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Constraints faced and suggestions given for the improvement of women agriculture extension functionaries

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Abstract

The extension services provided to the agricultural community by extension professionals have become more diverse than ever before and will continue to evolve to meet increasing demands. The effectiveness and productivity of these services are largely dependent on the performance of the professionals delivering them. In this purview the present study was conducted Elicit the constraints faced and suggestions given for the improvement of women agriculture extension functionaries. This study was conducted in the year 2023-2024 in Shivamogga and Chikkamagalur districts under of Karnataka State by considering 120 respondents. Data collection was done by structured questionnaire and personal interview method and e-mail by using structured schedule. Frequency, Percentage and Ranking were used for data analysis. The major obstacles that limited the ability of women agriculture extension functionaries to demonstrate their job competence and performance were identified Less number of ICTs tools, Lack of transport facility, Political interference and Over burden of work. Further, to overcome the challenges, women agricultural extension functionaries suggested Provision of government vehicle, Higher officers should reward staff to motivate, Development of online platforms for technology transfer, Appointment of the vacant supporting staff and efficient allocation of operational resources could improve their competence and performance levels.

Keywords: Constraints faced, suggestions for improvement, agricultural extension services

Introduction

Agriculture is a cornerstone of India's economic development. Farmers are dedicated to improving their agricultural practices while also encouraging those from non-farming sectors to take up agriculture. Enhancing the livelihoods of farmers heavily depends on the role of women agricultural extension functionaries, who are essential in bridging the gap between research institutions and the agricultural community. The term "agricultural technology dissemination" refers to the structured process of passing new agricultural advancements, improved methods or innovative practices from research institutions into the hands of farmers. While technology transfer is critical, women working in agricultural offices face several challenges. These include limited opportunities for leadership positions, gender biases, lack of recognition and the difficulty of balancing work and family duties. Additionally, they often encounter restricted access to capacity-building programs or advanced technologies,

making it harder for them to effectively support farmers in adopting new agricultural innovations. Addressing these barriers is crucial to strengthening agricultural extension services and ensuring equitable participation for all. An extension service dealing with a women-to-women approach would result in a better transfer of information to women farmers than a men-to-women approach (Lamontagne-Godwin *et al.*, 2017) ^[2]. At the global level, only 15 per cent of women work as extension experts (Chowdary *et al.*, 2023) ^[1]. Hence, the need of the hour is to assess and understand the professionalism traits of female professionals in extension organizations to build a strong human resource in the overall agriculture sector. Agricultural systems and practices are evolving rapidly across the globe, which demands improved technologies and advanced services (Nair *et al.*, 2023) ^[4].

Methodology

The present research investigation was confined in the

purposely selected Shivamogga and Chikkamagalur districts of Karnataka State. In context to the objectives planned under the study and in view of methodology adopted an '*Ex-post-facto*' of Social Research has been used in the present study. All the talukas of Shivamogga and Chikkamagalur districts were selected. All the women agriculture extension functionaries working in the public and private agricultural fields level of Shivamogga and Chikkamagalur districts i.e. 60 public women agriculture extension functionaries and 60 private women agriculture extension functionaries were selected for the present study. Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. The data was collected in the form of primary data. The primary data was collected through survey method using structured and semi-structured Interview schedules. Statistical tools like frequency, percentage and ranking were used for the study.

Results and Discussion

1. Constraints faced by the respondents in performing their responsibility

The problems elicited by the women agriculture extension functionaries while discharging their duties are presented in Table 1 that, the extent of problems expressed by the female agricultural extension functionaries includes a lack of trained village-level extension functionaries, which had a mean score of 2.67 and ranked first. The reason may be due to the challenges faced by women agricultural extension functionaries are significant, with one of the main issues being the shortage of adequately trained village-level extension workers. This gap not only increases the workload on existing staff but also limits the effectiveness of agricultural outreach programs. Women in these roles often struggle with additional barriers such as insufficient training opportunities, gender biases in a male-dominated field, and inadequate support for addressing the unique needs of female farmers. As a result, the overall impact of agricultural extension services is reduced, especially in rural areas where women play a key role in farming activities.

The results depicted in the Table 1 revealed that, less number of refresher training on ICTs with mean score 2.30 ranked second. The reason may be due to women agricultural extension functionaries face challenges due to the limited availability of refresher training on ICTs, which restricts their ability to stay updated with modern technologies. This lack of training hinders their effectiveness in providing digital solutions and support to farmers, especially in promoting technology-driven agricultural practices.

It can be seen in the Table 1 that, Lack of transport facility to remote areas with mean score 2.22 ranked third. The probable reason might be likely women agricultural extension functionaries often face difficulties in reaching remote areas due to inadequate transport facilities, limiting their ability to provide timely support to farmers. This challenge affects their outreach efforts, particularly in rural regions where their presence is crucial for technology dissemination and farmer assistance.

It is observed from the Table 1 that, Political interference in implementing schemes/ programmes, mean score of 2.19, ranked fourth. The reason might be that, this interference can manifest in various forms, such as pressure to prioritize certain groups for political gain or delays in resource allocation. It undermines the officers' ability to operate impartially, reducing the effectiveness and reach of these initiatives. For women in particular, navigating this political landscape can be even more difficult due to existing gender biases, further hindering their capacity to implement programs efficiently.

It was evident from table 1 revealed that, over burden of work with mean score 2.17 ranked fifth. These officers often face an excessive workload due to the dual responsibilities of professional duties and traditional household roles, especially in rural settings where societal expectations can be more rigid. In many cases, they are tasked with covering large geographical areas, managing multiple projects and dealing with administrative work (documentation) and field visits, all while balancing personal commitments.

The result in Table 1 revealed that, lack of support/ faculty in working with other line department with mean score 2.15 is ranked sixth. These difficulties arise from a combination of gender biases, insufficient communication channels, and organizational silos that hinder effective inter-departmental coordination. In many instances, women agriculture extension functionaries find themselves marginalized in decision-making processes or receive inadequate cooperation from their counterparts in other departments, which can significantly affect the implementation of agricultural programmers/schemes.

It is clear from the Table 1, Lack of idea on preparation of extension information material and heavy workload 2.08 ranked seventh. The situation is worsened by the heavy workloads that women agricultural extension functionaries already bear. Balancing fieldwork, administrative duties and programmers management leaves little time for the creative and technical work required to produce high-quality extension materials. In some cases, they may not have access to tools, such as graphic design software or video production equipment or they may work in rural areas with limited internet access, further restricting their ability to develop and distribute these resources.

It is evident from Table 1 that, Heavy workload and hectic schedule of working untimely instruction were ranked eighth with a mean scores of 2.02. Women agricultural extension functionaries frequently experience heavy workloads and hectic schedules, which are further aggravated by receiving untimely instructions from higher authorities. These last-minute directives often force them to re-prioritize tasks, disrupting their workflow and making it difficult to manage time effectively. This unpredictability can lead to exhaustion, reduced job performance and difficulty maintaining a work-life balance, especially since many women agriculture officers also manage household responsibilities.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to Constraints faced

Sl. No	Statement	Mean score	Rank
1	Lack of support/ faculty in working with other line Department	2.15	VI
2	Political interference in implementing schemes/programmes	2.19	IV
3	Lack of idea on preparation of extension information Material	2.08	VII
4	Lack of trained village level extension functionaries	2.66	I
5	Over burden of work	2.17	V
6	Lack of transport facility to remote areas	2.22	III
7	Heavy workload and hectic schedule of working untimely instruction	2.02	VIII
8	Less number of refresher training on ICTs	2.30	II

2. Suggestions given by the Women Agriculture Extension functionaries

A collection of recommendations from Women Agriculture Extension Functionaries was compiled to address the challenges they encounter in their workplaces. The results were presented in Table 2. The suggestions offered by the Women Agriculture Extension functionaries were arranged in descending order of their frequency and percentage.

The suggestions for improving the job competence and job performance of women agriculture extension functionaries are presented in Table 2 that, among various suggestions expressed by women agriculture extension functionaries to

overcome the constraints, the major suggestion was provision of government vehicle during the crop season (79.17%), followed by all higher officers should reward staff to motivate (70.00%), development of mobile apps and online platforms for technology transfer (63.33%), release of budget by the organization should be timely (59.17%), appointment of the vacant supporting staff (54.17%), permission to purchase inputs well in advance of the season (53.33%) and create or enhance access to credit facilities, grants and subsidies specifically aimed at supporting smallholder farmers to adopt technologies (42.50%) were the received documented suggestion.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to Suggestions given

Sl. No.	Suggestions	Frequency	Per cent
1	Provision of government vehicle during the crop season	95	79.17
2	Higher officers should reward staff to motivate	84	70.00
3	Development of mobile apps and online platforms for technology transfer	76	63.33
4	Release of budget by the organization should be timely	71	59.17
5	Appointment of the vacant supporting staff	65	54.17
6	Permission to purchase inputs well in advance of the season	64	53.33
7	Create or enhance access to credit facilities, grants and subsidies specifically aimed at supporting smallholder farmers to adopt technologies	51	42.50

Conclusion

Women agriculture extension functionaries play a vital role in advancing the feminization of agriculture, narrowing the gender productivity gap and ensuring rural women have equal access to advisory services. Furthermore, the skills and performance of extension personnel significantly impact the effectiveness of these services. In a similar context, the present study revealed that in their job, Lack of support/ faculty in working, Less number of ICTs tools, Lack of transport facility, Political interference and Over burden of work. To address these challenges, suggestions were received from them, Provision of government vehicle, Higher officers should reward staff to motivate, Development of online platforms for technology transfer, Appointment of the vacant supporting staff and Release of budget by the organization should be timely. In the future, developing targeted policies could enhance the professionalism of women agriculture extension functionaries, contributing to a more efficient extension system in India.

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