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Study on Revitalizing Public Extension Systems

The changing agricultural scenario has thrown open various opportunities and challenges for the farming communities. To assist farmers in taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the changing scenario, it was felt necessary to study the existing extension systems and approaches in the public sector and suggest ways and means to revitalize them for addressing the upcoming challenges. Keeping this in view, the present study was taken up with the following objectives:

Objectives

1. To identify the types of public extension systems available in the country
2. To understand the present status of public extension system
3. To identify the constraints faced by the extension personnel and farming communities.
4. To suggest strategies for revitalization of the extension systems.

The study followed an ex-post-facto research design. The major public extension systems operating at the field level were the domain of the study. The data was collected through mailed questionnaire along with follow up visits apart from focused group interviews with a cross section of officials and farmers. Secondary data from the reports and records were also made use of. Simple analytical tools were used for analysis and presentation of the data.

Some of the key recommendations are given here.

* Since knowledge and skills are crucial requirements for improved farming activity, it is recommended that the objective of public extension systems to be dovetailed to provision of technical assistance to the farming communities than supplies and services.

* ATMA is to be operationalised as a coordination mechanism at district level integrating extension service delivery; the hierarchical levels of line departments should be limited to four i.e. State, District, Block and Panchayats that are decision making and delivery levels; and a mechanism of public private partnership for provision of services inducted.

* The pattern of bottom up planning of extension programmes needs to be promoted rather than top down schemes. Considering the need for intensive skill upgradation on technological innovations, multiple approaches such as farmers field schools, farm schools, farmer led extension, lead farmers, farmers organizations, farmers interest groups, exposure visits, whole farm demonstrations, farmers scientists interactions etc. are needed.

* Appropriate support facilities may be provided for field extension functionaries of an office space in the panchayat, telephone / mobile phones etc. A common resource centre is to be created at the block level with support facilities.

* It is recommended to streamline linkages between research and extension organizations by inducting KVK scientists as members of GB of ATMA and core team members for preparation of comprehensive district agricultural development plan. Pre-seasonal zonal workshops, monthly workshops, farmers-scientists interface and field trials programme need to be revived.

* Extension organizations may offload role of providing services and support in areas of input management, processing, value addition, marketing etc. to private sector. on a Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode.

* Build farmers' capacity through technical assistance in developing a farm business oriented approach; organizational skills and technical assistance in marketing of agricultural produce and build capacity of extension personnel to meet future challenges.

* ICT facilities need at the gram panchayat through an info kiosk with facilities at ATMA and FIAC levels to provide access to information on government policies, programmes and schemes for the benefit of the farmers.