mechanisms and strategies need to be designed by the groups’ right from the formation of the group. Because, poor linkage and relationships within and with other FRG can be a cause for group instability and lose of interest.

Thus, there must be healthy working relations and collaborations within the group members and with other groups so that innovations are better communicated from one FRG to the other. The linkages that need to be established within the group and with other must be both horizontal and vertical in nature. Vertical integration is when the FRG member has a close link and contact with research, extension, government and their subordinates. Horizontal integration is when there is a link and collaboration between the FREG and FRG. Both types of linkage are essential especially in order to exchange information and collect feedback from all similar or different categories of the group. Such collaboration and communication can be enhanced through organizing a joint visit, study tours, field days, and workshops.

24. RECORD KEEPING BY FRGs /FREGs

All activities and results of the FRG /FREG must be properly recorded and documented. Lack of keeping records on group activity is often cited by stakeholder as one of the major drawback to measure the outcome of the group as well as to know the historical development of the group. Unless all necessary records (Technical, financial, managerial) are kept in proper way, it is indeed very difficult to know what progress has been made, what difficulties are encountered, what outcomes have been achieved and who did what in a group activity.

Therefore, separate filling system for each FRG groups and if possible for each members need to be opened. Thereafter, daily activity performance of the FRG and the contribution of each member in a group must be documented. During reporting and group evaluation, this document must be referred to be rational and transparent. Those FRG activities that do not have proper documents will not get any financial support form the funding organizations or project.
25. REPORTING ON FRG/FREG ACTIVITIES

Recipients of the fund are expected to report the progress of each FRG on regular basis following the government system or based on enquires from the supporting organization. In fact, lack of producing or preparing reports and sending on a regular basis to the appropriate individuals or organization will lead to lose of many opportunities and advantages. For instance, according to RCBP, those FRGs who would send their report on time will get additional budget by taking from those FRGs that could not send their activity report as schedule.

On the other hand, the report must also be complete and fully describe all the progress of group activities in relation to each component and sub components. Likewise, the report must also clearly indicate actions to be taken by members and others depending on the shared tasks and roles.

In the case of RCBP, physical report is to be submitted on quarterly bases while financial activity report is to be submitted on monthly bases.

26. SOURCE OF BUDGET FOR THE FRGs/FREGs

Source of budget to run the activities of FRGs could be obtained from different sources. However, the budget from the national or local governments is the most reliable one for stable and sustainable function of FRGs. In addition to the government budget, project can also support the activities of the FRGs as an incremental budget. For instance, RCBP allocate each year for project regions (Amhara, Oromia, SNNP, Tigray, Afar, Benishangul Gumuz, gambella, Somali and Harari). For example, only for 2000 physical year, a total of birr six millions are allocated mainly to support FRG/FREG and linkage activities as indicated in table 4.

The amount of budget transferred to project regions is expected to cover cost for the advisory council meetings, field supervision, establish FRGs and support them in the process of participatory innovation generation and dissemination. However, the expense for recurrent cost such as perdiem for advisory council meetings and field supervision should not exceed 30% of the total budget allocated for each region.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Budget (birr)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Oromiya</td>
<td>1,075,665</td>
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<td>2 Amhara</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
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<td>3 SNNP</td>
<td>940,000</td>
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<td>4 Tigray</td>
<td>814,500</td>
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<td>5 Afar</td>
<td>500,000</td>
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<td>6 B.shangul</td>
<td>420,000</td>
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<td>7 Gambella</td>
<td>400,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Somali</td>
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<td>9 Harari</td>
<td>165,000</td>
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<td>10 Haromaya university and Diredawa</td>
<td>206,000</td>
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<td>11 Total</td>
<td>6,000,000.00</td>
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**27. OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES**

**27.1 GROUP IDENTIFICATION**

Right after the formation of the group, it is advisable to give the name for group identification. In addition, group category by sex, education and socio-economic status and types of group activities that the FRG would like to participate must be known to all relevant stakeholders and community leaders for legality purpose. (Fig.13A). In some FRGs, members name their group after their village while in some FRG they name it after the activities they want to engage in. For example, Vegetable FRGs, Tef FRGs, Maize FRGs etc and some other name it like ‘Unity For Growth and the like.

Such information need to be recorded and kept in the record of each FRG and whenever there is a change of name and group activities; it must be also documented in the record of the group.
PREPARING GROUP RULES & REGULATIONS

Preparing binding rules and regulations are critically needed when working in groups. It is just meant for the benefits of the members. Therefore, starting from the time of FRG formation, deliberate effort need to be made to develop necessary binding rules and by-laws to maintain group unity and manage group performance during its lifetime. Group rule and regulation is a written agreement made by the members in a group and only be changed by the groups.

The rules must clearly indicate what is expected from the member as a group and as an individual, how the groups as well as individuals in a group need to be governed and act according to the rules developed by the group. Group regulation must also clearly shows who is doing what in a group, what
measures to be taken in case members in groups are not act according to their responsibilities and duties. It has to also define the right and obligations of members and group leaders. Rules and constitutions of the group usually developed systematically and expanded as new issues are arise.

27.3 SAVING FROM WHAT HAS GAINED

The habit of saving must be encouraged by the group members both on individual bases as well as in groups. Saving is all about preparing for butter future, but it is also about growth (FAO, resource book for group promoter, 2000). Actually, people of Ethiopia often have limited skill in this area. Saving can be both in kind and in cash. Saving in kind includes grains obtained as a result of new innovations while saving in cash is depositing of the local currency from the sale of products or byproducts that the groups are engaged in as it is illustrated in Fig 14. Facilitators of the FRG must clearly inform the members about the importance of saving.

For example saving:
- Reduce group dependence on outsiders,
- It increases self-reliance and empower for self-help development, and
- It serve as life insurance for the groups at a time of risks.
27.4 GENDER CONSIDERATION

In principle, making enough rooms for active participation of women and men, boys and girls are important in any development programs. Therefore, it is very essential to consider gender and gender related issues while organizing FRG and designing any rural activities. In view of the RCBP, gender issues are considered as one of the major area of attention and project activities that do not consider gender issues by at least 30% will not accepted.

Actually, it is good to organize both men and women in one FRG provided that they are within the same socio-economic status, understand each other and have interest to be organized under one FRG. In fact, having both men and women in one FRG has so many advantages since women are usually good in bringing new ideas to the group and feeling more responsibility in their activities than what men do. Nevertheless, there are cases when one is forced to organize women farmers in one group because of the following reasons:

- Some villages wants to treat male and female group separately because of some traditions and cultural issues,
- It may be difficult for women to attend frequent meetings by male farmers,
- Women farmers have different needs, perceptions and ideas, and
- Women farmers may not talk more openly in informal gatherings and in front of male farmers.

Therefore, the choice either to organize women group as separate FRG or to organize together with men must be based on the culture of the community and interest of the groups. Hence, the facilitators are advised not to involve themselves in such decisions.
27.5 SUBMISSION OF THE PROPOSALS

As indicated above, under the sub-topic of proposal formulation, proposal are expected to be jointly prepared with relevant stakeholders in a group. Those proposal developed in groups are expected to be reviewed at zonal linkage REFLAC meetings using the format developed by ARTP. Proposal accepted at Zonal level REFLAC meeting will be presented to regional level linkage meetings for final approval. Approved proposal will be compiled and will be sent to RCBP and this will be done by the committee members drawn from different institutions. The committee members selected for this purpose are: The head of the research extension department of the EIAR, head of the socio-economic department of the regional research institute, head of extension department of the region and focal person for RCBP. Budget allocation will be also made by this committee members and each proposal will get maximum of birr 20 thousands per the project or proposal, and the copy of the approved and selected proposals and budget is expected to be submitted to the REFL specialist of the PMU not later than one month after the regional review.

27.6 SHARING ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES (Who is doing what?)

Defining roles and duties for each partners in a group is critically important. This will improve efficiency and effectiveness by way of accountability and sharing responsibility. The following will give some highlight of the roles and duties expected from each partners in a group. Nevertheless, such roles and duties are expected to be shared right after the types of FRG activities are identified and agreed by all members in a group.

27.6.1 COMMON TASKS FOR ALL GROUP MEMBERS

During the process of on-farm participatory innovation process members in FRG are expected to collaborate genuinely to implement the activities that are planned jointly. In this case, every member in a group must clearly understand the notion of group/team work and convince his/her self and contribute what is expected from him/her self. During sharing common and individual tasks, it
very useful and advantageous to consider the 5Us (What, Who, How, Where, When) as a guiding principle as it is illustrated in Fig. 13. The 5Us remind the FRG members to see things from different dimensions and accordingly to prepare themselves.

![Diagram of 5Us]

Fig. 15 5Hs as an important questions for FRGs

Source: EGERTON PRA hand book

In addition, each member is expected to learn new things from each other by testing, observing, comparing, and contrasting his/her traditional farm management practices with that of new technologies from research in terms of their relevance and general output. The observation would include among others; yield, quality/acceptance, cost, labor etc.

27.6.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR RESEARCHERS

As a general principle, before approaching farmers, researchers are advised to understand clearly the importance of participatory research and must approach farmers with open mind to learn as well as to teach.

Researchers are also expected to have a detail knowledge and package of information about the technologies he/she want to demonstrate to FRGs. Without having these packages of information before hand, it needles to organizing FRG. Because, there are cases when researchers are saying there are no seed, written manual, leaflets etc after organizing FRGs to provide such
information. In principle, such issues should be treated before organizing farmers.

In FRG approach, researchers are expected to demonstrate proven technologies in participatory way based on the demand by the FRGs through comparing with farmers' tradition practices. Researchers should not only limited to demonstrate the technologies from research to farmers but, also expected to conduct series of practical oriented participatory training and organizing different experience sharing visits and tours that he/she think important for FRGs. This can be done by joint collaboration with respective BOA.

The other interesting point that is expected from research is record keeping. It was noticed that some researchers are not recoding all data from on-farm participatory demonstration with the assumption that data for technologies to be demonstrated are already collected during the time of technology verification. In this case, it is important to notice that situation or the condition during technology verification is quite different from the situation during participatory on-farm technology demonstration. In other word, there are different nature of data between on-station and on-farm that also requires different interpretations.

### 27.6.3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBLITIES FOR DAs

- Provide technical advise to farmers
- Providing ideas useful for planning/designing participatory trials
- Implementing/assisting in implementation of the participatory trials
- Monitoring and data collection from farmers
- Promoting joint evaluation and recommendation
- Providing participatory training methods and approaches in collaboration with Research, NGOs
- Organizing experience sharing forums and/or tours in collaboration with relevant actors/stakeholders or independently
- Production and distribution of extension materials such as leaflets and manuals, brochures in collaboration with research, NGOs
- Assist farmers in getting improved technologies/inputs
- Empower farmers for self-help development
27.6.4 ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF FRG MEMBERS

Government or any donor organization primarily interested to support those groups who are initiated to support themselves. From this point in mind, FRG members are above all responsible to perform all activities as it is planned by the group members. In doing so, members under one FRG must collaborate with research in providing land for participatory demonstration and evaluation purpose. Two participatory demonstration plots are needed for comparison purpose i.e. one plot for demonstrating improved varieties/technology while the remaining plots is for the demonstration of local varieties/farmers practice.

Those FRG members who offer the land are treated as trail farmers, those farmers within the FRG who could not have land for participatory demonstration can learn from the trial farmers, and usually they are treated as a learning farmer. Therefore, farmers in one group must collaborate to learn from one another and to enhance farmer-to-farmer learning and innovation dissemination.

FRG members are also expected to evaluate both individual and group performance and clearly differentiate who is doing what in group activities. Likewise, FRG members are expected to give a feedback on the demonstrated technologies from research and output obtained from group work as it is critically important for future planning of the FRG.

28. General Goal of RCBP in regard with FRG

- Support the expansion of participatory research and extension activities through increasing number of FRGs (Target 250).
- Build the capacity of farmers (both men and women) to manage their own agricultural activities and empower them for self-help development.
- Increase interaction between research, extension, NGOs and private sectors facilitated by REFLAC, and
- Improved livelihood of the participant FRGs/FREGs and contribute to the improved economic growth of the agricultural sector.
Reference


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