

Report on DSI4MTF's Partners' Meet and Collective Reflection

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Improving water use for dry season agriculture
by marginal and tenant farmers
in the Eastern Gangetic Plains



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The mid-term review of the project “Dry Season Irrigation for Marginal and Tenant Farmers in the Eastern Gangetic Plains” from 26-29th September at Patna, India emphasized the need for community and stakeholder engagement cutting across social and biophysical domains. Furthermore, the need for Participatory monitoring and documentation was underlined as critical to capture ground realities and dynamics. The views and shared messages of farmers in Saptari, Bihar and West Bengal is critical. As a result, “**DSI4MTF’s Partners’ Meet and Collective Reflection**” was planned. The event was a timely event allowing research partners and farmers to collectively reflect and build on each other’s perspectives, strengths and innovations and consider challenges and issues.

1.2 Goal and objective

The goal of the meeting can be seen as an opportunity for sharing and shared learning of perspectives, processes and outcome. The overall objectives of the meet being:

1. Learning from each other’s perspectives
2. Collective reflection on the learning
3. Synthesizing the learning of perspectives, programs and processes to document successes and weaknesses of the model and best practices.
4. Allowing the strategies for up-scaling to evolve and to consider the policy integration of best practices
5. Revisiting the original goals of the project with regards to collectivization, and developing strategies and work plans for the remaining project period –taking into consideration the field realities and wisdom of the farmers and practitioners.

1.3 Program schedule

It was a two day event comprising a mix of presentation and participatory discussions including field visits. The first day included an overview of site progress and discussions with farmers. The second day included field visits, reflections and SWOT analysis. Annex 1 provides details of the schedule. A short overview video of the event can be found here: https://youtu.be/6sS_ulexkiE

1.4 Pre-program preparation and activities

The meeting agenda evolved through a series of discussions among team members. While the program components were being finalized among the project team, an organic engagement process occurred with farmers in order to make the sharing and reflection process meaningful. This gave farmers and the project team an understanding of ground realities on collectivization, technological and gender aspects. In respective sites of Saptari, Bihar and West Bengal, the following preparatory activities were carried out:

1. Program objective, structure and format were shared to each farmer group through formal and informal meetings
2. Engagement with farmers to develop skits and songs capturing experiences on various project aspects: collectivization/institutional development/gender equity/technological components.
3. 5 to 6 participants were selected from each project site. Careful consideration was given to make the selection process democratic and unbiased. Field officers facilitated the discussion among farmers. Selection was done focusing on two things: farmer's ability to share group issues and availability of his/her for program days.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF PROJECT INTERVENTIONS ACROSS SITES

This project is being implemented in 6 villages across three districts of Nepal, Bihar and West Bengal. At the beginning of the meeting farmers from project intervention sites provided a quick overview of progress in their respective sites.

2.1 Overview from Madhubani sites

In Bihar, the project intervention covers two villages, namely, Bhagwatipur and Mahuyai of Madhubani district. Farmers are organized into 6 groups, 4 in Bhagwatipur and 2 in Mahuyai village. A total of 8 farmers from two villages participated in the meeting representing those groups. The leader of respective group attended the meeting.

The majority of farmers are landless tenant farmers. At the beginning of the project they used to think what could be done to improve land productivity. They thought of working in group and cultivate with improved technology. Eventually, they started working in a group, facilitated by the project. Among the 6 groups some are some are pure collective and others are practicing different models. Some of the pure collective are women's group as well.

From Bhagwatipur site-1 collective leader Jitan Ram and Laldai Devi presented about their group activity and shared experience of working in collective for last one year. Their group has 8 members in the group, all are almost landless (marginal farmers) so total area taken on lease 4.5 bigha, start cultivating vegetable(mainly during summer season) along with paddy and wheat crop. They are also saving Rs.30/month/member and use of that saving amount in agriculture. They also talked about how they resolve the internal conflict of group like labour pooling, timing of work, absence of group member from work.

From Bhagwatipur site-2 collective leader Jugut Yadav and Sita Kumari presented about their group activity and shared experience of working in a group for last one year. Total member of the group 9, all are marginal farmers. They are also saving Rs.30/member/month and used that

saving for repairing and maintenance of pump set and other agri input. They also talked about their conflict resolution mechanism in the group.

From Bhagwatipur site-4 collective leader Ranju Devi presented about group activity and experience of working in a collective for last one year. Total member in the group-5 all women, all are landless. They also save Rs. 50/member/month and used that saving for agri-input purchase. They talked about their conflict resolution mechanism.

From Mauahi site-1 group leader Md. Sakruddin presented about their experience of working in the project area. From Mauahi New Youth collective group leader Kamlesh Yadav shared their last three month experience of working in a group (collective agriculture).

The collective groups procure inputs collectively, contribute labor and sometimes sell together. However, they reported some dispute among members. The main dispute was for labor sharing, specifically not being able to work in field at the same time. In such situation, they call for meeting and tell the member that if s/he cannot come for work, it is better to inform in advance. However, they think the collective model in general has been helpful as it has eased input procurement, use of new technologies, better access to water and influenced in individual farming practices as well (mainly on technology uses). Women farmers reveal that the access to machinery has increased after becoming member of collective group.

2.2 Overview from Saptari sites

In Nepal, the project intervention covers two villages, namely, Kanakpatti and Koiladi of Saptari district. Farmers are organized into 5 groups, 3 in Kanakpatti and 2 in Koiladi village. 5 farmers participated in the farmers' meet, 4 from Kanakpatti and 1 from Koiladi respectively. Farmers introduced two villages: Kanakpatti and Koiladi. Information on groups and land leasing were shared by farmers with the help of Project Coordinator. Before the project intervention (and being organized into group) farmers in both study villages used to cultivate mainly as sharecropper [of the landlord]. Farmers are organized into different collective models.

Collective modality of 3 groups in Kanakpatti are as follow:

1. Kanakpatti group 1 and 2 practice part as well as pure collective in different plots of intervention sites, while Kanakpatti group 3 practices part collective in all plots of land in intervention site.
2. Koiladi group 1 and 2 practiced pure collective in 2016 monsoon for paddy season and shifted to part collective for winter 2016-17 for vegetable farming

After site introduction, farmers showcased the Saptari group formation process and farmer landlord relationship through a skit. The major highlights were negotiation with landlord to reduce land rent specifically for Kanakpatti. Previously, land farmers leased was fallow, during their dialogue with landlord, productivity from fallow land through vegetable farming resulting in benefits to both parties was showcased. Anticipation of farmers to improve their livelihood by

improved productivity was another component of their presentation. This is also highlighted in the song they sang:

Saptari Farmer's Song (translated from Maithili)



This is an agriculture oriented country

Farmers' lives and the country will be uplifted now-2

To practice agriculture in dry season, surveys were conducted in Koiladi and Kanakpatti

Farmers were selected and groups were formed

Everyone is farming together now

This is an agriculture oriented country

Farmers' lives will be uplifted now

Making barren land fertile, wells were dug, solar installed

Conducting training on compost fertilizer preparation

Preparing a nursery of improved seeds

Farmers started Collective farming

Our country will be uplifted now

Creating farmer groups in villages
Participating in capacity building trainings
Learning skills on savings
Taking Irrigation-related trainings
We made these farms green

This is an agriculture oriented country
Farmer's lives will be uplifted now

2.3 Overview from West Bengal sites

From West Bengal, five farmers participated, including three male farmers from Dhaloguri village in Cooch Behar district and two male farmers from Uttar Chakhwakheti in Alipur Duar district. Dhaloguri was introduced as a Schedule Caste majority population where agriculture is the major source of livelihood. A group of young farmers once formed a farmers club to work together in larger spectrum. Largely farmers from Dhaloguri village including females were members of the group and plunged into various collective work like fishery, mushroom, organic fertilizer preparation. In the process the village was introduced to this project through CDHI and UBKV. Continuing with the previous rigor in the project three sites were developed with the village. Collective modality of 3 groups includes male and female farmers, covering both landless and landholder farmers. But irrespective of this differential the contribution of cash or physical labour goes equal and during distribution according to distribution the land holder takes a bit more and rest equally distributed.

For Uttar Chakhwakheti the majority of the population is Scheduled Tribe and depends on varied jobs like wood collection from forest, seasonal migration and/stone chips collection from river, tea garden and farming. The land holding of the farmers is a bit more in comparison to Dhaloguri. Here also they had a farmers club but did not have much of activity. Following introduction of the project the farmers have started farming all season for the first time. The collective model in this village is the same as Dhaloguri.

3. PARTICIPATORY GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Having participants from two countries (3 sites: Saptari, West Bengal and Bihar) speaking different languages, reflection and sharing had some challenges. Bengali farmers do not understand Maithili (spoken by Saptari and Bihar farmers), Nepali (spoken by Saptari farmers) and vice versa. Hence, bargaining role play and gender position bar activities of the Participatory Gender Training Manual developed under the DSI4MTF project were introduced. This helped eliminate language barrier among participants through visual inputs and interactive facilitation with the support and translation of the field coordinators. Two activities were carried out to understand different tasks performed by women and men in collectives, gender position bar and role play.

For gender position bar, pictures of different labor activities representing tasks requiring male labor, mostly male labor, labor shared by both genders, mostly female labor, or female labor were used. Farmers were divided into 3 mixed groups. The objective was to firstly help farmers engage in a discussion and reflect on existing labor division in collectives and understand similarities and differences in gender roles in agricultural domain across sites. As the discussion progressed, farmers discussed on whether existing modality of work leads to higher work burden for women or men in their particular sites and how we can change that.

Farmers from Nepal and Bihar discussed among themselves about agricultural activities performed by men and women in their respective collective groups. It was a good opportunity for them to compare activities done women at Kanakpatti village of Saptari which are different in the context of Bhagwatipur village of Madhubani in Bihar. For example, for irrigation activities, women at Kanakpatti shared how they operate solar pumps as well as are comfortable operating electric pump. Farmers from Bhagwatipur shared that only men carry out irrigation activity. Another interesting discussion centered on vegetable sale. The modality of vegetable sale in Bhagwatipur is different than the practice from Kanakpatti and Koiladi, villages from Saptari. In Bhagwatipur, men are reluctant to sell, so most women do it. Farmers in both villages from Saptari were quite fascinated by the fact that vegetable buyer comes at the farms to purchase the produce from the group at once. However Bihar farmers were surprised to learn women at Kanakpatti load and cycle their produce to the market individually. Male members of the household control income from vegetable sale at Bhagwatipur while mostly women keep it at both villages in Saptari. They use it for household expenses, purchase of agricultural inputs and monthly savings. In intervention sites in Saptari, male help out with sowing, which is usually considered a female task in Bhagwatipur.



Farmers from Bihar and West Bengal engaging on gender position bar activity facilitated by project personnel.



Farmers from Nepal and Bihar engaging on gender position bar activity facilitated by project personnel.

In the role play, participants from all three regions: Nepal, Bihar and West Bengal were divided into mixed groups including male and female participants. One of the role play included three male and two female. The initial discussion was very interesting as all had different stories, language and power dynamics in their own place. But all participated and decided upon a common matter to reflect through the play. For role play, farmers were given situation where they take the role of the other gender and have conversations with other participants in a farming or household situation. Materials such as scarves, shirts, and other male and female clothes, farming and household props, such as a water pot, a spade etc. were used. Role play gave an opportunity for participants to assume role of collective member and issues that arise.

One of the role play goes as:

The scenario is as such that group members have to meet and plan for okra production. Group leader goes house to house to call upon all the members to convey information on group meeting agenda, time and venue. One of the farmers pokes “what is the importance of such meeting? While working we have to work double but time contribution is not considered while distributing the product”. The leader shared two meeting agendas: discussion on chaos over delay in contribution of membership fee and addressing issue of untimely labor contribution for okra cultivation.

On the day of meeting, though meeting was called at 1:00pm, out of 6 members, 1 male member as usual arrived almost half hour late. By this time, the group had already discussed the first agenda. While they were discussing about the untimely labor contribution, late arrival of the sixth member added fire to the fury. Everyone started complaining about his negligence. Rather than realizing his mistake, he threatened to break the group. He counter argued that though he is late in the meetings but contributes membership fee regularly. Others issues also emerged subsequently:

1. One male farmer notes his contribution is double than female members. So, he questioned why female should be part of the group while they hardly contribute. He perceives women participation is for number sake.
2. Another member said that female contribute less time in group activities and often come late for field work.
3. Field Irrigation delayed due to untimely contribution of membership fee.

Female members reverted that they contribute to their utmost level and they do not want to break the group. One of the group member mediated by suggesting to go for resolving the issue rather than extenuating it. The member identified the basic problem of the group: untimeliness and irregular fee contribution. Afterwards, the group decided to maintain a daily register. The contribution could be in cash or physical labour. In case of any complaints, they agreed to register and resolve through meetings.

4. FARMERS' REFLECTION FROM VISIT TO MADHUBANI FIELD SITES

Site visits to two collective farms at Bhagwatipur village was an integral part of the farmer's meet. All participating farmers and other delegates visited site-1 and site-4 of Bhagwatipur village. Mr. Ritesh from Sakhi provided an overview of ongoing activities in these two sites. Member farmers explained the details and responded queries of farmers from other sites.

Through the observation made at field, farmers discussed among themselves the difference in water infrastructure and collective farming approaches in their respective sites. Farmers discussed mainly three aspects: irrigation technology, agronomic practices and marketing.

Automated drip system and solar panels to pump water installed at the sites immediately caught attention of farmers from Saptari and West Bengal. They discussed about the simple drip system installed at their place in comparison to the ones at Madhubani sites. They inquired on time required to irrigate water, how often the system has to be cleaned. The financial sustainability of such irrigation infrastructure was a concern raised by farmers.



Farmers from Saptari and Bihar discussing about the crops

Another interesting aspect noted by the farmers was on plastic mulching for Eggplant, which was spread out in the entire plots. Looking at the use of plastic mulch at site-1 farmers from West Bengal questioned why instead of organic mulch, plastic mulch is used. Bhagwatipur farmers said there is problem of white ant in organic mulch. Other farmers said organic mulch is not available in required quantity. Since they are raising more animals, fodders and organic materials are used for animal feed. West Bengal suggested that the problem of white ant can be resolved by using neem (*Azadirachta indica*) leaf before applying organic mulch. It decreases the incidence of white ant.

One farmer from Dholaguri village Mr. Nirmal Das was unconvinced on the spacing or crop geometry of Eggplant crop in the field. He said plant spacing should be narrow than the current practice. Mr. Dhananjay Roy from CDHI seconded Mr. Nirmal's view that spacing is more and should be based on scientific and agronomic principle. He (Nirmal Das) also said planking after ploughing helps conserve soil moisture.

Farmers moved on to discuss on how the vegetables are marketed. Upon knowing that buyers come to the village itself to collect the production, Saptari and Bengal farmers shared interest in having similar mechanism at their places. They noted however that in Madhubani site, production of particular produce is in larger quantity. Hence, it is easier for buyers to collect the vegetables. Saptari farmers reflected the need to produce high volume of vegetable to sell in bulk.

Despite being new to vegetable farming, farmers in Madhubani have started planting high value crops such as carrots in some plots. They expect to fetch higher price. Saptari and West Bengal farmers showed interest to farm high value vegetable in their farms in upcoming season.

Agricultural scientist from the partner institute Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) Dr. Md. Mahbulencouraged the cultivation of other high value crops such as strawberries, summer tomato and capsicum, which can fetch high market price. He also suggested multi-tier and mixed cropping but Mr. Anoj Kumar, field coordinator from Madhubani had concern whether these crops are suitable for this region as they require cool or temperate environment.

It was interesting for farmers as well as project team to learn that nearby farmers have started replicating commercial and collective vegetable farming. The promising side is that 42 more farmers at Bhagwatipur have started vegetable cultivation on their own after seeing the success of intervention sites. Even the landlord has started commercial vegetable cultivation in his land, and this is really encouraging to deal with the issue of improving land productivity and thus may result in increased intensification of farming. However, there were still some issues regarding resource pooling (labor contribution). It is necessary to be clear on whether heterogeneity is important of homogeneity or a good mix of both dimensions. Further efforts require to make farmers clear about the principle of collective farming.

5. SWOT ANALYSIS

Working with different farmer groups in three sites brings about strengths and opportunities in some respects and weaknesses and threats in other. To uncover, these aspects, site wise SWOT analysis was conducted. Issues raised during the discussion was shared among fellow participants. SWOT analysis mainly focused on institutional aspects that centered on collective farming. This session helped to explore site wise similarities and differences in participation.

5.1 Saptari farmers

Saptari farmers noted following **strengths** of following collective model in their group:

1. Farmers highlighted time saving as a major benefit of working in group. They mentioned for weeding of a crop, the task that would normally require 4 days is completed in 1 day.
2. Another advantage of being in a group is purchase of agri inputs. Pooling in money to purchase fertilizer, seeds together helps them buy in bulk, which reduces per unit cost.
3. Monthly saving in the group of Rs 100 helps to create group fund and create a small fund. Farmers have started loaning this amount among themselves for household activities as well as investing in agriculture.
4. When one member in the group does not have money, other members contribute. This works out fine because investment in the field is made at the time of need.
5. Leadership building among members is another important aspects developing. Farmers mentioned how they would be hesitant to participate and speak up. Now during the meetings and different training programs, they have started raising their concerns.



Weaknesses:

1. One of the major weakness shared by farmers is the difficulty to manage farmer's time to contribute labor at that same time. They are caught up with other activities which makes working at the same time in the field challenging. This sometimes gives way for internal conflict. However, Farmers do not come at same time, so minor internal conflicts
2. When some farmers are not able to contribute money at the time of need to purchase inputs, others do not receive it well.

Opportunities:

1. Saptari has markets nearby and if the produce is in abundance, the linkage with the highway can help to transport goods to big markets.
2. Saptari farmers have registered their groups in District Agricultural Development Office, Saptari. Now they expect they can apply for schemes that will provide them subsidies on seed fertilizer, water pumps as so on.

Threats:

1. There is some risk with landlords where farmers feel that the landlord may not continue leasing land to them which would mean they lose the water infrastructures available to carry out vegetable farming.
2. Uncertain climatic events can lead to crop loss.

5.2 West Bengal farmers

Strengths:

1. Farmer groups are united and this real sense helps the group to function better and be more productive.
2. Limited number of landless family.
3. Farmers are getting new experiences and gaining skills of agriculture.
4. Collective farming groups have received support of irrigation system, lack of which could hamper crop/vegetable productivity negatively.
5. Farmer groups are inclusive and comprises of both men and women.

Weakness:

1. Investment in the agricultural field is limited, this is because of limited financial capacity among the farming households.
2. Farmers feel that they do not have more of modern / innovative technologies.
3. The dynamics of the group tends to be affected by the local politics (minor conflicts)
4. Farmers find it difficult to access loan from the bank is not sufficient. They feel that politicians affect the process (Local politicians play tricks)
5. Farmers are not aware of what crops would suit in the field they are working on. The cultivation is happening without soil testing (Less awareness)



Opportunities:

1. Farmers are supported through different initiatives are undertaken by the research project and supporting to the farmers.
2. Farmers can apply for governmental loan as well as schemes and facilities now they are in the group.
3. Labour shortage in farm is a critical issue which has been eliminated i the group farm to some extent by collective mode of farming. Labour management (collective farming system is avoiding the crisis of labour shortage)
4. Along with all the other advantages, farmers are learning and developing their skills through Interchange of knowledge and information.

Threats:

1. Natural disaster / hazards could lead to crop failure.
2. The price of vegetables sees quick fluctuation in the market. Sometimes farmers end up selling their produce in low amount. (Including less market price)
3. The investment of farmers goes above when they have to deal with issues such as pests attack (Resulted in higher investment cost).
4. There is also wild animal encroachment at Bengal mainly from elephant and buffalo. This affects farmers' crops and forces them to bear crop loss.
5. Limited number of cold Storage facility is another critical problem marginal farmers as such in the group face. (Richer gets preference in getting bond to store their crop)

5.3 Bihar farmers

Strengths:

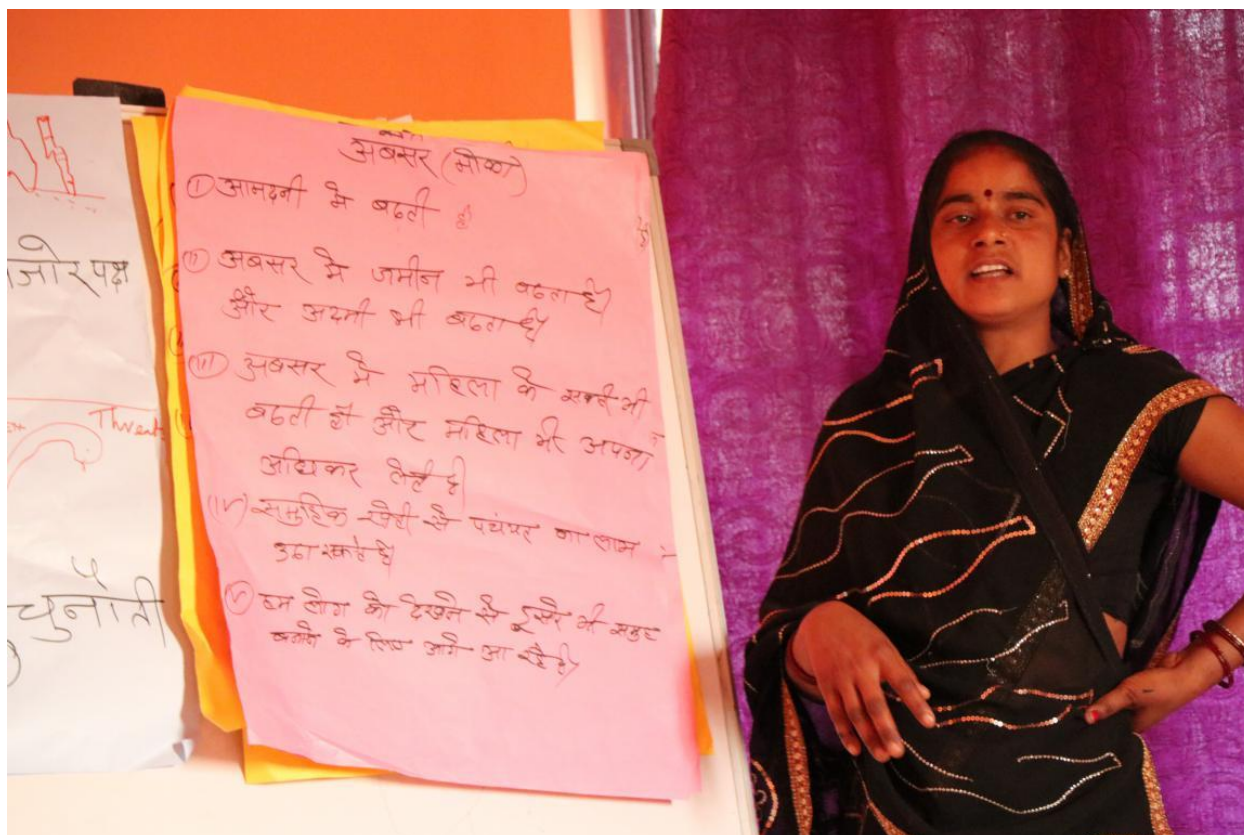
1. Requirement of less time to carry out agricultural activities is felt by Bihar farmers as well.
2. They shared that as a group, risk bearing capacity is higher whereby they can experiment with new crops and practices.
3. Group saving is another major benefit perceived by the group. One of the benefit is they get to invest the money in agricultural inputs.
4. Labour management is another advantage. When one person has some emergency, and is not able to contribute, through negotiation, other members can compensate the work. This eliminates the chances of delays in the farm and work does not hold up.

Weaknesses:

1. One of the resonating aspects among collectives is managing time of farmers to perform work at the collective farm.
2. Vegetable farming is a new practice for Bihar farmers, sometimes, they find it challenging and are unaware on what to do.
3. Women farmers have pressure from family when they go to work outside from home. Women are burdened with household work, farming outside also takes their time
4. In case group member do not own the communal land, if there is any loss, fear of paying for the rent

Opportunities:

1. Vegetable farming has potential to increase farmers' income. They are most excited about this.
2. While there are some barriers to participate in external activities for some women, farmers feel there is increase in women's engagement in outside activities. This has somehow empowered them.
3. Having observed the practices of collectives under the intervention, neighboring farmer are showing interest to form similar groups.



Woman farmer presenting the discussion with Bihar farmers on SWOT of Bihar collective

6. REFLECTION ON GENDER AND INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES OF COLLECTIVE FORMATION

A key aim of the meeting was to bring farmers together to generate critical reflection on the success of the project team in mobilizing collectives, monitoring their success, while identifying opportunities to refine the model. The farmer's meet was accompanied by Prof. Bina Agarwal, Professor of Development Economics and Environment at the University of Manchester and former Director and Professor of Economics at the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG) at the University of Delhi. She led several FGDs with the farmers both at Sakhi center and in the sites.

Understanding how and why farmers collectivize help us to know their past engagements in any group. Because of this, site-specific focused group discussions were organized.

Farmers in Saptari intervention sites had prior experience with cooperative group. Some of the Kanakpatti (KP1) group members were part of Kanak Mahila Goat Raising Group facilitated by District Livestock Office. They used to raise goats individually and saving was done in group basis. The group had 13 members, and 3 of them are member of current group as well, currently, this group has 8 members and all are female. The intervention include 8 katha of pure collective and 20 katha of another model (individual cultivation). In case of Kanakpatti group 2 (KP2) out of 7

members at present (6 female and 1 male) 3 were part of a previous group named Kanak Micro-enterprise Group. The remaining 4 were from same neighborhood. The intervention include 6 katha of pure collective and 14 katha of another model (individual cultivation). Likewise in case of KP3 group all 8 members (5 male and 3 female) were part of a saving group formed by one micro-finance company. The intervention include 12.5 katha of land cultivated individually. In Koiladi group 2, 6 members are cultivating in 50 katha of land. In monsoon season they practice pure collective [of paddy] whereas in winter they grow vegetables individually. While working collectively, one of the main issues raised by Saptari farmers was about the return to labor. The group representative revealed some dispute regarding labor contribution in case of collective farming. Discussion revealed that they did not have any systematic record keeping mechanism for labor contribution of male/female members, especially the female members. There was suggestion about the need to consider equal wage rate for male/female and across operations.

Further, FGD with West Bengal farmers also reconfirmed that labor contribution is an important issue in case of collective farming. Dhaloguri group 1 has 7 members (4 male and 3 female). Three of the initial members left the group because of internal dispute as well as family reasons. In this group, they do not practice collective farming in monsoon season. The reason was unclear, whether it was because of subsistence need of land owner farmer or because of more labor opportunity for landless members. The discussion revealed the need to calculate return to land and return to labor. In Uttar Chakhwakheti, they reported the emerging group in addition to already existing 3 groups. They realized the need/importance to understand the details of new plots being cultivated.

The FGD outcome was combined with the reflections from the farmers throughout the event to identify the following key issues and action points.

6.1 Identifying a model for upscaling

1. Comparability of collective models across sites is limited due to different approaches through different NGOs and diverse trainings and agricultural inputs (seeds, crops, water technologies...) per site. Adoption of a collective model also depends on different socio-cultural background of each intervention site. Therefore diverse productivity cannot be calculated, but trajectories of group formation, motivation and incentives can be qualitatively investigated. This has implications for how these models are up-scaled in the future. Important point to take into account is there is no one best collective model. It depends on model that works best for farmer's group consideration.
2. Information on group fluctuations and details of each group member (such as total land ownership, total project contributions, total tenancy, socio-economic data etc.) is crucial to track the changes for each group. The data is already being collected seasonally in these aspects but we should continue this effort systematically. The project team member are putting effort to pull together the information and document in collective report.
3. Even though bio-physical data is being collected on seasonal basis using standard format, we may revisit to ensure accuracy of labor, tractor used and agricultural input cost. For

example, if any farmer cultivate more than one crop in a single parcel of land, the recording details of input use and associated cost is difficult.

6.2 Labour management

1. Currently, labor data is being collected almost every day by the field staffs. While collection of labor and other data is vital, it is equally important to convey the purpose and usage to the farmers. Efforts needed to train the farmers in the all the sites for documenting the labor contribution on regular basis. This will ensure that labor calculations is not done in retrospective basis.
2. Labor accounting: The concept on intervention farmer and family members' labour accounting on collective farm stirred interesting discussion. Prof Bina presented her view on farming as an individual entity rather than household. She suggested "membership" should be clearly defined individually, and not per household (joint membership). . Everyone contributing labor from the intervention household should be accounted for, particularly of women. She suggested that women should be proper members. She cautions that in the case where men are the members of group women may end up contributing labor for free without individual profits. This view was opposed by Mr. Joy, from CDHI in West Bengal. He argued stating record keeping could destroy the trust between group members and create conflicts. Bina counter argued indicating social mobilization process can change perceptions and initially questioning over time. Labor documentation on who is contributing what and initiating discussion regarding the possibility of individual farmer's membership rules was recommended. The current version of format being used includes the provision to record labor contribution for both male and female whether it is hired or own labor, however, revisiting the format to ensure this suggestion helps sort out this concern.
3. A collective model with incentive to work collectively throughout the year, not only season-wise, should be introduced. For example, in West Bengal, the cultural reason exists that Khariff's season will provide food security for the family for one full year. Therefore farmers are unwilling to work as collective. While, Saptari farmers prefer to work individually for vegetable crops. The primary reason are high labor input and lack of trust for timely labor contribution. Social mobilization through engagement approach should be developed and implemented by partners together.
4. There should be a clear understanding about the conflicts and layovers between collective farming and private farming (e.g. giving priority to own land over collective labor input – from an economic point of view, higher priority is given to individual farming). Such phenomenon should be captured in case study documentation, which will eventually help identify gaps in collective models.

6.3 Need for an institutional base

1. The project will have a long term impact if interventions are coupled with institutional strengthening. Sustainability of the project can be ensured when project approach goes beyond merely equipment provision and intervention around that. Questions such as “what is the institutional spine that will sustain collective models should be reflected on. One possibility could be a federation as per the PRADAN model, and a value-chain link to distant market. One strategy would be to develop proposal for next stage focusing around these issues.
2. Strong enforcement of rules and penalties, e.g. for labor input, being late etc. linkages to government schemes, developing upscaling and out scaling strategies with government partners. It is advised to develop ways to strengthen institutional linkages.

6.4 Group composition

1. For collective to function well, class (landownership) and gender homogeneity is important. For example, in case of Dhaloguri site 2 the composition of landlord and his two relatives and other female laborers as members reflects disbalanced power relations in terms of inequitable labor contribution and benefit sharing. In this group, laborers work for free and are left with less share as they pay the rent to the landlord in form of harvest. . In the next stage, group formation should consider balancing such heterogeneity thereby balancing power relations.
2. Collective model work well in communities with prior history of working together. For example, the experience of farmers working with SHGs tend to build social cohesion and trust among the members.

7. WAY FORWARD AND IMPLICATION FOR FUTURE PLANNING

Farmers’ meet was a platform to cross learn among farmers from Saptari, Bihar and West Bengal. Along with reflection on functioning of collectives, issues raised over two days and learn on past and present project activities building a pathway to move ahead. This event was fruitful because:

1. Crucial for action research project like DSI4MTF to learn from farmers themselves in such critical time (halfway of the project) to assess past approaches and plan for upcoming ones.

2. Participatory way of doing things demonstrated through the event, farmers' meet an opportunity for project team to recollect on what is happening on ground and how to better current and future practices.
3. This event an example of bottom up approach in real sense where "experts" took a back seat and put farmers in forefront.
4. The expected challenges in a multilingual environment can be addressed via pictorial and activity based measures such as role play, skit and songs.
5. This kind of event help manage diverse expectations of farmers.

A range of key issues were identified that needs attention for improving the interventions in future:

1. Lack of clarity on labor contribution and proportionate benefit sharing may jeopardize the collective efforts and thus it is advisable that farmers maintain proper record of labor contribution in different activities.
2. Group composition seems crucial for effectiveness of group functioning. A proper mix of homogeneity/heterogeneity among the group members needed for balancing power relations and group dynamics.
3. Appropriate technology mix can lead to effectiveness rather than focusing on sophisticated ones.
4. Proper linkages to market outlet is crucial.

ANNEX 1. SCHEDULE

Overall environments: The event has to offer enabling space for the participants for reflection and experience sharing. This necessitates that we do not have a rigidly fixed target and schedule. Late February offers a warm and cozy weather condition where the participants can pursue a relaxed learning goal over an extended period.

Pre-meet -20/02/2017

Travel and arrival of the participants: Evening before the day the conclave commences. The evenings used for informal interaction, introduction and setting the environment including:

- *Settling down*
- *Welcome dinner*
- *Tentative schedule-discussion and finalization of the schedule*
- *Assuming various responsibilities –who does what for the next three days. The event should not be responsibility of the Sakhi, local staff and farmers only. The three days would be spent in a spirit of an integrated commune*

Event Schedule

Day 1: 21/02/2017

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity/Program Content</u>
8:30 am to 9:30 am	Breakfast
9:30 am to 9:40 am	Formal Inauguration-Welcome by Sakhi Representative
9:40 am to 10:10 am	Brief Introduction of participants via (know your partner)
10:10 am to 10:20 am (in Maithili and Bengali)	Brief introduction of the Project conveyed by coordinators
10:20 am to 10:30 am (in Maithili and Bengali)	Discussion of layout of the program and seek participants' views

Each session explained for

- *Setting the tone and Objectives of the event*
- *Contents*
- *Activities*
- *Facilitators*
- *Expectations from the event*

Site wise sharing session begins: *Sharing sessions- Farmers from each site make verbal/picture/poster presentation focused on Bihar, West Bengal and Saptari - 30 minutes each*

- *Introduction of the sites*
- *Content of the program –what?*
- *Strategy and processes-how*
- *Outcome so far-what has been achieved so far*
- *Issues –and discussion*

10:30 am to 11:00 am	Sharing session (Farmers from Bihar make Poster/verbal/picture presentation focused on Bihar)
11:00 am to 11:30 am	Sharing session (Farmers from West Bengal assisted by to make poster/verbal/picture poster presentation focused on West Bengal)
11:30 am to 12:00 am	Tea break
12:00 am to 12:30 pm	Sharing session (Farmers from Saptari to make poster/verbal/picture poster presentation focused on Saptari)
12:30 pm to 1:30 pm	Synthesizing the learning – identifying aspects for SWOT, Facilitators or specialists to relate with the respective presentations-however participants to be encouraged
1:30pm to 2:30 pm	Lunch

Participatory Gender and Social Inclusion Training Commences

2: 30 pm to 4:00 pm	Group Activity 1: - Gender Position Bar (Refer to Participatory Gender Training Manual for details) <i>Farmers from all sites will be divided into 3 mixed groups with 6 participants with 2 facilitators each (1 Bengali and 1 Maithili speaking Use of pictures of labor division (agricultural and domestic activities carried out by men and women) to initiate discussion and generate comparative reflection on each sites, similarities and differences. –facilitators will help farmers to communicate with and understand each other</i>
4:00 pm to 4:30 pm	Tea break

4:30 to 6:30 pm	<p>Activity 2: Role Play different scenarios on gender, landlord tenant Relation <i>Split in same 3 groups with same facilitators (Refer to Participatory Gender Training Manual for details)</i></p> <p><i>This session will also help</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Facilitate discussion on Gender and Social Inclusion issues in collectives</i> • <i>Bargaining Role Plays in small groups addressing landlord-tenant as well as family and community issues</i>
5:30 to 6:30 pm	Group present role play to audience (<i>Final discussion and tools on ways forward: Gender and Social Inclusion</i>)
6:00 pm	Day break
7:00 pm onwards	Film screening “Participatory gender Training” and Cultural /role plays by the participants –Freedom to build partnership across countries-Bangladesh, India, Nepal)
8:30 pm	Dinner
9:30 pm to 10:00 pm day.	<p>Core group sits together to discuss day’s work and plan for the next</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated discussion on Gender and Social Inclusion issues in collectives • Activity with pictures on roles in collectives – who does what? How can we better promote social inclusion (diverse gender, age, caste)?

Day 2- 22/02/2017

<u>Time</u>	Activity/Program Content
9:30 am- 12:00 pm	Field visit to Madhubani sites
12:00 pm to 12:30 pm	Tea break
12:30 to 1:30 pm	<p>Reflections on the field covering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective farming • Group dynamics • Equity and equality –class and gender in collective farming • What the ground tells • Analysis of the profit loss • Technology

- Cropping systems
- Social capital and social Development
- What do you carry from the field

1:30 pm to 2:00 pm	Lunch
2:00 pm to 3:00 pm	SWOT Analysis (Group work-each site to have the analysis-there would be eight breakaway groups)
3:00 pm to 3:30 pm	Strategy for Turning Weaknesses into Strengths and Threats into Opportunities
3:30 pm to 4:00 pm	Presentation on the SWOT Analysis and strategies and feedback on the day
4:00 pm to 4:30 pm	Tea break
4:30 pm to 6:00pm	Skill based orientation (as per the needs identified during the last two days) (Mad Tea Party) How to ensure equal share of labor in your groups? How did you and your group members became more confident in engaging with community and landlord?

The skill and capacity building session would cover subjects which would emerge as the need of the participants. It has to be captured through different sessions. The need based training would not be theoretical or simulated. It would be in the form of practical. For example

- *Why gender does not get fully integrated into the institution development under collective farming? How this can be done? Strategies that can help gender integration into institutional development?*
- *Why institutions are not inclusive? How they can inclusive which would mean how all farmers –land less, tenant ,women headed can be included?*

The emphasis should be on how to help the situations change in favor of the small/marginal/tenant and women farmers? This will inevitably bring in the issues of and need for capacity building strategies and tools. The workshop should be able to offer answers to such questions through instantaneously evolved tools and methods. This would be built through the existing capacity/ and skill sets with the participants.

Probable areas which may emerge for additional capacity and skill building inputs may include:

- *Institutional Development*
- *Engagement strategies and tools*
- *Gender concerns –representation and equity issues*
- *Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation -Process documentation –everybody can document –you don’t need to be highly educated and technically skilled*
- *Presentation skill*

Day 3 -23/02/2017

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity/Program Content</u>
9:00 am-10:30 pm	<p>Session Commences</p> <p><i>Follow-up and take homes Suman</i></p> <p><i>How the momentum should continue</i></p> <p><i>Exchange strategies</i></p> <p><i>Networks</i></p> <p><i>Coordination</i></p> <p><i>Agenda for collaboration</i></p>

Conclusion