GROUP FORMATION PROCESS
FORMING AND EMPOWERING
IFAD TARGET GROUPS
IFAD in Cambodia

Since 1996, IFAD has invested US$61.7 million in six projects in Cambodia, which have mobilized overall investments for a total of US$155.9 million. The objective of the organization’s efforts in the country is the sustainable improvement of the livelihoods of the rural poor in the project areas. In order to achieve this objective, IFAD loans support community empowerment, productivity improvement and improved access to assets, productive resources, rural services, rural infrastructure and markets.

IFAD-funded activities target the provinces with the highest rates of poverty and, within those provinces, the poorest people and communities. The poorest groups include:

- Poor rural households with access to only small areas of land and no other productive assets who are likely to be food insecure and in debt, with little if any access to off-farm employment opportunities.
- Landless rural people who are willing to learn skills for livestock raising, off-farm income-generating activities or wage employment.
- Women and households headed by women with a large number of dependents.
- Other poor rural households such as those in indigenous ethnic minority communities.

The participatory approach toward community development is at the core of IFAD-financed initiatives. It has the aim of building the capacity of grass-roots institutions and fostering direct ownership of investment programs by the people who benefit from them.
The IFAD supported groups

IFAD assistance and development programs are delivered through the establishment of groups, which are given ownership of the entire process. They participate in the definition of their group unique direction at all stages and develop through the group the capacity of planning their own development together with local institutions while simultaneously improving their livelihoods and farming systems. The three IFAD supported groups are:

Most Vulnerable Families Groups (MVFs):

- Recently established group, composed of a variable number-7 to 15- of the poorest and most vulnerable families of the target village, often landless and highly food-insecure.
- The group receives a grant, necessary to cover the first urgent necessities, production input, in kind and in cash, and training to improve food security and increase cash income. The input delivery is phased slowly, in 2 years, and most of its cost is paid back at the end of the production period to a Group Revolving Fund that is managed and grown by the group for future investments.

Livelihood Improvement Groups (LIGs):

- Composed of 25 of the poorest families of the target villages, with very few resources and knowledge.
- The group members receive training and production inputs – in cash and in kind (rice seed, fertilizer, vegetable seed, fruit trees, pigs, chickens, compost). Most of the cost of the input is paid back at the end of the production period to a Group Revolving Fund that is managed and grown by the group for future investments. Moreover, the group establishes a rice bank to improve food security and receives a group fund after a few years, when it achieves maturity.
Farming System Improvement Groups (FSIs):

- Composed of 25 poor families from the target villages, with some resources but lacking knowledge and technology.
- The group members receive training in order to improve their farming system. In order to do so, the group elects 3-6 farmers to undertake on-farm demonstrations for rice, vegetable, pig, chicken, fish pond, and integrated farming which are determined by the AEA process. Demonstrations are used as learning sites through farmer field school for 20 weeks (one day per week) and farmer field day at the last session, open to the villagers who are not beneficiaries.

FSIs are conceived as training groups, who are supposed to meet only during the 20 weeks of the FFS. MVFs and LIGs are bonded together by the management of GRFs and they work collectively as self-help groups for the whole duration of the project.

The benefits of establishing groups

- **Project implementation:** when engaged in a group the members get mutually motivated to participate in the activities and to apply successfully the techniques learned. Moreover, individual problems are better faced through the exchange of ideas and experience and through the establishment of self-help practices and dynamics of solidarity.
- **Sustainability:** through group dynamics members of the community develop the capacity and ability to participate in the planning and decision making of their own development with local institutions.
- **Gender mainstreaming:** the female family members are actively involved in group dynamics and activities, usually joining the training and the meetings more often than men. These practices are a powerful tool for increasing their self-confidence in speaking up and expressing their ideas and, therefore, encouraging the empowerment of women in the family and in the village.
Steps of Group Formation and Empowerment: how to establish and consolidate a group.

**Preliminary:** selection of the group members through the Participatory Wealth Ranking System

**Step 1:** The selected members fill in: an application form to express their willingness to join the group and the Beneficiary Baseline Data Form

**Step 2:** The members meet to discuss and develop the vision, goal and objectives of their group, with the facilitation of the CEWs

**Step 3:** Election of a group committee: group leader, deputy leader and bookkeeper - the last only for LIGs and MVFs. The election of at least one female component is strongly encouraged

**Group formation and empowerment**

**Step 4:** The groups discuss the responsibilities and duties of the members and the leaders and establish their own principle and regulation. MVFs and LIGs also discuss on their input needs.

**Step 5:** The group members sign a membership contract and the formation of the group is made official

**Step 6:** The group committee receives training on group management and facilitation skills.

**Step 7:** The members run monthly meeting, focused on the status and management of the Group Revolving Fund.

**Step 8:** The group run a mid-term self-assessment to evaluate their grade of maturity.

**Group consolidation - only for LIGs and MVFs**
The stage of group formation is a delicate and difficult moment of project implementation, where the activities encounter several problems connected mainly to:

- Passivity and lack of voluntarism of the beneficiaries.
- Reluctance and fear of taking the risk connected to a change of behavior, the engagement in a group and a process, the contraction of debt.
- Lack of official recognition.

In order to overcome these difficulties the project staff has consolidated a set of successful strategies:

- Ensure that villagers have the ownership of the selection process, through the participatory wealth ranking system. If the farmers are actively involved since the beginning they will have more motivation to mobilize and participate in group formation.
- Make a special effort in carefully explaining the project functioning, what is a Group Revolving Fund and what is the role of the Commune Extension Worker.
- Carefully inform the local authorities, i.e. the Commune Councilors and the Village Chief, and involve them in the process.
- Encourage and give voice to charismatic and engaged group leaders.
- Perform cross visits to mature and successful groups, from whose experiences the new group members can get motivated and reassured.
Step 3: Election of the Group committee.
“IFAD is dedicated to eradicating rural poverty in developing countries by helping poor people to improve agricultural productivity.”

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