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Strengthening Grass Root Level Extension Management System

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The recent overriding concern in extension has been how to establish an efficient agricultural extension system that is capable of balancing the needs of the farming community with the available personnel and other resources. Against this background, group extension approaches are being considered as one of the potential solutions. The vital aspect of the transfer of improved farm – related technologies to the rural people has largely been neglected. With the fast development of new agricultural technologies, it is being increasingly felt that the technical knowledge of the farmers acquired over the generation is not being updated. They are in urgent need of understanding and acquiring new knowledge and skills so that they could contribute more effectively to the production process. It would also help them to the drudgery involved in their day to day work (FAO, Report, 2000).

Today, Indian Agriculture has become vibrant, buoyant and resilient as a result of the green revolution in food crops production, the white revolution in milk, and milk products, the blue revolution in fish and marine production and the yellow revolution in oilseeds crop production. The commodity based technology missions also help to accelerate the process of growth in the production of commodities like oilseeds, pulses etc. (Singh, 2004).

The Department of Agriculture, West Bengal decided in 1977 to implement the proposed World Bank Scheme of "Re-organization of Extension" and "Research Service in West Bengal". Under this scheme the Agricultural Extension Officers at the block level, upgraded and re-designated step by step as Agricultural Development Officer (ADO), were separated from the set up of the Block Development Officer. He was made accountable for his due discharge of duties, primarily to the Sub-divisional Agricultural Officer (SAO) and

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then to the other officers in the hierarchy. The Village Level Workers/Union Agricultural Assistance/Agricultural Demonstrators were to be designated uniformly as "Krishi Prajukti Sahayak" (KPS). In each block, a team of KPS would work under the institution of the respective ADO with about 800-1200 farm families being assigned to each.

The national agricultural extension system evolved with the establishment of the Department of Agriculture in the imperial and provincial Governments. Efforts to strengthen this department continue up to the time of independence. The agricultural extension was one of the activities of the department and no special attention was paid to accelerate the transfer of technology efforts. However, some isolated attempts were made to start special rural development programs, including the improvement of agriculture (Prasad, 1989). Soon it was realized that sporadic and ADHOC programs might not be effective and that there was a need for sustained rural (including agriculture) development programs. A nationwide, multipurpose extension network backed with professionals become indispensable, consequently, 55 community development projects were started in 1952. Each project covered 300 villages with a village level worker for a group of 10 villages. The program was based on the philosophy of integrated rural developments. The project was headed by a project officer, and a nos. of subject matter extension officers in the disciplines of agriculture, animal husbandry, cooperation, industries, rural engineering, social education, etc. Each project had about 60-multi purpose Village Level Workers (VLWs). They were government appointed extension functionaries at the lowest level, who were nearest to the people. The multipurpose village Level Workers were common to the departments engaged in rural development work.

A year later, on 2nd October 1953, the National Extension Service (NES) Programmes were launched with the idea of having wider coverage at less cost and more people's participation. The NES block had about 100 villages and about 65 thousand population. The NES block was headed by a Block Development Officer (BDO) and had a number of Extension Officers (EOs). For the NES Blocks funds were drastically reduced and the numbers of multipurpose village Level Workers were brought down to 10. NES was thought of as the agency and Community Development as the method to bring about the Socio-economic transformation of the rural people. The program aimed to accelerate the pace of rural development, including increased employment and production by the applications of

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scientific methods in agriculture. The program greatly emphasized the principle of development through self-help and people's participation. The central government largely bore the cost of the program.

The central government also launched several schemes to achieve self sufficiency in food production. The important programs were – Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP) in 1960, and the Intensive Agricultural Areas Programmes (IAAP) in 1964. In 1966, High yielding varieties programs (HYVP) were taken up in respect of some major crops; a new multi cropping program was taken up in 1967-68. These programs concentrated the transfer of "package of practices" and supply of critical inputs to farmers. In other words, the extension strategy combined technical information with the supply of inputs.

By the middle of 1970s it was felt that extension services in the developing countries were suffering from a no. of weaknesses (Benor& Baxter, 1984), including the dissipation of extension workers energies on low priority tasks; the lack of a single, clear line of command and low level of agricultural knowledge and expertise among field level functionaries. As a means of reforming and strengthening the extension services, a reorganized system of agricultural extension, known as the Training and Visit (T & V) system was introduce in India in 1974. It was presumed that transfer of technology through the contact farmers shall benefit all farmers. It became the dominant method of restructuring the extension services. This system tries to achieve a changer in production technologies used by the majority of farmers through assistance from well trained extension agents who have a close link with agricultural research and are supported by supply, service and marketing facilities.

In West Bengal from the year 1980, the agricultural development unit has been delinked from the Block Development Organizational and agriculture itself has been developed as a single line administration. As per the Department of Agriculture the existing fourteen posts at the rank of a village extension worker as conceived by Mr. Danniel Benor were redesignated as Krishi Prajukti Sahayak; Popularly known as KPS the post was; Fieldsman, Agricultural overseer, village level worker (Jute). Jute field Assistant, Agricultural Demonstrator, Agricultural Inspector. Field Assistant, Fertilizer Demonstrator, Fieldsman (cotton), Fieldsman (oilseed) Field Inspector, Field Agricultural Inspector and Union Agricultural Assistant. This newly developed KPS cadre has been assigned duties

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mostly under training and visit system under the Direct Supervision of the Agricultural Development Officers (ADOs) of the Block.

The Krishi Prajukti Sahayak is the only extension agent who teaches production recommendations to farmers. He is just as specialized and professional as other extension workers. The responsibility of all other extension staff is ultimately to make the KPS more effective in his work. One of the main tasks of Krishi Prajukti Sahayak is teaching farmers regarding scientific practices and motivating the farmers regarding the acceptance of modern practices is not an easy task. Hence, the KPS must receive intense support and guidance, and must not be burdened with non-extension function. Moreover, the nature of his work and his achievement must be recognized personally and in terms of opportunities for professional growth and technical upgrading. The main responsibility of the KPS is to visit regularly each of the 8 farmers groups of his area of jurisdiction and to teach and try to convince farmers to adopt recommended production practices. He must also advise farmers on the price and availability of necessary inputs and market conditions. He should report farmer response on recommendations, production problems, input demand and availability, and market conditions to his supervisor (the Agricultural Development Officer) and in training. Days without a regularly scheduled visit or training are used for make up visits, farm trails, and field days. In addition to making field visits for at least 8 days, each fortnight the KPS must attend a fortnightly training session given by Subject Matter Specialists (SMSs) and a review meeting with his Agricultural Development Officer (ADO).

The main activity of the KPS is visiting farmers and their fields. It is very important that the KPSs circle should be properly delineated. Each KPS has a fixed no. of farm families (800 - 1000) for whom he is responsible to pass on production recommendations and advice on their agricultural activities and field problems. All the farmers are divided into 8 equal size groups. In each group, about 10 contact farmers are selected usually 80 – 120 farmers are a suitable group size.

Although he will primarily through a small number of contact farmers in each group, the Krishi PrajuktiSahayak should also on each visit deliberately meet with and promote recommendations among other farmers. All farmers must know the day of the fortnight while the KPS is scheduled to visit their group. Where group formation or selection of contact

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farmers needs adjustment, the Krishi Prajukti Sahayak should propose an alternative group organization or individuals to his ADO for guidance and consideration.

The KPS making the four fixed visits weekly during which he discusses recommendations and field problems, the KPS has a number of other responsibilities in the field. These are generally undertaken on the extra visit day included in his weekly schedule unless this is being used for a makeup visit to a group that was missed during the week. These additional tasks include: conducting the farm trials (field experiments) on farmers fields that each KPS undertakes under the guidance of his ADO and sub divisional SMSs (which may be dealt with on a scheduled visit to a farmers group so long as this work does not interfere with his regular extension activities); holding field days to show the farmers of one or more groups an outstanding area under a recommended practice; or even having extra farmers meeting that might, for instance, focus on a new variety, crop or cropping system, or perhaps pest control measures that extension intends to promote. These other field activities must be just as closely supported and guided by the ADO and other officers as the KPSs regular visit and contacts with farmers.

Besides these, the main responsibility of the KPS is to receive training. The training most frequently and regularly held for the KPS is the fortnightly training sessions. It is here that the KPS together with his ADO learns the recommendation and their impact points for the coming fortnight. The function of fortnightly training, however, is not merely to teach KPSs and ADOs production recommendations. There are also important venues for feedback from the field to other extension staff and research and input organizations. The KPS must report thoroughly on the field situation of his circle, unseasonable problems faced by farmers, and farmers reactions to the recommendations of the previous fortnight, he and the ADO must also report on local market conditions and the demand for and availability of recommended inputs and other agricultural support services in his circle. This information is vital to the development of useful recommendations and their subsequent adoption by farmers. The KPS should make a note of these points in his diary. So that he can make sure they are pursued with the authorities concerned.

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Essential duties of KPS assigned by the concerned authorities:

1) Teach relevant technical messages and skills to the farmers in his circle and motivate them to adopt recommended practices to improve their agricultural productivity and income.
2) Divide the farmers in his circle into and discrete, approximately equal sized groups. Visit each group for one full day each fortnight, each group being visited every fortnight on the same day.
3) Select about ten farmers in each group to be contact farmers. Concentrate on contact farmers during visits but also reach as many other farmers as time allows.
4) Spend most of the time of a field visit in farmers fields on a visit, (a) observe the condition of the crop and field operations and problems, and suggest appropriate action (b) note to what extent recommendations have been adopted and the reasons why this has not been done more widely, (c) teach and demonstrate to farmers in the field recommendations learned in the previous fortnightly training session and (d) listen to farmers and encourage them to discuss their problems and difficulties.
5) Participate actively in fortnightly training sessions on one day in each fortnight. Learn the recommendations and impact points and, under the guidance of the SMSs and training officer, work out how to teach and convince farmers to adopt them, check that recommended practices and relevant and timely for the farmers in his circle, and that all major crops of the circle are covered by some recommendations.
6) Carry out a small number of four trials each season under the guidance of SMSs. Encourage farmers to participate in and observe farm trails.
7) Organize each season field day for each farmers group to show the results of recommended practices to as many farmers as possible. Encourage farmers to participate in these and other field days.
8) Maintain a daily diary record in it, among other things, field observations on crop and field conditions and farmer reaction to and adoption or recommended practices, along with the remedial measures recommended.

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9) Be familiar with the demand and availability of inputs (e.g.) seed, fertilizer, plant protection chemicals, power, fuel, irrigation water, credit, etc. and also with market conditions, and advise farmers accordingly. Report to the ADO any unusual occurrences in the input supply/demand situation and serious pest and disease problems and natural calamities.

The study had been conducted, of the grass root level extension worker of our state namely KPS who is known as VLW in other states. For characterizing the efficiency and training needs of the grass root levels worker, given all the above discussion the researcher have been delineated the following specific objective to fulfill of the study

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