

Distinctive Features of FEST¹

FEST comprises a distinctive blend of commitments and understandings

A critique of mainstream 'development' (neo-liberal modernisation) which allows unjust and unsustainable exploitation of a majority of the world's people, as well as of its natural resources.

A commitment to social justice and the achievement of similar levels of dignity, wellbeing, freedom and security by all people.

A recognition of the need to give priority attention to those who are marginalised, disadvantaged and vulnerable.

A (humanistic) recognition of the potential of human beings to learn and develop through critical analysis of their experience and ongoing 'praxis' (action/reflection).

A recognition that, once critically engaged, it is those directly concerned that are best (and most legitimately) placed to determine what is desirable and appropriate in terms of their development.

A conviction that, once critically engaged and equipped with self-esteem and personal skills, people can take effective steps, both as individuals and through transformed relationships with others, to enhance their wellbeing, freedom and security. (Also, that they are responsible for doing so).

An acknowledgement that, because people are often not critically engaged or equipped with adequate self-esteem and personal skills, they can think, feel and act in ways that are not constructive for themselves or for their communities.

An understanding that inappropriate development interventions can 'disempower' by undermining critical awareness, self-esteem and personal skills, along with a conviction that appropriate interventions can 'empower' by promoting these things.

A recognition that there are usually valuable resources (natural, human, financial, infrastructural) available locally to support development action, even in disadvantaged communities, and that optimisation of these resources is important for both sustainability and autonomy.

A recognition that national and local government, as well as certain non-government institutions, have a role and a responsibility to create an enabling environment for community-led development, to provide fair access to necessary external resources, and to uphold legal protection of human rights.

A recognition that humanity can be nurtured in all people, whether their starting position is that of 'marginalised' or that of 'oppressor', and that social transformation requires change on all sides.

FEST encompasses a distinctive range of strategic commitments

1. Prioritising the marginalised and disadvantaged
2. Combating disempowerment
3. Building deliberative capacity
4. Building organisational capacity
5. Developing an enabling environment
6. Promoting sustainability

¹ NB - This document is a draft. It will be updated and refined in the light of feedback from members of the FEST Workgroup.

FEST encompasses a distinctive range of practice elements

1. Prioritising the marginalised and disadvantaged

FEST practitioners use a range of tools to identify the most marginalised communities in their work areas, including stakeholder consultation, community screening and structured social analysis. They also establish close, trusting relationships with the people in marginalised communities by living in their neighbourhoods, visiting and getting to know the occupants of every household and sharing in the daily activities of community life. They ensure gender balance in the composition of their field teams in order to facilitate open communication with both women and men. They also learn and use local languages and show equal respect to people of all backgrounds (ethnicity, caste, etc.). Although FEST is primarily a group methodology, they make special provision (family/household mentoring) for people whose circumstances make it difficult for them to participate in group activities.

2. Combating disempowerment

A defining characteristic of FEST is that it makes use of skilled process facilitation as a primary development intervention. FEST practitioners refuse to be 'problem solvers' or 'agents of change' and instead attempt to support those directly concerned to take on these roles on their own behalf. In order that marginalised people will be able to discover (or recover) their own power and potential, FEST practitioners avoid adopting a high profile. They live simply and avoid ostentation. From the outset, they also make it clear that they come with 'empty hands' (i.e. that they do not provide material/financial resources or specialist technical expertise). At the same time, they show interest and express confidence in community members and acknowledge and affirm the skills and resources they are able to access and deploy.

3. Building deliberative capacity

FEST practitioners bring community members together in groups and use various tools (social/resource mapping, community history, seasonal calendar) to engage them in group discussions. They explain and demonstrate through their own behaviour the norms of respectful democratic group interaction. These norms are captured in group contracts, which serve as reference points to guide ongoing development of effective personal participation and group deliberation. Critical analysis is stimulated through the use of Freirean 'pedagogy' (androgogy). Critical engagement is generally first secured through the use of 'codes' based on issues of concern to community members that have been identified through 'listening surveys'. 'Code' discussions then serve to deepen critical analysis, revealing the root causes of these issues and the extent to which they are amenable to change. Collective action to address these root causes is reviewed through ongoing monitoring and final evaluation, both of which generate learning that is used to inform subsequent action.

4. Building organisational capacity

FEST practitioners help community members to develop project planning skills (objective setting, task scheduling, resource deployment, allocation of responsibilities, monitoring and evaluation, etc.). They also provide trainings to promote the emergence of stable community-based organisations from informal community groups (e.g. group strengthening training; community facilitation skills training; leadership training). Further support and training is provided to enable established community-based organisations to collaborate through apex or network organisations at different levels. Ongoing mentoring and organisational development assistance is provided for these apex organisations. At all levels, organisational capacity is monitored through the use of self-assessment tools ('spider diagram'; 'group photo', etc.).

5. Developing an enabling environment

Whilst recognising the responsibility of all people (including the marginalised) to act in their own and their communities' best interests, FEST practitioners recognise that government and non-government actors have a responsibility (and sometimes a duty) to promote people's dignity, wellbeing, freedom and security. They therefore disseminate information about the respective roles and responsibilities of these actors and provide signposting support. They also build the capacity of community-based and apex organisations to engage directly with these actors through liaison, claiming established entitlements, proposal preparation and advocacy. Such engagement helps to transform their

perception of, and behaviour towards, marginalised communities. FEST practitioners support this transformation by providing development education and organisational development training for relevant government and non-government agencies.

6. Promoting sustainability

The existence within marginalised communities of empowered people with an established capacity for action learning is considered a key requirement for sustainability in the FEST approach. The existence of strong, inclusive community-based organisations and networks is also considered important. FEST practitioners encourage communities to recognise the importance of enhancing and sustainably utilising their local resources. They also seek to promote linkage with effective and lasting government and non-government institutions from which marginalised communities will be able secure ongoing support into the future.

FEST encompasses a distinctive process

A feature of the FEST approach is that it combines these practice elements in a clearly sequenced process. This has five advantages. Firstly, it gives new field practitioners a clear sense of the steps they must take to apply this unfamiliar methodology in practice. Secondly, it introduces new practice elements in a measured way, such that they are better understood (and subsequently replicated) by community members. Thirdly, it makes it easier to manage a FEST programme and to reconcile it with donors' funding cycles. Fourthly, it facilitates mutual learning between field teams who are advancing through stages of the process in different areas at the same time. Finally, it keeps everybody (practitioners and communities alike) focused on the time-bound nature of the special opportunity FEST represents and the consequent need a) to use it well, and b) to avoid a dependency relationship.

FEST requires distinctive people

The success of FEST depends more than anything else on the personal qualities of those who practice it. As well as advanced skills in process facilitation, work as a FEST practitioner calls for personal integrity, a belief in the potential of all and a firm commitment to social justice. FEST practitioners must be prepared to live simply among marginalised and disadvantaged people and to accept the challenges that can present for them and their families. They must also be willing to step aside from the status they may enjoy as a consequence of educational achievement or social standing in order to 'serve' and empower the marginalised. To identify and develop adequate human resources, FEST practitioners have developed important processes of staff selection and training. Structured organisational learning is also a characteristic of a FEST programme.
