



Confederation of Potato Seed Farmers: A Study of Innovative Management System in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted on potato seed producing group, Confederation of Potato Seed Farmers (POSCON), Jalandhar, operating at state level. A combined questionnaire and interview approach was used to survey group members. Out of the total 250 members, 40 members were randomly selected. The study examines the effectiveness and also determines the facilitating and hindering factors for effective group functioning. It was found that all functioning characteristics were found to be effective. The overall Functioning Effectiveness Index (FEI) of the group was more than 0.70 indicating that the group functioned effectively in terms of selected group characteristics. The major variables such as group goal achievements, group motivation, group cooperation and participation in group activities had contributed highly for the effective performance of the group. Important facilitating factors for effective functioning of the group were increased income, knowledge gain of advanced technical information in potato seed production, transparency in functioning and easy availability of loan. The main hindering factors were inadequate government support for lobbying issues, marketing and policies that favor farmers.

Key Words: Potato, Seed, Farmers, Confederation, Management system, Punjab

INTRODUCTION

Potato is a starchy, edible tuber that is cultivated throughout the world and is consumed as a major staple food. After wheat, rice and maize, potato is the most important food crop in the world. It contributes to almost 50 per cent of the total tuber and root crop production. It is vastly consumed as a vegetable and is also used in various forms such as starch, flour, alcohol, and dextrin and livestock fodder. India is placed 3rd in the list of major potato producing countries of the world. The area, production and productivity of potato in India is 1,181 ('000 ha), 28,580 ('000 t) and 157.8 (q/ha) respectively. In India, the biggest area under potato cultivation is in Uttar Pradesh cultivating on 527.4 thousand hectare area with a productivity of 205 q/ha and followed by Bihar, West Bengal and Punjab. Punjab state has 81.1 thousand hectare area under potato cultivation with a productivity of 246.7 q/ha (Anonymous, 2008). In Punjab, majority of the large farmers in Jalandhar district are producing

potato seeds in a large scale. With the self help initiatives of the large farmers Confederation of Potato Seed Farmers (POSCON) was established in the year 2007 to bring together all potato seed producers in Punjab under one umbrella. The group was registered in 2008 as a society within the state and started functioning; it is the only potato crop organization affiliated with the Government of Punjab. The group's primary objective is to promote, develop, build and propagate seed potato cultivation in Punjab for the benefit of seed potato growers in the state by adopting and applying the most advanced and modern technologies. It aims to produce and market the best quality potato seed in order to compete with the best seed potato growers in the world. This paper examines the effectiveness of the farmer-based self-help group in the state of Punjab. It shows how the changing nature of extension in India has influenced the group and examines the functional characteristics and role of the group. While highlighting important

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characteristics of successful groups, it also determines the facilitating and hindering factors for effective group functioning.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The potato seed producing group (POSCON), Jalandhar operating at a state level with 250 members was selected for the study. A combined questionnaire and interview approach was used to survey group members. Out of the total members, 40 members were randomly selected from the group. Records of group activities were examined and overall information relating to the group was procured from executive members of the group through personal visits and discussion. The Functioning Characteristic Index was computed by using the modified scale developed by Sherin (1998). The index score was calculated for each respondent separately and was later used to calculate the average score of a group for that functional characteristic. The score of each (surveyed) individual member of a self-help group, for the 8 functioning characteristics, were summed to generate the functioning score of that member. The sum of the functioning score of all members of a group provided the total functioning score. The self-help group functioning effectiveness index of the group determined the overall effectiveness of the group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Average Functioning Index of the selected Functioning Characteristics of the POSCON group members. (n = 40)

Group Functioning Index	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median
Group Interaction	0.75	0.12	0.76
Group Cooperation	0.80	0.11	0.81
Interpersonal Trust	0.74	0.11	0.75
Group Decision Making	0.75	0.11	0.75
Group Motivation	0.83	0.09	0.83
Group Cohesiveness	0.77	0.10	0.78
Group Goal Achievement	0.84	0.08	0.85
Participation in Group Activities	0.79	0.10	0.80
Overall Functioning Index	0.78	0.10	0.79

Functioning and Effectiveness of the Group

The results (Table 1) revealed that from the eight functioning characteristics, average index score was found to be highest in group goal

achievement (0.84 ± 0.08) followed by group motivation (0.83 ± 0.09), group cooperation (0.80 ± 0.11) and participation in group activities (0.79 ± 0.10) and the lowest average index score was for interpersonal trust (0.74 ± 0.11). Lowest deviations were found for group goal achievement and group motivation while deviations were slightly higher for group cooperation, interpersonal trust, group decision-making and group interaction. The average index score ranged from 0.74–0.84 which indicates that all functioning characteristics in the POSCON group were on the higher side and found to be effective.

Facilitating and Hindering Factors

Important facilitating factors for effective functioning of the group, as perceived by the respondents, were increased income (100%), knowledge gain of advanced technical information in potato seed production (100%), transparency in functioning (95%), easy availability of loan (82%), faith in executive members and their professional abilities (75%) etc. The main hindering factor indicated by members (57.5%) was inadequate government support for lobbying issues, marketing and policies that favor farmers.

CONCLUSION

The results suggest that almost all group characteristics contributed significantly to the effective working of the groups. However four group characteristics i.e., group cooperation, group motivation, group goal achievement and participation in group activities ranked high in the group. Nicholson *et al.* (2001) noted that most human associations between individuals having common interests, shared outlook, or merely meeting frequently facilitates development of an emotional bond or liking as well as trust in each other. Over a period of time, the emotional bond can become the driving force in the relationship. Group interaction, group cohesiveness, interpersonal trust and group decision making ranked low positions.

Increased income, availability of advanced technical information and transparency in functioning were major facilitating factors for group participation. Parida and Sinha (2010)

Confederation of Potato Seed Farmers

Table 2. Facilitating and Hindering factors affecting the working of POSCON group , Jalandhar .(n=40)

Sr.No.	Factors	Number of respondents	Percentage	Ranks
<i>Facilitating Factors</i>				
1	Availability of advanced technical knowledge	40	100.0	1.5
2	Increased income	40	100.0	1.5
3	Transparency	38	95.0	3
4	Easy availability of loans	33	82.0	4
5	Professional executive members	32	75.0	5.5
6	Faith in executive members	30	75.0	5.5
7	Strong linkages with government and private agencies	29	72.0	7
8	Enthusiasm for functioning	28	70.0	8
9	Honest office secretary	25	62.5	9
10	Easy to get support from government	24	60.0	10
11	Working jointly with problems of potato seed farmers	20	50.0	11
12	Socialization	12	30.0	12
13	Improved social status	10	25.0	13
<i>Hindering Factor</i>				
	Inadequate government support	23	57.5	1

revealed that the performance of self-help groups depends upon the awareness of members about overall group objectives as well as the capacity of the group to develop members' managerial and technical skills. Gianatti and Carmody (2007) stated that access to the latest information and research allows group members to make the best possible decisions for their farming business. The other facilitating factors that enhanced group participation were increased income, greater savings and socialization. Economic and social benefits were also pointed out as the outcome of group participation by Panda (2009). Thus group participation and increased socio-economic benefits are both mutually dependent. The group members claimed that besides sustained efforts and hard work linkages with government, NGOs and other institutions are the factors affecting successful functioning of the group. Easy access to loan was another important factor stated by members as the main advantage of being in the group. The overall FEI of the group was more than 0.70 indicating that the group functioned effectively in terms of selected group characteristics. However, we acknowledge that the above conclusion is based on the study of only a

single producer group. Although these suggestions have a broader perspective, further empirical studies would help to strengthen our arguments and suggestions. A detailed study of self-help groups from different parts of the country could help gain a deeper understanding of the functioning of these groups.

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