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### Do we have adequate market orientation in our public extension system

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#### Abstract

India is having quite a comprehensive public extension system to cater to the knowledge requirement of farmers. Though, inclusive approach with focus on marketing is required for sustainable development of agriculture. An attempt is made to assess the orientation of extension functionaries towards agricultural marketing extension activities while performing their responsibilities. The findings are based on the information collected from extension functionaries representing different public organizations. A five point Likert-scale was used to capture the response over five categories of activities namely production, capacity building, institutional building, marketing and investment and other office related work. The findings indicate that majority of functionaries are working directly with the farmers with each serving 1205 farmers which is much higher to the numbers ideally an extension functionary should serve as suggested by DFI Report. The extension functionaries are focused more on production, capacity building and other office related activities. The focus is slightly less on institutional building and marketing and investment activities which are considered to be vital in present time commercial agriculture with focus on income enhancement. The findings will facilitate in bringing the desired shift in agricultural extension from production to market-oriented for realising the true potential of agriculture. There is need to follow an extension strategy that goes beyond public agencies and encourage involvement of private players to increase the effective number of extension functionaries available to serve farming community.

**Keywords:** Public extension system, market orientation, extension functionaries to farmers ratio and market-led-extension

#### Introduction

Agriculture sector is becoming increasingly knowledge intensive (Babu and Joshi, 2015) <sup>[1]</sup>. India is having quite a comprehensive public extension system to cater to this requirement. The public extension system in the country is one of the largest knowledge and information dissemination institutions in the world (Babu, *et al*, 2013) <sup>[2]</sup>. Though, there is need for inclusive approach to ensure sustainable development in the farming systems, as the agricultural extension system in the country is still oriented mainly towards production-led-extension (Naik and Ashokkumar, 2021) <sup>[3]</sup>. Realising this, the Government has introduced various initiatives like decentralisation of decision making, coordination among line departments facilitated through Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) and involving private sector through initiatives like Agri-Clinic and Agribusiness Centres Scheme – ACABC (Babu and Joshi, 2015) <sup>[1]</sup> and Diploma in Agricultural Extension Services for Input Dealers – DAESI. In present time, agricultural extension system is viewed as playing a wider role by developing human and social capital, post-harvest management, processing and value addition, facilitating access to markets and trade, organising farmers and producers group, and working with farmers towards sustainable natural resource management practices in addition to transfer of technology for enhanced production. Emphasis is on empowering farmers on different aspects of agriculture along its long chain of pre-production, production and post-production activities including

marketing (DFI, 2017) <sup>[4]</sup>. The focus on income enhancement and changes experienced in the trade environment have further brought marketing to the fore. The need to bring market orientation in agriculture through concept like market-led-extension is further highlighted by the suggestions made in DFI Report to strengthen extension relating to agricultural marketing by transferring manpower to district level agricultural marketing departments. The need to bring market orientation in extension is important (Singh and Burton, 2006, FAO, 2021) <sup>[5, 6]</sup> considering the market opportunities offered by present global and liberal trade regime. This makes it interesting to understand the market orientation of the existing public extension system. With this background, the present paper aims at making an assessment of focus of extension functionaries on agricultural marketing extension activities while performing their responsibilities.

#### Methodology

The assessment of involvement of extension functionaries in agricultural marketing extension activities is based on the information shared by 101 extension personnel representing different public agencies like ATMA, KVK, University and agriculture and allied departments. The information was collected online by executing a Google Form. The participation of extension functionaries in the survey carried out in the first quarter of 2024 is skewed slightly towards ATMA and KVK. This tilt is mostly likely due to the sample getting drawn from a group of stakeholders

associated with the implementation of a skill based component by MANAGE called Skill Training of Rural Youth (STRY). The component is implemented in different states through SAMETIs and programs are conducted through different training partners like KVKs, ATMA, Directorate and Universities. A five point Likert-scale was used to capture the response of the extension officers on their association with different kind of extension activities. The responses are captured over five categories of activities namely production, capacity building, institutional building, marketing and investment and other office related work. Simple descriptive statistical techniques like averages and percentages are used to analyse the information collected and draw logical inferences. The aggregate of all the responses under each category of activities has also been worked out to have a clear understanding of the flow of focus across different activities as identified under the paper.

**Table 1:** Profile of the extension functionaries covered under the study

Item	Unit/Category	Status
Age	Years	39.27
Experience	Years	10.65
Organisations	ATMA	57 (56.44)
	KVK	20 (19.80)
	SAMETI	12 (11.88)
	Directorate of Extension (University)	8 (7.92)
	College of Agriculture	2 (1.98)
	Department	2 (1.98)
Level of Operation (level at which officer is serving)	Block	53 (52.48)
	District	27 (26.73)
	State	14 (13.86)
	Region/ Division/ Others	7 (6.93)
Degree of Contact	Direct contact with farmers	81 (80.20)
	Indirect Contact (monitoring and implementation)	13 (12.87)
	Policy formulating	7 (6.93)

### Extension functionaries to farmers ratio

An attempt has also been made to assess the number of farmers served by each extension functionary. The information presented in Table-2, indicates that each extension functionary at an average is serving 1205 farmers. This number is slightly higher to the number worked out at 1162 by DFI Committee based on the information compiled for the year 2012-13. The number clearly indicates a major gap with respect to the number of operational holdings ideally an extension person is expected to serve. The DFI

## Results and Discussion

### Profile of extension functionaries

The information compiled in Table-1 reveals that more than 50 percent of the respondents are from ATMA system. The average age of respondents is about 40 years with average experience of more than 10 years which suggests that the extension functionaries participating in the survey are having a reasonable length of experience in agricultural extension. Majority of the extension functionaries considered in the study are working at Block level (52.48 percent) followed by those working at district level (26.73 percent), state level (13.86 percent) and very limited number of officers working at regional or division level. Majority of the respondents are working in direct contact with farmers (80.20 percent). Though, 12.87 percent of the respondents are not having direct contact with farmers and are involved with program implementation and monitoring. About seven percent of the respondents were observed to be involved in policy formulation.

Committee has suggested that each extension functionary should ideally serve 400 farm families in hilly areas, 750 farm families in irrigated areas and 1000 farm families in rainfed areas. The information clearly indicates that the marginal favourable shift in number as worked out in this paper to the number worked in DFI report based on 2012-13 information, is not at the desired pace and there is lot more required to be done. Involving private players to improve this number may be considered as one of the effective strategies.

**Table 2:** Average number of farmers served by extension agents

Sr No	Category	Number of Respondents	Average Number of Farmers Served
1	Less than 500	38	217
2	500 - 1000	11	745
3	1000 - 1500	8	1258
4	1500 - 2000	4	1873
5	More than 2000	18	3398
	Total	79	1205

### Discipline-wise presence of extension functionaries

The information on disciplines of extension functionaries working for different organisations is presented in Table-3. The table reveals that agricultural engineering, agricultural extension, plant protection, economics and agronomy are leading disciplines in same order with more than two-third (69.31 percent) contribution. The distribution of discipline

clearly indicates an inclination towards crop management and mechanisation related issues. A limited representation of disciplines like animal husbandry and dairy science (5.94%), forestry (4.95%), horticulture (4.95%) and fisheries (3.96%) may be an indication of lack of sufficient focus on allied activities with immense opportunities for taking up as income enhancing enterprises.

**Table 3:** Discipline-wise distribution of extension functionaries

Sr No	Discipline	No.	Percent	Cumulative
1	Agricultural Engineering	18	17.82	17.82
2	Agricultural Extension	15	14.85	32.67
3	Plant protection	15	14.85	47.52
4	Economics	14	13.86	61.39
5	Agronomy	8	7.92	69.31
6	Animal Husbandry & Dairy Science	6	5.94	75.25
7	Forestry	5	4.95	80.20
8	Horticulture	5	4.95	85.15
9	Fishery Science	4	3.96	89.11
10	Agribusiness	3	2.97	92.08
11	Others	8	7.92	100.00
12	Total	101	100.00	100.00

**Others include biotechnology, seed science, soil science, genetics and plant breeding and biotechnology**

**Focus on different extension activities**

The orientation of extension functionaries is captured through their responses to various activities identified under five broad categories of responsibilities of an extension functionary. The information compiled in Table-4 indicates that extension functionaries are involved most often in production activities like field visits, on-field trials, demonstrations, input supply and advisories. Though, the focus on identification of location specific problem and suggesting their solutions is relatively less. They are also involved most often in other office and development work like reporting, participation in meetings, preparation of action plan and publication for office. However, the focus on self-developed captured through personal publication and participation in training programs is again slightly low. In capacity building category also, the involvement of extension personal is most often in training of farmers and

officers, skill development of rural youth, and arranging field visits as part of training programs. The involvement is relatively poor in taking guest lectures and radio talks which may be an indication of being exposed to various tasks simultaneously.

It is important for extension functionaries to focus on different activities identified under institutional building and marketing and investment categories as present time agriculture have scope for business, investment and market integration. However, the information compiled in the table suggests that extension functionaries understand the importance of such activities related to business and market but execution of these activities is relatively low with often to sometimes involvement. Sometimes they focus on involving private organisations, developing network with market players and marketing through farmers group which is important to create an environment providing better market access to farmers.

**Table 4:** Orientation of the extension functionaries

Area	Activities	Response				
		Most Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Production	Field visits	62	25	12	1	1
	On-field trials	43	30	18	3	7
	Demonstrations	47	33	14	2	5
	Inputs production and supply	38	32	21	1	9
	Identification of location specific problem	30	41	22	4	4
Capacity Building	Advisories	48	38	12	1	2
	Farmer training	64	22	12	2	1
	Officers training	26	36	26	7	6
	Skill development of rural youth	37	34	23	4	3
	Guest lectures	23	30	33	10	5
	Radio talk	15	31	34	7	14
Institutional Building	Field visits as part of training programs	44	40	13	2	2
	Organising farmers	28	39	26	4	4
	Linking farmers with bank and other service providers	23	37	31	5	5
	Establishing network with banks	18	33	31	9	10
	Establishing linkage with input suppliers	20	39	29	5	8
	Involving private organisations	20	33	35	9	4
Marketing and Investment	Establishing institutional arrangements for better service delivery	22	42	23	7	7
	Awareness programs on agricultural marketing	28	40	26	5	2
	Orientation on grading, sorting and packaging	20	35	31	8	7
	Awareness on different investment schemes	24	32	27	14	4
	Market information	31	37	26	5	2
	Networking with market players for better market access	22	24	36	12	7
Other office work and personal development	Marketing through farmers group	26	26	33	8	8
	Office work and reporting	74	21	5	1	0
	Participation in meetings	58	24	15	3	1
	Preparation of action plan	63	22	11	2	3
	Official publications	38	32	21	5	5
	Personal publications	22	25	30	11	13
	Participation in training program for personal development	37	38	20	5	1

A total of 30 activities were identified under five different categories. In order to have a clear picture on which activity will fall under what type of response, the activities are segregated based on the maximum number of responses.

Most of the activities as compiled in Table-5 are falling under three categories i.e. most often, often and sometimes suggesting the relevance of these activities for extension personnel.

**Table 5:** Leading activities of the extension functionaries

Area	Most Often	Often	Sometimes
Production	Field visits, on-field trials, demonstrations, inputs production and supply and advisories	Identification of location specific problems and their solutions	--
Capacity Building	Farmer training, skill development of rural youth and field visits as part of training programs	Officers training	Guest lectures and radio talks
Institutional Building	--	Organising farmers, linking farmers with bank and other service providers, establishing network with banks, establishing linkage with input suppliers and establishing institutional arrangements for better service delivery	Involving private organisations
Marketing and Investment	--	Awareness programs on agricultural marketing, orientation on grading, sorting and packaging, awareness on different investment schemes and market information	Networking with market players for better market access and marketing through farmers group
Others	Office work and reporting, participation in meeting, preparation of action plan and official publications	Participation in training program for personal development	Personal publications

The flow of focus on different set of activities of an extension functionary will be clearer from the aggregation of all the responses under each category as presented in Table-6. The table reveals that extension functionaries are focused more on production, capacity building and other office related activities. The focus is slightly less on institutional building and marketing and investment activities which are considered to be vital in present time

commercial agriculture with focus on income enhancement and market. Institutional building is also important to tap international markets and follow a value chain approach with participation of smallholders. It became even more important in an environment where a comprehensive system with participation of banks, insurance and farmers organisations can actually be a game changer.

**Table 6:** Activity orientation of the sample extension functionaries

Category	Most Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Production	268 (44.22)	199 (32.84)	99 (16.34)	12 (1.98)	28 (4.62)
Capacity Building	209 (34.49)	193 (31.85)	141 (23.27)	32 (5.28)	31 (5.12)
Institutional Building	131 (21.62)	223 (36.80)	175 (28.88)	39 (6.44)	38 (6.27)
Marketing & Investment	151 (24.92)	194 (32.01)	179 (29.54)	52 (8.58)	30 (4.95)
Others	292 (48.18)	162 (26.73)	102 (16.83)	27 (4.46)	23 (3.80)

## Conclusion

India is having a comprehensive public extension system which is still oriented towards production-led-extension. The extension functionaries are still focussed relatively more on activities related to production and capacity building. The involvement of extension agents in various activities related to market, investment and institutional building is relatively low. The ratio of extension workers to farmers at 1:1205 makes it difficult to focus on marketing activities relevant in present time agriculture to help farmers get integrated with emerging value chains and realise best possible price for their produce. Participation of private players and involving farmers and farmers group as extension agents may help in reaching out to maximum number of farmers effectively. There is need to improve focus and availability of experts on dairy science, forestry, horticulture and fisheries to enable farmers avail business and income enhancing opportunities. The time has come to bring focus on various market extension activities like establishing linkages with market players, direct market,

market information and demand, post-harvest operations like grading, sorting, value addition and packaging to ensure gradual shift from production-led-extension to market-led-extension for realising the true potential of agriculture. This may need agricultural extension strategy going beyond production and public extension.

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