

## **Success Factors of Self-Help Groups in Rural Extension: Experiences from Turkey<sup>1</sup>**

**Zeynep DİNÇ<sup>2</sup>**

**Tayfun Özkaya<sup>3</sup>**

### **ABSTRACT**

Self help groups have been widely used in agricultural and rural extension in both developing and developed countries.

The group promoter can be prepared herself/himself on agricultural and rural topics of the community before the group works begin. The group promoter should have training on participatory approaches. In the training programs of the group promoters the number of the participants should be more than enough.

If the village is very heterogeneous in terms of farm sizes, agricultural system, ethnic etc. it is better to construct more than one self help groups.

If there is a grassroots' organisation like cooperative or association, it can be very supporting the success of self help groups. It is possible to prefer first, the villages with these organisations in the first step for establishing groups. The villages around this village will be affected by the extension activities.

The optimum size of a self help group is between 8-15 persons. The village head, leader farmers, the members of the managerial board of NGO's or cooperatives may be the members of the self help groups. The addition of some managerial board members of local organisation to self help groups is increasing the cooperation between the group and the local organisation.

### **SELF-HELP GROUPS IN THE WORLD**

The problems encountered in top-down technology transfer approach in extension and rural development practices lead to rising of participatory approaches since 1990. The self-help groups became a very important component of participatory approaches in extension in the same flux. But the history of the self-help groups is older than this. At the end of the 1930s' Kurt Levin's effects became dominant with his group works. Especially in 1940s' many researches has been carried on groups, and in 1960s' group dynamics leads the research agenda in social psychology. Since 1990 participatory rural appraisal and self-help groups methodologies widely applied in agricultural and rural extension in both developed and developing countries. Today group works are widely applied in many areas like agriculture, industry, physiotherapy etc.

In many countries like Ghana, Sri-Lanka, Senegal, Germany, France, Thailand, Brazil, Zambia, India, Australia, Kenya, many self-help groups had been established and the results are rather good. (Pretty, J., N., Guijt, I., Scoones I., and John Thompson, 1995).

### **WHAT IS SELF-HELP GROUP, HOW WORKS, HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL**

Self-help groups are a group of farmer/people coming together which they have same problems, conditions and sources to share their experiences, information or to give and take support. Self-help group members are informal volunteers meeting for their common needs.

Four basic principles should be followed in group formation: (1994, FAO):

- The group should be small

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented in 17<sup>th</sup> European Seminar for Extension Education, İzmir, Turkey, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Is agric. economist and has a master degree on extension, İzmir, Turkey

<sup>3</sup> Ege University, Director of Agric. Extension and Research Centre, İzmir, Turkey

The ideal number of members is between eight and 15. In a small group dominant and powerful members can be controlled easier and silent members can be encouraged.

- The group should be homogeneous.

Members should live under similar economic, agricultural conditions and have close social affinity. If the village is very heterogeneous in terms of farm sizes, agricultural system, ethnic etc. it is better to establish more than one self help groups. For example, there may be groups for poor people or sheep keepers or immigrants. In many communities in developing countries women have different problems and mix groups are not possible. Turkey experiences show that in some villages' men groups could not succeed but women groups lead the community transformation. So there should be a woman group in each village. If the extension worker is men, he can find a woman promoter from the village for women groups, for example teachers, nurses from the village can be group promoter.

- The group should be formed for their problems solving and realization of their hopes. The starting point should be farmers' problems and hopes, not the extension organization's aims.
- Groups should be voluntary and democratic

Members should decide in the formation of agenda, planning of activities etc. The action is their action; the outsiders (extension workers) help the farmers.

Self-help groups do not mean the cancellation of other extension methods and tools like conferences, demonstrations, bulletins, posters. Contrary if it is planned in a group, a conference, organized and supported by members of groups and extension workers would be more successful.

In self-help groups a group promoter plays a key role. The group promoters are extension workers but also some young farmers which have good communication skills and secondary education can be also group promoter.

The group promoter has three basic roles: (FAO, 2004)

- Group adviser:  
She/he will give advice to members in a stimulating atmosphere.
- Participatory trainer  
She/he will facilitate the learning of members. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (or Participatory Learning and Action- PLA) methodologies will be very helpful in planning these learning activities.
- Link person

She/he will facilitate communication between the group and extension service, NGOs, other groups, other farmers, input supply agencies etc.

In the very beginning of the construction of self help groups in a village, existence of a conflict situation inside the community is very dangerous. Before entering the community, it is better not to hurry and learn the village profile, the existing conflicts and the reasons. The conflicting sides should understand that the group promoter aim is not to support one side.

The group promoter should be prepared herself/himself on agricultural and rural topics of the community before the group works begin. The group promoter should have training on participatory approaches. The inexperienced group promoters should be supported by senior promoters.

The group promoter should be ready to work at nights in the village since in many situations most of the year only nights are the only option to have meetings. The in-service education, motivation is very poor in many governmental organisations. So it is not possible that every worker of the organisation is convenient for that job. In the training programs of the group

promoters the number of the participants should be more than enough. Like the wheat farmer “one for the bird, one for the stone and one for the soil.”

At least every week a meeting of self help group is needed for the success. The group members should decide the meeting time not the group promoter.

The PRA (or PLA) approach should be used in the meetings. The beginning of the meeting and the first two weeks are very important for the success of group. In the first meeting both the most important problem from the point of view of participants and the easiest problem to tackle should be in the agenda. Also this problem should be solved quickly. If with the collective actions of the group this problem is solved, the moral and the self esteem of the group will be very high. Participatory problem analyze should be done for the identification of the group agenda.

Before every meeting of the group the place and time has to be decided by the group. There should be a plan for the meeting before. Which methods will be used? Which material is needed? Which source person (or expert person) is needed? These and similar questions will be responded before. (ACTS, 2004)

### **SELF-HELP GROUP EXPERIENCES IN TURKEY**

Four projects had used self-help groups in Turkey. Both of them are in Izmir province.

These are:

1. Halilbeyli Project (Özkaya, Karaturhan, Boyacı, 1998)
2. Bademli Nursling Project (Özkaya, 2000)
3. Menemen Project (Özkaya, Karaturhan, Boyacı, 2003)
4. Gödençe Project (Dinç, 2005)

The first three projects had been conducted by the Agricultural Extension and Research Centre (Izmir) team. The fourth Project is a master thesis.

#### **Halilbeyli Project**

In this action research, in Halilbeyli Village of Kemalpaşa County in Izmir province one men and one women self-help groups had been established. Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) approach has been used in project which is first experience for Turkey. As the characteristics of the approach, villagers had opportunity for put their thoughts into action. The both groups had positively effected the dissemination of innovations. Also the group supported the planning and implementation of conventional extension activities like conferences.

With in the six months, the quite positive results were obtained. Some examples are; the vaccination rate against the foot and mouth disease has increased from 50% to 80%, the maintenance rate of the milking machines raised from 1-2% to 100%, the silage making tendency among the farmers has gone up from 3% to 15%. The nutrition habits have been amended. The amending of nutrition habits, the increasing of the knowledge levels of women about the gynaecology knowledge are the other attained improvements by the study. Furthermore, women and men all the participants have gained self-confidence and the statute of women has risen.

In this project the reasons for the success of self-help groups are well established groups, the skilled group promoters and facilitators, well preparation of meetings and good information sources and providing enough experts.

#### **Bademli Nursling Project**

This action research was in harmony with the long periodical aims of the “Macro Project of Nursling Technologies Research and Application” of Age University Agricultural Faculty, to provide qualified, clean and through to name nursling for fruit producers and to realise a sound and confident institutionalisation. Bademli Agricultural Development and Nursling Cooperative was the leader for this institutionalisation.

In a self-help group established by the farmers and researchers from Ege University once a week a meeting had been realized. The synergy between researchers and farmers gave a good motivation to cooperative to plan new attempts.

The cooperation of researchers and farmers realized the better results. Also the integration of cooperative and self-help group targets supported the success.

### **Menemen Project**

At the end of the 1998 this project was prepared to scaling-up and institutionalisation of PRA approach in a county (Menemen) of Izmir province by using self-help groups in the villages.

The institutionalisation would have taken place in all institutions related with agriculture in the Menemen County. County Extension Service, The Chamber of Farmers and two Irrigation Associations are the project partners. There is no effective NGO in Menemen for rural area development or extension.

A weekly training program for facilitators on PRA was organised in Menemen. The project covered six villages and nine (four females and five male) self-help groups.

Scaling-up the approach was partly successful. Out of the village groups sessions done, some of the results of the actions decided by farmer are as follows:

The farmers accepted many innovations, such as farming practices, new inputs or varieties, etc. Some of these innovations were transferred "from farmer to farmer". Some new crops, like mushroom, organic vegetable (by women in their home gardens for the family consumption) were accepted by farmers. The farmers planned and realised to make some adaptation researches conducted by farmers for the whole village. Some collective actions had been performed, such as planting eucalyptus trees, collecting soil samples to analyse, etc. But in some villages because of different reasons self-help groups could not survive or very few members attend the meetings. These groups had been cancelled.

The County extension service, Chamber of Farmers and Irrigation Associations as institutions could not internalise the philosophy, methods and techniques of PRA. So a real institutionalisation in the project could not realised. Only 4 of the 11 facilitators could internalise the approach because of many problems of these institutions.

The reasons of unsuccessful results in some groups and not realizing institutionalisation are mainly the bureaucratic structure and top down culture of extension service. In service education was not sufficient. Some unmotivated extension workers and managers even passively sabotaged the working of self-help groups.

### **Gödence Project**

In this action research which is a master thesis, one men and one women self help group have been formed in Gödence Village in Seferihisar County in İzmir Province, and the sessions have been carried once every week. Gödence Agricultural Development Cooperative and Head of Gödence (muhtar) have supported the activities. The members of the management board of cooperative and muhtar have been included to self help group, and this helped to the farmers for the quicker adoption of action decisions taken by the group.

The activities of self help groups have been lasted seven months. In this short period, five farmers have got their soil analysis results, and 16 farmers have applied. 27 farmers have grown vegetables with local standard varieties and it has been observed that this usage has empowered the farmers. For many years the farmers wrongly have perceived that the reason of fire blight disease which causes high production loss in pears, is mostly environmental pollution. After this topic has been put into group agenda and after discussion, two members of the group have performed proper and timely pest management applications against fire blight and they have got more yield and income. In the vineyards last year 80% of the grape production has been lost due to grape powdery mildew, grape berry moth and

flat headed wood borer, but this year timely chemical application and fertilization has been realized and the lost is only 25%. This pest management system has been realised by 25 farmers. Villager's self-respect and self-confidence have been enhanced.

These results reveal that self help groups will be more successful where there are effective local organisations. It can be said that the places where there are no effective NGOs, the institutionalisation of participatory approaches is not easy. In these places the self help groups can be established and developed as a pre NGO also.

## CONCLUSIONS

The self-help groups are not magic stick and for success some important factors have to be into account:

- The group should be small
- The group should be homogeneous
- The group should be formed for their problems solving and realization of their hopes. The starting point should be farmers' problems and hopes, not the extension organization's aims.
- Groups should be voluntary and democratic
- In the very beginning of the establishment of self help groups in a village, existence of a conflict situation inside the community is very dangerous. Before entering the community, it is better not to hurry and learn the village profile, the existing conflicts and the reasons.
- The group promoter should be prepared herself/himself on agricultural and rural topics of the community before the group works began. The group promoter should have training on participatory approaches. The inexperienced group promoters should be supported by senior promoters.
- The PRA (or PLA) approach should be used in the meetings.
- In the first meeting both the most important problem from the point of view of participants and the easiest problem to tackle should be in the agenda. Also this problem should be solved quickly if it is possible.
- The extension service organisation performing or supporting self-help groups should be democratic. A learning atmosphere is needed in the organisation. The motivation and in-service education should be enhanced.
- The inclusion of the members of the management board of local cooperatives or local NGOs or local authorities to self help groups, increase the success of the groups.
- Self help groups will be more successful where there are effective local organisations.

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