POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AND SOCIAL LEGITIMACY OF FARMERS ORGANIZATIONS IN INDIA

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Capability to relate

1. First of all in a society like ours political legitimacy and social legitimacy are two different aspects and thus cannot be placed within one common sentence. For a farmer organization in a country like India, political and social legitimacy is half important. In a complex society like ours political and social interests are not same for all the sections and there are sharp differences and at times conflicting interests among various groups situated at various steps of social strata. Political groups generally represent some sections of society and they opine there stand as per these sections which they claim to represent. Political legitimacy is of least important for Farmer organizations. F.O.s are involved in productivity, marketing, policies, and other issues of its constituents. At best connectivity with political groups for lobbying purpose is required for F.O.s.

As far as social legitimacy is concerned, social legitimacy as a larger concept is required and a must for farmer organizations but at times farmer organization in a country like ours have to take stand and object to commonly prevalent social perceptions and strive to bring about a change in the same. “Social legitimacy” can be seen as an added value especially in Indian context wherein social divisions, gender divisions etc. play a key role; Social legitimacy will strengthen the Farmer organization. Farmer organization need not be politically correct all the time; however its actions and process should be well within the legal framework. Thus within the broader aspect of “capability to relate” the Political and social legitimacy is half important for farmer organizations in society like ours.

2. Integer leadership and staff (upright, incorruptible and undiscussed) is very important. While working on farmer issues a farmer organization need to present a positive and trust worthy face and there should be well placed processes to ensure accountability and transparency in the functioning of organization. Any producer organization that seeks to represent issues and interests of farmers shall be prepared to face uncomfortable questions from the sections with conflicting interests. An integer leadership and staff is first condition to gain sustained confidence of your constituency. Democratic processes for electing leaders and decision making are the pre-requisite.
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of human and financial resources to the organization. F.O. leadership in developing nation has many limitations due to “short duration of the office holding”. It also confronts the problem of communication skills. Projecting the leader in developing nation is the work of organization/administration. It is therefore essential that a strong support staff is available for the overall success of leadership. Farmer leadership is not a very glamorous activity to attract the attention of one and all.

Aspect 3

Capabilities to deliver on development objectives

1. Financial resources are very important to deliver on development objectives by farmer organizations. Farmer organization in developing countries often faces an acute shortage of financial resources and it is one of the major barrier/obstacle in way of delivering on development objectives. Mechanisms to generate financial resources/support are either unavailable or are difficult to access by farmer organizations in countries like India with illiterate and small farmers lacking professional training and exposure to opportunities. Management of these resources is another issue. From maintenance of account, income-expenditure etc. to fund generation, allocation of funds for different purposes and timely expenditure of the same, organizations require continuous support system of education, training and experience sharing.

2. Facilities, equipments and premises are very important. It facilitates the complete process of organizational functioning and growth. Facilities and equipments helps in real time coordination which further the capabilities to deliver on development objectives. However organizations require thorough training on management of such resources for the given purposes so as to ensure optimum utilization of these. Similarly a premise helps in developing a common centre for coordination and communication and also provides a platform for experience sharing, learning and reviewing the performance. Most farmer organizations in developing countries lack such facilities, equipments, premises etc. and require continuous direct support to develop and manage the same.

3. Human resources are very important for capabilities to deliver on development objectives. Farmer organizations in developing countries lack professional and well trained human resource. Identification and development of human resource is very important. Farmers in developing countries do not have exposure to policy level and decision making processes and market dynamics; expecting them to reflect on these is not realistic. Professionally trained and committed human resource is very important for farmer organizations with aim to enable these organizations to deal, negotiate and bargain with other stakeholders, market and authorities. CIFFA supported by Agrierra and FFA since 2002 has unique distinction of developing many innovative concepts that are new to 600 million Indian farmers e.g. (1) networking farmers as producer groups and assisting them
in organizational and policy matters (2) assisting the producer groups in developing partnerships with industry, research and others (3) establishing a strong lobby with participation by parliament members (4) joining the international fraternity.

4. Access to knowledge resources is very important, all the more important is access to right knowledge/information on market, technologies, policies at right time. Creating centers of knowledge/information resources, making these centers accessible to organizations and farmers and developing mechanisms for practical implementation and use of this knowledge/information in the field is a challenge in developing countries. Absence of common platforms for knowledge/experience sharing and mechanisms to ensure practical use of this information/knowledge by farmers pose a challenge to organizations. Disconnect between new discoveries, inventions, knowledge etc. and practical agriculture in the field is very wide in terms of time and access. In developing nations including India establishing a strong info base will have tremendous advantage for increasing production, providing more income to small farmers and overall economic benefit to the country.

Aspect 4
Capabilities to adapt and self renew

1. Understanding of shifting contexts and relevant trends is very important for farmer organizations to adapt and self renew, however scope for such understanding is very limited due to absence of supportive and facilitating environment. Farmer organizations in developing countries; first need to develop understanding of over all policy and market environment, understanding of shifting contexts and relevant trends comes later. However to be able to adapt to change and to survive in fast changing socio- economic, political as well as climatic environment, understanding of shifting contexts and relevant trends and flexibility to adapt to the same is a must. A permanent mechanism shall be evolved to conduct studies and provide information to the F.O.s on regular basis.

2. Confidence to change, leaving room for diversity, flexibility and creativity is very important for farmer organizations. Such confidence can only stem from understanding of market and policy environment, ability to respond and timely access to knowledge/information. The fragile farmers in developing countries are very vulnerable and it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to continue in the profession. Expecting confidence of any kind in such situation is not a practical approach however. Risk mitigation and ability to cover for possible failure is the key to confidence to change. Such security and cover is completely absent in developing countries. Crop failure and absence of risk mitigation is the main reason for suicides of over 20,000 farmers every year. It is also responsible for large number of farmers leaving the profession and opting for more secure professions in urban areas. To make farmer organizations confident to change,
leaving room for diversity, flexibility and creativity, a minimum security for the
time gap required to shift and cover for possible failure with scope for coming
back should be provided. It will help in retaining the youth in agriculture sector in
India.

3. Use of opportunities and incentives, acknowledgement of mistakes that have been
made and stimulation of the discipline to learn is important if such opportunities
and incentives are available and are within the reach of the farmer organization,
which is not the case with farmer organizations in developing countries. Next
logical step to acknowledgement of mistakes that have been made is using
available alternative options. No such alternatives are generally available. In most
cases mistakes are at policy or implementation level and farmers and their
organizations are not in a position to bring any substantial change by
acknowledging the same. However within the given framework with all its
limitations, use of opportunities and incentives, acknowledgement of mistakes
that have been made and stimulation of discipline to learn is important for farmer
organizations to enhance its capability to adapt and self renew.

4. Systematically planned and evaluated learning, including in management is
important but it is a distant reality for most of the farmer organizations in
developing countries due to lack of professionals, institutions and mechanisms to
design, implement, and monitor and support the same. Farmer organizations most
in their nascent stage of development as professional organization are challenged
by all the dynamics that are part of organizational development process.
Systematically planned and evaluated learning may boost the process and increase
the capacity of organization to deal with the internal and external issues related to
organization and the sector. Again this should be an evolving process through
guidance and support from outside. Inclusion of professionals in the management
processes may benefit the organization, but these professionals are required to be
exposed to ground reality and grass root experience before any such inclusion.

Aspect 5
Capability to maintain consistency

1. Clear mandate, vision and strategy, which is known by staff and used by its
management to guide its decision making process is very important for farmer
organizations. In most cases clear mandate is not lacking but building a clear
vision around that mandate remains a challenge for the organization due to
absence of understanding of policy and market environments and restricted access
to information and knowledge. Developing strategy comes later. Developing
strategy around the vision requires understanding of complete policy
environment, changing trends and knowledge of ones strengths, weaknesses,
opportunities and threats (SWOT). Unless such understanding and willingness to
bring about desired positive change is there, strategy can not be developed and
implemented. However clear mandate, vision and strategy is definitely a major
factor affecting capability to maintain consistency and is very important for
farmer organizations. CIFA has initiated a process on above aspects since 2004, at
the apex level. Between 1998 and 2004 similar exercise was done at state level by
Federation of Farmer Associations, Andhra Pradesh. Both institutions are
recipient of Agriterra assistance and advice. The experience of L.T.O. Netherlands
has helped in shaping many of the policies and strategies. However in the context
of India’s 600 million farmers, it will take considerable time, resources to cover
the entire country. India can be a model for developing nations to learn from its
experiences.

2. A well defined set of operating principles (by-laws) is very important for farmer
organizations. This facilitates smooth functioning and helps in avoiding group
dynamics and conflicts in any organization. These principles facilitate day to day
functioning, decision making process and provide a yardstick to organizational
growth and development.

3. Leadership committed to achieving coherence, balancing stability and change is
important for farmer organization. Such coherence, balancing stability and change
within the organization provides flexibility to adapt and thus helps in maintaining
consistency in performance. A coherent team can always deliver better than one
which is not. Achieving coherence, balancing stability and change should be
transferred from leadership to the members and staff and it should become
integral part of organizational functioning.

4. Consistency between ambition, vision, strategy and operations is very important
and continuous monitoring; feed back, review system and well placed follow-up
processes are the key to it. Farmer organizations can develop these processes with
time through guidance, support and mentoring from outside. One word of caution
here is that this ambition should not be personal and it should be well in tandem
with organizational goals and purposes. Organizational goals, objectives,
ambitions, vision, strategies and operations should be performance oriented and
these should be specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic and time bound.
Such processes if laid down and implemented properly helps in developing
capabilities to maintain consistency.