

Role of Extension Agents In Service of Farmers

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ROLE OF EXTENSION

Extension is a human process in which technical information is used to help rural people in achieving their potential. A holistic approach to agricultural extension today goes beyond technology transfer for major crops, livestock production and other related activities. It also includes goals for the human capital development in terms of enhancing the management and technical skills of farm households relating to production and postharvest, sustainable natural resource management, nutrition, leadership and organization skills in addition to developing producer groups. Agricultural extension also facilitates problem solving, creating links to market and other players in the agricultural value chain as well as providing access to information, skills and technologies. Extension began to be seen as a bridge between research and farmers -a bridge to bear a two-way procession of newly developed agricultural technologies and policy directives on their way to be utilized by farmers and feedback to the research. The task of extension personnel is to translate these technologies and directives into an understandable form suitable to the location.

THREE ARMS OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION NETWORK:

1. Public Extension Services

Public extension services are government-led initiatives that play a crucial role in agricultural development. These services are operated by state government line departments, such as Departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, and Livestock Development. Additionally, state agriculture universities-based extension services, including Directorates of Extension, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and Krishi Gyan Kendras (KGKs), contribute to the network. ICAR extension services, comprising Zonal Research Stations, Krishi Vigyan Kendras, Agriculture Technology Information Centres (ATICs), and Institute Village Linkage Programme (IVLP), also fall under this category.

2. Private Extension Services

Private extension services are non-governmental initiatives that complement public extension services. These services are provided by community-based organizations, para-extension workers, agri-clinics, and agribusinesses. Input suppliers and dealers also play a significant role in private extension services, while the corporate sector contributes to agricultural development through various initiatives. These private extension services help bridge the gap between farmers' needs and the availability of expertise and resources.

3. Mass Media & Information Technology

Mass media and information technology are essential components of the agricultural extension network. Print media, including vernacular press, helps disseminate information to farmers. Radio and television programs, as well as private cable channels, also play a vital role in sharing knowledge and best practices. Electronic connectivity through computers, NICNET, and the internet enables access to a vast array of information. Farm

Information and Advisory Centres (FIACs), private portals, and public and private information shops further facilitate the flow of information to farmers, supporting their decision-making and agricultural productivity.

Status Of Manpower In Public Extension:

There is a scarcity of extension staff at various levels. As per the Doubling Farmer Income report in 2012-13 there is one extension functionary to serve 1162 operational holdings (1:1162). The recommended ratio is as follows: 1. Hilly areas 1:400, 2. Irrigated areas 1:750, 3. Rainfed areas 1:1000.

Role Of Extension Agent:

- An extension agent endeavors to stimulate individuals to acknowledge and engage with their issues, to surmount these challenges, to provide them with instruction on how to do so, to convince them to follow his guidance, ultimately leading them to experience satisfaction and pride in their accomplishments, to bring about a transformation in attitudes, behavior, and social organization, serve multiple functions, acting as intermediaries between the government and the populace, initiates a process of change upon recognizing that specific changes are needed in rural society and helps individuals create their own organizations to address their issues, steers the innovation and decision-making processes toward outcomes that the change agency considers desirable.

Nevertheless, many notions regarding the agent's role can be grouped into two overarching categories. The agent's role can be viewed as comprising two main areas of responsibility, which are distinct from one another.

Knowledge/communication/innovation

The extension agent's role involves supplying the knowledge and information necessary for a farmer to comprehend and decide on a specific innovation, and then conveying that information to the farmer. The agent in this role is viewed as a carrier of knowledge—typically technical—and as an educator who teaches farmers how to apply this knowledge. This position has the agent receiving formal training. He is given technical knowledge and information that he must share with the farmers. In this position, the agent's duties are typically well-organized and grounded in current government policies and rural development initiatives.

Educator/facilitator/catalyst

When acting as an educator, facilitator, or catalyst—roles the agent may need to take on while fulfilling his responsibilities—the agent is more closely linked to the personal development of the farmers than to the knowledge/communication aspect. The agent is primarily focused on assisting farmers in building confidence, organizing themselves, and starting to engage in extension activities, rather than on specific programs or targets. The agent's role is primarily to assist and actively motivate farmers to create their own initiatives and start addressing their own issues. The many-faceted interpretation of this role includes- teacher, facilitator, organizer, arbitrator, educator, broker, administrator, advocate, leader, consultant, enabler, catalyst, communicator, intermediary, activist, friend, motivator, listener, provider and stimulator, etc.

Knowledge and personal skills

Knowledge

Four main areas of knowledge are important for the extension agent and form the basis of extension training.

Technical: The agent must be adequately trained in the technical aspects of his work and have a good working knowledge of the main elements of the agricultural system in which he is working.

Rurallife: This includes anthropological and sociological studies of the rural area where he is working, local traditions, practices, culture and values.

Policy: The agent should be familiar with the main legislation of government or other institutional policies which affect the rural areas, development programmes, credit programmes, and bureaucratic and administrative procedures.

Adult education: Since extension is an educational process, the agent must be familiar with the main approaches to adult education and group dynamics and with the techniques of developing farmer participation in extension activities.

Personal skills

A vast range of such skills has been suggested; however, these have been grouped together to present a list of the main areas of skills required of an extension agent.

Organization and planning: The extension agent must be able to plan extension work, to organize its implementation and generally to manage and effectively control an extension office and its activities.

Communication: An extension agent must above all be a communicator, both verbally and non-verbally, and this skill is the basis of all extension activity.

Analysis and diagnosis: The extension agent must be able to examine situations which confront him, recognize and understand the problems that exist and propose courses of action.

Leadership: The extension agent should inspire confidence and trust in the farmers he serves, set them an example and take the lead in initiating activities.

Initiative: The extension agent may often have to work in isolation and unsupervised. He must have the initiative and confidence to do so without depending upon guidance and support from his superiors.

Public speaking

Most agents will be able to develop a good approach to public speaking with application and practice. The points listed below are a useful guide to public speaking for the extension agent.

Preparation: To deliver an effective public speech, an extension agent should prepare thoroughly by verifying facts, organizing material logically, and preparing audiovisual aids. They should also familiarize themselves with the venue and consider the audience's interests, needs, and knowledge. Rehearsing key points and using visual aids like notes or overhead projector sheets can help guide the presentation and provide a summary for the audience.

Content: When crafting a talk, it's essential to carefully consider the content, structure, and language used. A clear introduction and logical sequence of key points will engage the audience. Keeping the talk concise, avoiding jargon and complex technical language, and adapting to the local context will ensure the message is effectively conveyed and well-received.

Delivery: Delivering a successful presentation demands careful attention to detail and confidence. It's essential to know the message, prepare well, and engage with audience in a friendly and conversational manner, while respecting their intelligence and avoiding condescension. Maintain positive body language, speak clearly and loudly, and keep a positive attitude. Ultimately, keep the talk concise, ideally 15-20 minutes, to hold the audience's attention and fit the available time.

Reportwriting

Report writing is a skill that the extension agent can develop and put to good use. As a guide to writing a report, the following are a few general hints to bear in mind.

Ensure that all the information and data which will go into the report are available and readily at hand.

Plan the report beforehand and decide up on its general content, format and style of presentation.

Structure the content in a logical order, introducing the purpose of the report, followed by the main substance, and then some concluding remarks.

Keep it brief! At whatever level the agent is operating, a brief, concise and well-structured report is far more useful and effective than a lengthy, rambling one.

Check over the report, once written, and ensure that the final version is clear, neat and easy to read.

An extension agent who can easily and quickly structure his report-writing duties will get through them with much less bother than the disorganized agent who prepares and writes his report as he goes along.

The use of local leaders

When carrying out his extension programme and activities in the field, the extension agent will work with local informal leaders. Informal leaders are farmers, prominent in their area, who show the qualities and abilities which can be of use to an extension agent. Informal leaders will exist in a rural area, and by careful inquiry and observation, the extension agent should be able to identify them. Often, by talking to other farmers and asking whom they see as the natural leaders in the area, the agent will be able to identify the key farmers whose support will be invaluable in promoting extension activities.

Selection of local leaders

Extension experience in different parts of the world has suggested the kinds of qualities and characteristics that the agent should look for in farmers who might be good local leaders. Clearly, an extension agent should not hastily invite a local farmer to become a leader of extension activities. He must give some thought to his choice. The following lists are examples of the qualities to look for in local leaders.

1. Initiative to take the lead and give confidence to others.
2. Intellect to understand issues and identify problems.
3. Industry and energy, to work unselfishly with other farmers.
4. Influence over others, and the ability to persuade and teach.
5. Integrity and a sense of responsibility.
6. Experience in farming and modern agricultural practices.
7. Educated and literate.
8. Reliable and a regular attender of extension functions.
9. Innovative and willing to try out new ideas.
10. Trusted and liked by his fellow farmers.

Working with local leaders

The extension agent should take great care to develop the qualities mentioned above. His own relationship with local leaders will also be important and he should always try to be available to support and encourage their work. There are four main aspects of working with local leaders which the agent should keep in mind.

Inform local leaders of extension activities and proposals for new programmes, and keep them supplied with extension literature.

Visit them as often as is necessary - enough to ensure that they are not isolated or left on their own. Try to make the visits regular so that the leader can build them into his own work routine.

Train the local leaders in the aspects of extension activities with which they may be unfamiliar; formal training sessions can be set up at which the leaders will learn about a new practice, how to run a demonstration or how to hold a farmers' meeting.

Encourage local leaders to take the initiative and to begin to act with some independence. The more they can be comerecognized and effective, the better chance the extension agent will have of making an impact in the area.

An extension agent who has the use of the services of a group of good, efficient local leaders has a tremendous additional resource at his disposal and will be in a far better position to get extension work going in that area than if he had to work alone and unsupported.

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