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Sequential extension interventions: Agricultural extension reforms in India

R. Ratnakar

Team Leader APCBTMP (World Bank Project), India

Agricultural extension is heading forward with a focused common vision. The last thing we want are several competing visions of what should be done, and once you have the vision, be sure that people see it as in their personal best interest. This is possible through Sequential Extension Interventions, a coordinated effort under Agricultural Extension Reforms in India.

Change is the name of the game today and organizations that learn to cope with evolutionary change emerge as winners. Managing change in extension organizations is a herculean task as it involves changing the mindset of the farming community towards adoption of new technologies. Agriculture extension has a crucial role to play in the context of demands of agricultural production in a sustainable manner. Reforms in the system envisage an extension service more broad-based and holistic in content and scope, thus beyond agricultural technology transfer. Its normal task of transferring and disseminating appropriate technologies and agronomic practices would not be sufficient. Extension agencies, services and functionaries will need to exercise a more proactive and participatory role, serve as knowledge information agents, initiating and facilitating mutually meaningful and equitable knowledge based transactions among primary producers, agricultural researchers and trainers.

Extension reforms in the country under ATMA (Agricultural Technology Management Agency), envisage a more holistic and broad based approach aimed at empowerment of the farmer through bottom up planning, capacity building and convergence of development departments. The reforms envisaged have been pilot tested with effect from November, 1998 in seven states viz., Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Orissa and Punjab covering 4 districts in each state. An autonomous institution – Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) has been established in these project districts as a registered society representing various stakeholders, including farmers, in project planning and implementation under the guidance of the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad.

ATMA implemented throughout the India since a decade has taken several initiatives to promote a positive change in the farming community and has now become the keyword for extension in the country. It was launched to consolidate the earlier investments and address specific system constraints, weaknesses and gaps that remained un-addressed by previous research and extension projects. Innovations in Technology Dissemination (ITD) component, in particular was expected to test new innovations in technology dissemination with restructured institutional and developmental arrangements resulting in delineation of future direction of the extension system and, at the same time, bridge serious Research-extension-farmer (R-E-F) linkage problems that currently constrain the flow of appropriate technology to farmers.

Objective of Agricultural Extension Reforms: ATMA

The objective of the scheme “Support to State Extension Programmes for Extension Reforms” is to make extension system farmer-driven and farmer accountable by way of new institutional arrangements for technology dissemination. The objective is proposed to be achieved by promoting, *inter-alia*, the following key reforms:

- **New Institutional Arrangements:** Providing innovative restructured autonomous bodies at the district/block level, which are flexible, promote bottom up and participatory approaches, are farmer driven and facilitate public private partnership.
- **Convergence of line departments:** Programmes and operating on gap filling mode by formatting Strategic Research and Extension work Plan (SREP) and annual plans.
- **Encouraging multi Agency extension strategies** involving *inter-alia* public private extension service providers.
- Moving towards integrated, broad-based extension delivery in line with **farming systems approach**.
- Adopting **group approach to Extension** cooperating through Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) and Self Help Groups (SHGs).
- Addressing **gender concerns** (Mobilizing farm women into groups and capacity building etc.).
- Moving towards **sustainability of extension services** (e.g. through beneficiary contribution).

ratnakar123@yahoo.com