



Assessment of Core Competencies of Livestock Extension Professionals of Jammu and Kashmir State of India

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Introduction: Competence is a concept that integrates knowledge, skills and attitudes, application of which enables the professionals to perform effectively, and to respond to contingencies, change, and the unexpected, the ability to perform the roles and tasks required by one's job to the expected standard. Combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes lead to competency, and they are important traits that extension professionals should possess. However, the need for competencies among extension workers is context-specific. Extension workers are now considered not only the channels for information transfer but also the facilitators, advisors, consultants, and sources for innovation and knowledge. Extension management need to know the essential competency domains their extension professionals require, which lay the foundation for an analysis on competency, identifying gaps in competencies and determining areas for training and education. To understand the same in the livestock sector of Jammu and Kashmir state of India, the current study was undertaken.

Methodology: The present study was conducted in the two districts of central Kashmir i.e., Srinagar and Ganderbal. From each of the two districts 30 livestock extension professionals (15 field veterinarians and 15 para-vets) that make a total of 60 respondents were selected randomly for the study. Respondents were interviewed at their respective places of posting based on various parameters of the study.

Scenario of livestock extension organization in Kashmir: The main organizations engaged in the livestock extension related work in the study area are the State Department of Animal Husbandry, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), veterinary education and research institutes (SKUAST, Kashmir). The extension contacts of the professionals were very low. Majority of the respondents (48.33%) perceived information flow through the livestock departments as fair followed by 26.67 percent and 25 percent who perceived it to be good and poor respectively. Majority of the professionals did field visits, treatment of animals, and record keeping on daily basis while as doing survey of households, awareness camps and vaccination programmes were done on yearly basis by majority. The extension professionals reported that there is adequate availability of the basic amenities like table, chairs, stationary and electric fans in their respective veterinary centers. Veterinarians have to work with the livestock hence are susceptible to many health hazards during their work. There has to be adequate supply of protection cloths, gloves, masks and automatic syringes that to some extent can prevent the transfer of the communicable and zoonotic diseases. The linkages of the livestock extension professional with the livestock extension agencies are not very impressive. Majority of livestock extension professionals have functional linkage with the central veterinary hospitals, block veterinary offices and veterinary hospitals. Some of the main livestock developmental programmes going in animal husbandry departments are farmer advisory programmes, fodder development programmes mainly by KVKs in downtrodden areas.

Majority of the respondents (73.33%) reported that there is no transfer of the research findings from the research institutes to the field level livestock extension functionaries. The dissemination of the research findings to the farmers and distribution of livestock extension material by the field level extension professionals is done mainly on yearly basis. Majority of the livestock extension professionals are satisfied with their current job. The state of Jammu and Kashmir has the least presence of the private sector jobs and getting a government job is like luxury in the state. As the contexts are changing, competition for resources is increasing, clients are more aware of their need for services than before, and they are demanding quality, reliable and performance-based services. So the need to strengthen dissemination of information and technology becomes foremost important.

Core competencies: Knowledge level of professionals about extension related competencies were lower compared to perceived importance of the same. Most of extension competencies were considered important by majority of veterinarians except the preparation of the questionnaires. As compared to the veterinarians, the perception of the para-vets regarding the livestock extension competencies was comparatively low. Fair majority of veterinarians and relatively low percent of para-vets have high knowledge regarding extension competencies.

Perceived importance of "livestock service and welfare related competencies" is high among both veterinarians and para-vets. Communication competencies were perceived to be important by majority of both veterinarians and the para-vets to communicate technical information in a way general public can understand (96.67% for both), and communicate effectively with peers to exchange technical and practical experience (93.33% & 83.33% for vets and para-vets respectively). Knowledge and skill of veterinarians regarding communication competencies was high. Effective communication was considered basic for any kind of extension activity in order to be useful in long run.

Risk analysis is very important task in order to have better prevention of diseases in animals and to achieve efficient production levels and was perceived as important by the majority of para-vets though comparatively lower than veterinarians. The para-vets considered competencies regarding risk communication, monitoring and conducting initial surveillance of diseases as comparatively less important than other competencies in this category. Knowledge level of majority of veterinarians was moderate regarding some important risk analysis competencies like the current international regulations, risk communication, risk based inspection respectively. Para-vets were having low level of knowledge and skill regarding the risk analysis.

Livestock professionals perceived subject matter related competencies as important, while para-vets perceive these competencies less important. Majority of the livestock professionals were having high subject matter related competencies (73.33%) in clinical subjects like medicine, surgery and gynecology. Basic subject related competencies were low in majority of the para-vets as they don't have expertise or training regarding these subjects that is revealed by a huge gap between perceived importance and level of knowledge of these competencies. Technical subject matter competencies are perceived important by majority of the livestock extension professionals (both veterinarians and para vets). Knowledge level of the veterinarians regarding technical subject matter competencies was found to be high and of para-vets mainly falls between average to low.

Application of technical information is very important as the role of the extension professional is prescriptive in nature and is mainly concerned with transfer of technology. Extension programme planning competencies were perceived as important and less important by majority of veterinarians and

para-vets respectively. There is a gap between the perceived importance and current level of knowledge in both veterinarians and the para-vets. Livestock extension professions are mostly lacking behind in the programme planning competencies. From the identification of the problem till the implementation and evaluation of the programmes, the livestock extension professionals should have high competence and involvement in these programmes in order to get effective results.

There is a huge gap between the perception about importance of the information and technology competencies between veterinarians and para-vets. Majority of veterinarians perceive information and communication technologies of average importance while they were perceived of low importance by majority of para-vets.

Veterinarians perceived all the professional and leadership competencies as important while as the knowledge and skill of the same was lower than perceived importance. Knowledge level of majority of the para-vets is low about most of these professional and leadership competencies. Time and management, stress management, motivational techniques, finding staff needs, etc. are considered important by the majority of the veterinarians and competencies regarding value chain analysis and economic and business management competencies are considered important by comparatively less number of veterinarians. The gap between the importance of these competencies and the current knowledge and skill is high. The importance and knowledge level about these competencies follow the same pattern in para-vets except that para-vets are comparatively less competent and consider these competencies less important than the veterinarians.

Livestock extension professionals (veterinarians and para-vets) had low knowledge and skill to perform the diverse competencies although the skill of the veterinarians is higher than that of the para-veterinarians. There is gap between how much important they are considered and what is the actual skill to perform these activities among both veterinarians and the para-vets.

Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that core competencies can be improved through pre-service training and there should be assessment of the professionals before the certification. Fifty percent of the respondents strongly agreed that competencies can be increased through basic induction training by conducting seminars, workshops, webinars, etc. Participation in these programmes can expose livestock extension professionals to latest happenings in livestock research and development. As per the recommendations of the Planning Commission of India (2012), emphasis should be given on refresher training of the field veterinarians to brace them for recent developments and making refresher course every five years during their career mandatory.

Conclusion: The findings of the study indicates that livestock extension departments, their contacts, linkages, facilities etc. are not on par with the current need of the livestock owners. There is urgent need to improve the contacts of the livestock extension professionals with other extension agencies that will lead to better understanding and the better solutions to the field problems. There is low level of knowledge of extension professionals (both veterinarians and para-vets) regarding the various core competencies important to them according to context of the job. This leads to conclude that in current age of challenges and competition there is a need to provide regular and quality trainings regarding the areas of need for efficient performance of the job. The trainings should be conducted separately for the veterinarians and the para-vets according to their need and level of knowledge and understanding.

Recommendations:

- There is a need for improvement of the extension contacts and linkages
- Furtherance of infrastructure in livestock health centers needs to be concentrated on for better service delivery
- Modifications in the curricula of pre-service training for veterinarians is necessary for equipping them to face the current and upcoming situations and challenges
- Imparting in-service trainings to the livestock extension professional
- Short in-service courses for the para-vets as refresher courses to keep their knowledge and skills up to date
- Increase in number of female extension professionals to better cater to the female livestock farmers
- Increase the number of the veterinarians and para-vets in field level for effective and timely service delivery

Complete report on 'Assessment of Core Competencies of Livestock Extension Professionals of Jammu and Kashmir State of India' is available at www.manage.gov.in

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The research report is based on the research conducted by Dr. Sheikh Shubeena as MANAGE Intern under the MANAGE Internship Programme for Post Graduate students of Extension Education.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in the document are that of the authors based on the research conducted and are not necessarily those of MANAGE or the officials interacted with during the study.

Correct citation: Shubeena, S., Suchiradipta B., and Saravanan, R. (2018) Assessment of Core Competencies of Livestock Extension Professionals of Jammu and Kashmir State of India, Research Report Brief 8, MANAGE- Centre for Agricultural Extension Innovations, Reforms and Agripreneurship, National Institute for Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad, India.



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