



**FACT  
SHEET  
VOLUME 1**

**Group  
Management  
Techniques for  
Farmers'  
Organisations in  
the Caribbean**



**Caribbean  
Farmers  
Network  
(CaFAN)**

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## **THE PURPOSE AND BENEFIT OF THE BOOKLET**

The purpose of this booklet is to inform farmers on the importance of farmers' organizations and the effective management of farmers' organizations.

## **IMPORTANCE OF THE FARMER'S VOICE**

When farmers are not strong, many sections and sectors of the society are ready not only to tell the farmers what they should do, but even worse, to speak on their behalf often times in good faith. The lack of farmer's voice is often precisely because of the enthusiasm with which other people are ready to speak on behalf of farmers, giving their opinions.

Similarly, during periods when farmers do speak, farmers' voice is more readily seen as something of a "problem".

Irrespective of its desirability, the lack of an effective farmers' voice is indeed an impediment to agricultural and rural development. Whether it be the development of agriculture or of rural society or the protection of environment, farmers play a vital role.



*"Together we stand, divided we fall."*

A two-way dialogue therefore needs to be established between farmers, and other actors which determine the political, economic, legal as well as technological framework within which farmers operate.

Farmers' voice cannot be obtained without farmers' organizations because there is strength in numbers. Individuals approaching government have less power than a group of farmers approaching government as a

farmers' organization, together the voices of farmers can be used to engage in any sensible dialogue with the rest of society, and Governments to influence policies that affect them. Farmers need their representative organizations, the farmers' organizations, structured from grassroots to the international level, as their legitimate voice. This is why farmers' movement gives a lot of importance to farmers' organizations, organizations by farmers and for farmers, as an important pillar of today's society.

## **REQUIREMENTS FOR FARMERS' ORGANISATIONS TO BE EFFECTIVE**

### **1. PEOPLE MANAGEMENT**

Farmers' organizations must address the needs of members and their aspirations first and foremost.

There must be mechanisms in place for the involvement of members such as planning meetings and other well organized meetings.

#### **a. Communication & Participation**

In the knowledge-based economy new ideas and models of thinking serve as a basis of organisational vitality. How to reveal people's talents and make maximum use of them aimed at achieving the organisation's main goal. Communication is one of the processes that are extremely vital in engaging the membership of farmer organisations and in empowering the members to effectively participate. However, communication is not about just merely exchanging information, but it is

supposed to add value by leveraging the ideas of members which in turn can maximize the usefulness of the people as resources. This can only be achieved by efficient and meaningful feedback from the membership. This would encourage the sustainability of the organisation, through this participatory communication approach.

## ***b. Meeting Management***

### ***Selecting Participants***

- The decision about who is to attend depends on what you want to accomplish in the meeting. This may seem too obvious to state, but it's surprising how many meetings occur without the right people there. Also it is also important not to hold many meetings to avoid burnout.
- Don't depend on your own judgment about who should come. Ask several other people for their opinion as well.
- If possible, call each person to tell them about the meeting, its overall purpose and why their attendance is important.
- Follow-up your call with a meeting notice, including the purpose of the meeting, where it will be held and when, the list of participants and whom to contact if they have questions.
- Send out a copy of the proposed agenda along with the meeting notice.
- Have someone designated to record important actions, assignments and due dates during the meeting. This person should ensure that this

information is distributed to all participants shortly after the meeting.

### ***Developing Agendas***

- Develop the agenda together with key participants in the meeting. Think of what overall outcome you want from the meeting and what activities need to occur to reach that outcome.
- The agenda should be organized so that these activities are conducted during the meeting.
- In the agenda, state the overall outcome that you want from the meeting
- Design the agenda so that participants get involved early by having something for them to do right away and so they come on time.
- Next to each major topic, include the type of action needed, the type of output expected (decision, vote, action assigned to someone), and time estimates for addressing each topic
- Ask participants if they'll commit to the agenda.
- Keep the agenda posted at all times.
- Don't overly design meetings; be willing to adapt the meeting agenda if members are making progress in the planning process.

Think about how you label an event, so people come in with that mindset; it may pay to have a short dialogue around the label to develop a common mindset among attendees, particularly if they include representatives from various cultures.

### ***Opening Meetings***

- Always start on time; this respects those who showed up on time and reminds late-comers that the scheduling is serious.
- Welcome attendees and thank them for their time.
- Review the agenda at the beginning of each meeting, giving participants a chance to understand all proposed major topics, change them and accept them.
- Note that a meeting recorder if used will take minutes and provide them back to each participant shortly after the meeting
- Model the kind of energy and participant needed by meeting participants.

Clarify your role(s) in the meeting.

### ***Establishing Ground Rules for Meetings***

- You don't need to develop new ground rules each time you have a meeting, surely. However, it pays to have a few basic ground rules that can be used for most of your meetings. These ground rules cultivate the basic ingredients needed for a successful meeting.

- Four powerful ground rules are: participate, get focus, maintain momentum and reach closure. (You may want a ground rule about confidentiality.)
- If you have new attendees who are not used to your meetings, you might review each ground rule.
- Keep the ground rules posted at all times.
- List your primary ground rules on the agenda.

### ***Time Management***

- One of the most difficult facilitation tasks is time management -- time seems to run out before tasks are completed. Therefore, the biggest challenge is keeping momentum to keep the process moving.
- You might ask attendees to help you keep track of the time
- If the planned time on the agenda is getting out of hand, present it to the group and ask for their input as to a resolution.

### ***Evaluations of Meeting Process***

- It's amazing how often people will complain about a meeting being a complete waste of time -- but they only say so after the meeting. Get their feedback during the meeting when you can improve the meeting process right away. Evaluating a meeting only at the end of the

meeting is usually too late to do anything about participants' feedback.

- Every couple of hours, conduct 5-10 minutes "satisfaction checks".
- In a round-table approach, quickly have each participant indicate how they think the meeting is going.

### ***Evaluating the Overall Meeting***

- Leave 5-10 minutes at the end of the meeting to evaluate the meeting; don't skip this portion of the meeting.
- Have each member rank the meeting from 1-5, with 5 as the highest, and have each member explain their ranking
- Have the chief executive rank the meeting last.

### ***Closing Meetings***

- Always end meetings on time and attempt to end on a positive note.
- At the end of a meeting, review actions and assignments, and set the time for the next meeting and ask each person if they can make it or not (to get their commitment) It is very important that views expressed at the meeting should be turned

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into action plans or else the meeting would be a waste.

- Clarify that meeting minutes and/or actions will be reported back to members in at most a week (this helps to keep momentum going).

**Simple tools that can be used;** There are simple tools that can be used to help in meeting preparation;

- Workshop event planning chart to plan meetings
- Monthly planning sheets - most activities time frame and responsibilities.

### ***c. Leadership***

Leadership is essential for the sustainability of farmer organization. The capability of the leader is affected by how he/she is motivated and what placed the leader in the position. The characteristic of a good leader is one who typically has extra drive, energy and vision. It is important that the leader learns the art of delegation to key staff to ensure sustainability of the leadership.

The essentials of a good farmer organization people management functioning boils down to two (2) key fundamental factors.

- a) Democratic decision-making:

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A farmer organisation needs to be like a democratic country. Everyone should have a say and a vote. Sometimes, the leader, like a Prime Minister, has to take the final decision, and also take responsibility if it goes wrong. However, leaders in many countries find it difficult to share any of the decision-making. Dialogue between board and staff, dialogue between boss and staff – unless bosses ensure this, they are on the road to a dysfunctional, undemocratic farmer organizations with unhappy employees.

b) Respectful listening & effective Communication:

Good, respectful listening and effective communication is one of the most important skills that everyone should develop. It means helping the other person to say what they think and feel, by giving them the time they need, making encouraging noises, asking questions, saying that they are doing well – whatever works within your culture.

#### **d. Management Structure**

Ensure that your executive structure is based on issues and not on personalities, avoid partisan politics, and religion.

#### **Building and Sustaining an Effective Board**

A Board or a Steering Committee is a way of organizing the farmer organization. By asking respect-worthy local leaders and representatives to be members, a bridge is built between the farmer organization and the wider community.

The skills the members of the board or steering committee bring should supplement the farmer organization staff rather than compete with them.

The board members should have their functions clearly written, with a job description. The description should include the years of tenure. Job descriptions also help to link the board to the office and the people in the office.

The two types of functions – Board and Staff – should complement each other, and both should be stated in writing. It should be clear that the Board shall never interfere in decision-making about daily work; and the staff should not re-interpret the policy of the board to make it fit with their own vision. Inevitably, though, these things will happen and there will be clashes.

A good Board can do the following:

- If the membership is right, it will truly represent the interests of the beneficiaries
- It can make policy decisions away from the people doing the daily tasks, out of no personal interest except the good of the beneficiaries. This is what is meant by the separation of policy-making and executive functions.
- It gives the director authority and support; and provides an alternative authority to which staff can appeal if the director gets out of line.
- If it is made up of experienced women and men from the local community it will bring all kinds of experience into the Farmer Organization.

### **1. Staff Specialisation and Improved functioning**

Specialisation of Staff within the organization should be considered. Farmer Organizations can improve their function by creating job descriptions for staff members which will identify what they should be doing, who they answer to and who they supervise.

The role of the Farmer Organization should be reflected in the capacity of the staff and then the qualities of the board.

### **2. The relationship between the Staff and the Board in a farmer organization**

Both Board and Staff will only function at their best if their relationship is well built. The Staff need to have ways of providing information to the board and having an input into the process of policy development. They must then be ready to understand, accept and work within that policy frame-work. And they need to have the room to make decisions themselves within the framework.

### **3. Building the capacity of Board and Staff**

Members of the Board need to build their skills as Board Members. The Farmer Organization can arrange courses, the members can visit other Farmer Organizations; they can learn more from Staff about the issues of the work. They can also share training with Staff, building a sense of working together.

### **2. PROCESS MANAGEMENT**

The farmer's organisation could provide a range of services determined by their mandate and their needs, such as agribusiness development, marketing of produce etc. In whatever service the organisation decides to provide, the farmer's organisation should be properly planned and run like a business.

The farmer's organization should be properly planned and run like a business. Activities of the organization must be properly identified and broken up into independent separate entities which are managed effectively. For example, a typical farmer organization might have an agriculture marketing arm which should be run by soliciting the right technical expertise to manage it. Also the organization might have a development focus as well, which should also be run by a technical expert and other competent persons in that particular focus.

#### **a. Financial Management**

Financial management involves planning, organising, controlling and reporting on the financial resources of an organisation to achieve organisational goals.

- Managing scarce resources

Farmers organizations must ensure donated funds and other resources are properly utilised to achieve the organisation's mission and objectives. Financial management equates to maintenance of a vehicle – if we don't put in the right fuel and oil and give it a regular service, the functioning of the vehicle suffers and it will not run efficiently. If neglected, the vehicle will eventually grind to a halt and fail to reach its intended destination.

- Managing risk

All organisations face internal and external risks which can threaten operations and even survival (e.g. funds being withdrawn, an office fire or a fraud). Risks must be managed in an organised way to limit the damage they can cause. This is done by establishing systems and procedures to bring about financial control.

- Managing strategically

Financial management should not be seen as a separate activity left to finance department staff. It is of strategic importance and must be incorporated into all aspects of operational management.

### ***b. Good administration***

However it is organised, whoever does the work, good administration in an organisation does the following:

- It keeps the organisation in touch with important contacts, through letters, e-mail etc.
- It makes the office the hub of the wheel when other Staff go off on various tasks; so that no one is lost or feels isolated,
- It keeps correspondence ordered, up-to-date, findable
- It makes sure that everyone gets paid on time
- It keep some files, like personnel files, locked up and confidential
- It keeps financial records and receipts up-to-date.

Everybody in the organisation should have good administrative skills: if computers are used, then everyone should be able to use them including the boss; if there are procedures and practice in use, everyone

should use them, whether forms for internal memos and monitoring or rules for e-mails. It is very important to ensure that the farmer organization does not have donkeys, the poor people at the bottom of the pyramid who end up doing all the boring work for everyone else, carrying an impossible load.

### ***c. Logistics***

The job of logistics is making projects happen – ensuring that there are supplies and transport when and where needed. Some tasks need logistics that are quite complicated. One of the most important tasks of the logistician is to plan ahead.

### ***d. Technology Management***

With the increase in the use of information communication technologies around the world, farmers organization can improve their functioning and sustainability by utilizing information communication technologies, however not a pre-requisite, as technology becomes more affordable, it can improve the processes and efficiency by saving a lot of time and in improving communication.

A computer is particularly useful for creating documents that require regular updating, careful wording, precise calculation, or clear presentation.

Areas of operation that benefit most from computerisation:

- Planning (e.g. budgets)
- Organization (e.g. task management)
- Calculation (e.g. management accounts)
- Presentation (e.g. bids for funding)
- Communication and research (via the Internet)

### 3. **ADVOCACY & LOBBYING**

Advocacy is the act or process of convincing leaders, decision makers to use their powers and influence to support an issue or a cause by the making or changing of a law, policy or programme and in the allocation of resources.

Farmers Organization's principal role is to advocate for new policy changes in order to make their business environment transparent and predictable for all the farmers to do business.

Advocacy is a long and sustained process. It deals with behaviour change. It is a form of Information, Education and Communication to target audiences.

A lobby is a group of people trying to persuade an organization or government that something should be done e.g. Economic Partnership Agreement Farmers Lobby is a well known example in the Caribbean Region where Farmers spoke out against aspects of the EPA that was negotiated between the EU and CARIFORUM.

In the context of advocacy, lobbying can be interpreted as "a strategic communication or method of" persuading or convincing key advocacy target audiences" e.g. Members of Parliament, Government to do something (usually to change a law / policy or the allocation of budgets) about an issue.

There are different ways of lobbying ranging from the writing of letters to key target audiences expressing the issue or having face to face meetings to discuss the issue to a large scale campaign involving multiple groups and spokespersons using various media channels including

public rallies. Some examples of lobbying techniques used are shown in chart (Box 1).

#### Box 1: Lobbying techniques

Letters / Press releases / Press conferences Fact Sheets / Briefing packs / Posters / Flyers Public service announcements Public Forums and debates Petitions Public rallies Face to face meetings Website
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The seven basic rules (seven Cs) of effective communication, adopted from standard advertising practices, offer a convenient guide:

1. Command attention – messages should be daring enough to attract attention and elicit comment while at the same time remain sensitive to cultural context, social values and political priorities. Slogans are often used. Sometimes it is the medium even more than the message that is the attention-getter e.g. using a Farmers and his Family Logo as billboards to promote agriculture.
2. Cater to the heart and head – most people are moved at least as much by emotions as by reason. Personalize the message and appeal to the audience's consciousness and values.
3. Clarify the message – Focus and freedom from clutter are crucial. A key message should convey a single, important point.

4. Communicate a benefit – People need a strong motive to do something or change a behaviour.
5. Create trust – A message that people will act on their own accord must come from sources that they trust.
6. Call for action – After hearing or seeing the message, the audience should know exactly what to do. Prepared statements of actions or a draft legislation or policy helps.
7. Consistency counts – Repeated messages and sustained dialogue is important

The basis for successful lobbying is in forming credible partnerships and effective communication.

A key strategy for farmers' organisations is to link with institutions which provide a supporting role such as the Ministries" of Agriculture, Caribbean Agriculture Research and Development Institute (CARDI), Inter-American Agriculture Cooperation Institute (IICA), Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Agricultural Colleges and Universities; just to name a few. The benefit to the farmers' organisations is that more information flows to the farmers and possible technical assistance could be received.



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