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The sources of information and awareness about extension agency among farmers: A study of banana cultivators in Pathanamthitta, Kerala

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Abstract

The extension agencies help the farmers to be aware about new technology which is very important from the point of view of production, productivity and profitability in agriculture. The study examines about the sources of information about new technology to banana cultivators of Pathanamthitta district. The sample of 540 banana cultivators were selected among which 180 are the beneficiaries of Krishi Vigyan Kendra and the remaining are non-beneficiaries. The farmers are depending more on fellow farmers and newspapers for sources of information about farming. The mobile phones as well as internet or social media have less influence on farmers. The factor analysis identified the first status of sources as new generation media reflected by the variable's mobile phones and apps, social media networks and internet. The second status is traditional media reflected by the variable's newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and fellow farmers. The third status of information is agencies, indicated by NGOs and Government offices like Krishi Bhavan. Farmers are more influenced by the factor traditional media although some of them are using new generation media.

Keywords: Extension, awareness, information, sources

1. Introduction

Agriculture needs technology for delivering of multiple utilities like triggering growth, reduction of poverty and inequality, providing food security, and delivering environmental services (Byerlee 2009) [1]. Along with the development of better technology suitable to the regional specificities, measure to diffuse them to the farmer population is of utmost importance. The adoption of technologies is not an easy task considering the heterogeneous character of farmers and various challenges confronting them. The role and importance of agencies for agricultural extension becomes imperative in this context, particularly in developing countries. Extension services are the central mechanism in the process of agricultural development, both in terms of technology transfer and resource development. Krishi Vigyan Kendras. (KVKs) were established in India at district level with a mandate to transfer advanced agricultural technologies to the farming community in every districts.

1.1 Literature Review

The educated farmers are considered to be more aware by extension agents. Van Den Ban (1969) [2] in his study about Dutch farmers revealed that education influences the adoption rate. Ferroni and Zhou (2011) [3] emphasized about the role of knowledge and information as one of the main factors influencing productivity. Knowledge gap is one of the main factors contributing to difference in yield in similar agro-ecological zones. Varma (2017) [4] had studied about the problems of Krishi Vigyan Kendras beneficiaries in the adoption of new technology. The study was conducted in Basti district on the recommended adoption of wheat. Sixty five percent of beneficiaries had the poor knowledge of the recommended technology.

Pathania (2017) highlighted that Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) is the key institute for the comprehensive development of village community by adopting proper agricultural and allied practices towards sustainability. He had conducted study on both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries and found out that KVK act as the main source of information to the beneficiaries while non-beneficiaries were mainly dependent upon the input dealers for information. Though farmers have knowledge about adoption practices, the adoption was lower than that of knowledge [5].

Sasidharan (2015) in his study assessed the extent of adoption and constraints in the adoption of organic farming technologies by banana and vegetable farmers. The information seeking behaviour had direct effect on awareness and area under organic farming had direct effect on adoption [6]. Reghunath Namita (2016) analysed the various Innovations in Technology Dissemination in Kannur district in Kerala with special reference to Kannur Krishi Vigyan Kendra. She found that majority of farmers surveyed in the study has a medium level of perception regarding Innovations in Technology Dissemination. The acuity and awareness of farmers were positively and significantly correlated with mass media exposure,

extension agency contact, extension participation, social participation etc. Farmer oriented and location specific technology dissemination should be given importance. The indigenous knowledge of the farmers should be combined with modern Information communication Technology to make extension successful [7].

2. Methodology

The study area comprised the entire district of Pathanamthitta district of Kerala State. The universe includes all the banana cultivators who received assistance from Krishi Vigyan Kendra and those who have not availed any sort of assistance from it. In the first stage of sampling, two (midland and highland) from the three regions were selected purposively. Six blocks of the district are selected by random sampling. In the second stage, six Grama Panchayats from each block were selected based on simple random sampling. From the KVK, the list of beneficiaries under banana cultivation projects of KVK was collected and a quota of 30 beneficiaries was selected from each panchayat by simple random sampling method. The 60 non-beneficiaries of Krishi Vigyan Kendras were selected by random sampling from each panchayat.

According to NSSO 70thround of situation of agricultural households (2014) in India only 0.27% is approaching Krishi Vigyan Kendra's for extension. But secondary data reports of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Pathanamthitta states that 30% of farmers are approaching them from every panchayat. Taking the one third of 384 (according to Cochran's formula) gives the number 128.Then the number of beneficiaries if taken equally from each panchayat is only 21. So the statistical minimum of 30 beneficiaries from six panchayats is taken. Thus, the numbers of beneficiaries are fixed as 180 from six panchayats. Assuming non-beneficiaries to be two third, 360 of them was taken from six panchayats. Thus, the total sample size is 540. Appropriate statistical tools were used for used for analysis of data.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Age-wise Distribution of Banana Cultivators

Area (%)			Status (%)			
Midland	**Highland**	**Total**	**Beneficiary**	**Non-beneficiary**	**Total**	
35 to 60	71.5	70.4	70.9	66.1	73.3	70.9
Above 60	28.5	29.6	29.1	33.9	26.7	29.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

***Source*:** Survey Data

The above table shows that about 71% of cultivators are between the age group 35 to 60. The rest 30% belonged to age group above 60.

Table 2: Sources of Information on farming

	Area			Status		
	Midland	**Highland**	**Total**	**Beneficiary**	**Non-beneficiary**	**Total**
Fellow farmers	4.30	4.30	4.30	4.43	4.23	4.30
Newspapers news and features on farming	4.27	4.33	4.30	4.42	4.24	4.30
Agri Magazines	4.03	4.28	4.15	4.33	4.07	4.15
Radio programmes on farming	3.86	3.77	3.81	3.99	3.73	3.81
Television programmes on farming	3.86	3.93	3.89	4.09	3.79	3.89
Mobile phone	2.91	2.92	2.92	3.01	2.87	2.92
Mobile phone apps for farming	2.85	2.75	2.80	2.87	2.77	2.80
Social media networks on farming	2.79	2.70	2.74	2.73	2.74	2.74
Internet Browsing on farming topics	2.94	2.78	2.86	2.86	2.86	2.86
Krishi Bhavan	3.95	3.79	3.87	3.95	3.83	3.87
NGOs	1.14	1.63	1.38	1.37	1.39	1.38

***Source*:** Survey Data

The sources of information given in table 2 illustrates that farmers are depending more on fellow farmers and newspapers for sources of information about farming irrespective of area and status. The mobile phones as well as internet or social media have less influence on farmers.

Data analysis to identify the major sources of information on farming among the banana cultivators were attempted using the multivariate technique, factor analysis with the extraction method being Principal Component Analysis. Eleven different sources were presented before the respondents and their responses towards each of them were recorded on a five-point Likert scale. The adequacy of data set was examined by correlation matrix (R-matrix), Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Barlett's Test of sphericity. For these data, Bartlett's test is significant at zero percent level, and therefore factor analysis is appropriate.

Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix about major sources of information

	Component		
	1	2	3
Mobile phone apps for farming	.916	.040	.035
Social media networks on farming	.909	-.042	.022
Internet Browsing on farming topics	.868	-.039	-.082
Mobile phone	.697	.240	.224
Newspapers news and features on farming	.028	.776	-.139
Agri Magazines	.177	.706	-.141
Radio programmes on farming	-.042	.706	.202
Fellow farmers	-.065	.685	-.135
Television programmes on farming	.080	.667	.168
NGOs	-.019	.064	.804
Krishi Bhavan	-.116	.120	.763

Source: Survey Data

We identify the first status of sources as new generation media reflected by the variable's mobile phones and apps, social media networks and internet. The second status is traditional media reflected by the variable's newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and fellow farmers. The third status of information is agencies, indicated by NGOs and Government offices like Krishi Bhavan and Krishi Vigyan Kendras. Farmers are more influenced by the factor traditional media although some of them are using new generation media.

Table 4: Awareness of Cultivators about Krishi Vigyan Kendra

	Area (%)			Status (%)		
	Midland	Highland	Total	Beneficiary	Non-beneficiary	Total
Never heard about it	21.5	20.7	21.1	0.0	31.7	21.1
Not aware	34.1	43.7	38.9	0.0	58.3	38.9
Not Sure	6.7	0.7	3.7	0.0	5.6	3.7
To a limited extent	11.5	11.1	11.3	30.6	1.7	11.3
Yes, to a great extent	26.3	23.7	25.0	69.4	2.8	25.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

As per the factors identified agencies also provides information to farmers about the different aspects on farming. The table 4 illustrates that 90% of non-beneficiaries has no awareness about the institution. Among non-beneficiaries 31.7% never heard about the institution, 58.3% are not aware of it and 5.6% are not sure about it. The non-beneficiaries 1.7% are aware of KVK to a limited extent and only 2.8% aware of it to a great extent. The beneficiaries are aware of great extent and limited extent by 69.4% and 30.6% respectively.

The Pearson's Chi-square tests has shown that the area and awareness has statistically significant association between them. Similarly, the test also showed that status and awareness has statistically significant association between them.

4. Conclusion

Awareness about a matter is the fundamental factor required for adoption of new technology or new information. Although lot of agencies are working in the country farmers are not aware of them. They are depending on fellow farmers and newspapers for the information about various aspects of farming. Although a district level agency like Krishi Vigyan Kendra is functioning in the district many farmers are not even aware of the existence of institution. This clearly shows the information asymmetry that is existing in the farming sector of an advanced state like Kerala.

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