

Key Information Sources and their Utility for Upliftment of Members of Tribal Farmer Producer Groups

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ABSTRACT

Information is the crucial component in every walk of life. Information channels for and between the farmers are vital for increasing the agricultural yields. The present study in Seethampeta block of Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh was focused on identifying the utility of different sources of information. A sample of 145 respondents was selected through multi-stage proportionate sampling method. The data were collected with the help of well-structured interview schedule through personal interview method. The findings of the study elicited that progressive farmers served as regular source of information for majority (70.34 %) of the tribal FPG members and among the occasional source of information Subject Matter Specialists from KVK were preferred by exactly four-fifths (80.00 %) of the members of tribal FPGs. Radio was never preferred as information source by 77.24 per cent of respondents. Information utility and information score were high for progressive farmers with values of 0.84 and 2.25 respectively. The study concludes by saying that whatever information is available to the members of tribal FPGs, it should be communicated at right time in right form and right channel which can improve the utility of information and thus the quality of work.

Key words: Communication, Information score, Information utility, Information sources, Tribal farmers.

Introduction

Agriculture in India is not only a vocation or a business activity for the people; it is a legacy, a way of life that has formed their thoughts, worldview, and culture for generations. Agriculture is critical to India's economy. 54.60 per cent of total workforce in India is engaged in agricultural and allied sector activities (Census, 2011) and contributes 17.80 per cent of the country's Gross Value Added (GVA) for the year 2019-20 (DAC and FW, 2020-2021). Small and marginal farmers constitute a substantial population in the country, but they face numerous obstacles, including small and fragmented land

holdings, inadequate capital, weak bargaining power, a lack of economies of scale, and a barriers to participation in the price discovery mechanism. Information is critical to personal and society growth.

Information is a powerful tool for the growth of mankind and community (Apatha and Ogunrewo, 2010). Specifically, extension information is relevant to agricultural practices and development. It is important to understand not only how favourably producers view different information sources, but also the factors or characteristics that influence their attitudes toward various information sources. Sources of extension information available to

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farmers are diverse and numerous. Extension information, in particular, is pertinent to farming methods and development. It is critical to comprehend not just how positively producers see various information sources, but also the elements or traits that influence their views toward various information sources. Farmers have access to a wide range of extension information sources.

Knowledge and information are essential building blocks for greater crop yields. Recognizing farmers' requirements and determining the best way to offer them with the content they seek are prerequisites for effective agricultural information delivery. Access to the correct information at the right time, in the right format, and from the right source can turn the tide in favour of the farmer's success or failure. Extension information is generally obtained from extension workers, the mass media (particularly radio and television), printed publications (e.g., newspapers, bulletins, magazines, newsletters, journals, flyers, handbills), and other human groups (i.e., fellow farmers, village heads and traders). Habtemariam *et al.* (2015) stated that rural farmers communicate on their expertise to their neighbours, friends, relatives, and children mostly through informal talk, sharing of experiences, and encouraging other farmers to visit their fields.

Farmers have access to a variety of agricultural information sources. As a result, selecting a suitable medium for agricultural information sharing is critical. This is due to the fact that the desire to use or not use a specific information channel is influenced by the channel's orientation and information demand characteristics. Technology is passed down from one person to the next, and therefore its use expands throughout the community. Radio, television, and newspapers, for instance, have the ability to provide broader extension coverage to outlying farming areas (Muhammad *et al.*, 2004; Farooq *et al.*, 2007) and are particularly important in bringing new ideas and practises to the attention of communities, as well as notifying them to unanticipated emergencies at a quicker pace than personal interactions. Informal channels of farmer-to-farmer knowledge and information exchange are often seen as reliable sources of information amongst farmers (Leeuwis, 2004; Dutta, 2009).

Methodology

Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh is with highest per cent (96.58 %) of rural population to scheduled tribe population and was purposively selected for the study. Three villages of Kusumi, Kesarajodu and Somagandi from Seethampeta block with highest number of FPGs i.e., 243 in 61 villages with 2875 FPG members were selected. The sample size of 145 was taken by using multistage proportionate random sampling method. The ex post facto research design was adopted for the study. Preliminary data collection was done with the help of well-structured interview schedule through personal interview method. Multiple responses were collected. Information utility was measured as degree of usefulness of each source of information as perceived by the respondents by the product of frequency of contact and perceived usefulness. Frequency of contact was measured on a three point continuum of regularly, occasionally and never. The respondents were asked to rate each information source from five levels of usefulness. The product of frequency of contact and information utility gives information score. The present study highlights the information utility and information scores obtained by different sources of information.

Results and Discussion

Tribal farmers require knowledge in order to make judgments about farming operations that will increase their revenue and consequently their standard of living. As a result, farmers rely on a variety of sources to get the necessary information and keep updated on emerging technologies. As a result, in order to comprehend the utility of various sources of information in meeting the information needs of farmers, information on the frequency of utilisation and perceived degree of usefulness of various information sources was gathered and used to calculate the information score of various sources of information. The results of frequency of utilization of different sources of information has been shown in Table 1.

The results from Table 1 showed that nearly three-fourths (70.34 %) of the respondents regularly depend on progressive farmers for information followed by 28.28 per cent of respondents depending occasionally and a very small per cent

Table 1. Distribution of members of tribal FPGs based on frequency of utilization of different sources of information (n=145)

S. No.	Sources of Information	Regularly		Occasionally		Never	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1.	Progressive farmers	102	70.34	41	28.28	2	1.38
2.	Fellow farmers	91	62.76	53	36.55	1	0.69
3.	Agricultural scientists	42	28.97	95	65.52	8	5.52
4.	Extension officers from State Department of Agriculture	71	48.97	41	28.28	33	22.76
5.	Subject Matter Specialists from KVK	1	0.69	116	80.00	28	19.31
6.	Television	93	64.14	45	31.03	7	4.83
7.	Radio	2	1.38	31	21.38	112	77.24
8.	Newspaper	37	25.52	100	68.97	8	5.52
9.	Magazines	2	1.38	60	41.38	83	57.24
10.	Smartphone	95	65.52	46	31.72	4	2.76

*Multiple responses obtained

(1.38 %) never depended on progressive farmers. More than three-fifths (62.76%) of the members of tribal FPGs depended regularly on fellow farmers for information followed by 36.55 and 0.69 per cent of respondents who had obtained information occasionally and never from fellow farmers. Agricultural scientists served as occasional information source for nearly two-thirds (65.52%) of respondents followed by regular source for 28.97 per cent and never served as information source for a little number (5.52%) of respondents.

Extension officers from State Department of Agriculture served as regular source of information to nearly half (48.97%) of the respondents followed by occasional (28.28%) and never (22.76%). Exactly four-fifths (80.00%) of the respondents had Subject Matter Specialists from KVK as their occasional source of information followed by 28.97 per cent of never and only 0.69 per cent as regular information source. Television served as regular source of information for nearly two-thirds (64.14 %) of the respondents which was followed by 31.03 per cent as occasional source and 4.83 per cent respondents never felt television as information source.

A little more than three-fourths (77.24 %) of respondents had never felt radio as source of information followed by 21.38 per cent as occasional source and 1.38 per cent as regular information source. More than two-thirds (68.97 %) of the respondents had newspaper as occasional source of information and 25.52 per cent as regular source and 5.52 per cent of never. Nearly three-fifths (57.24 %) of respondents never found magazine as an information source followed by 41.38 per cent as

occasional source and only 1.38 per cent as regular source. Smartphones served as regular information source for nearly two-thirds (65.52%) of the respondents followed by 31.72 and 2.76 per cent as occasional information source and never respectively.

The possible reason for progressive farmers being regular source of information for majority of the members of tribal FPGs might be due to familiarity and ease of contact which promotes better communication and efficient use of information. Smartphones and television reached to a good extent in serving as source of information for a greater number of tribal FPG members as they provide lively and up to date information sometimes may be in an interesting manner.

Subject Matter Specialists served as occasional information sources for majority of the tribal FPG members during the meetings and training programmes. Radio hardly served as information source and the reason may be that people lose interest in listening to long stories without visuals. Due to less literacy and awareness about magazines, they might not have served as a good source of information.

It could be inferred from the Table 2 that progressive farmers had the highest information utility value of 0.84 followed by agricultural scientists and extension officers from State Department of Agriculture with information utility values of 0.79 and 0.75 respectively. The significant reason progressive farmers were assigned a high information utility value might be because they were the real users of scientific knowledge, and the

Table 2. Distribution of members of tribal FPGs based on the information utility of different sources of information.

S. No.	Sources of Information	IU**	IS**
1.	Progressive farmers	0.84	2.25
2.	Fellow farmers	0.64	1.67
3.	Agricultural scientists	0.79	1.77
4.	Extension officers from State Department of Agriculture	0.75	1.70
5.	Subject Matter Specialists from KVK	0.58	1.06
6.	Television	0.68	1.74
7.	Radio	0.16	0.22
8.	Newspaper	0.32	0.70
9.	Magazines	0.20	0.35
10.	Smartphone	0.74	1.91

**IU=Information Utility; IS= Information Score *Multiple responses obtained

impact of utilising such information on progressive farmers could be immediately observed by other farmers. This helps the fellow farmers in taking rational decisions based on the results obtained from the progressive farmers. Sharma *et al.*, (2012) in his findings stated that farmers were found to be dependent on their vast social network and took advices from fellow farmers, agricultural scientists, pesticides dealers, commission agents and friends.

The results of information score revealed that progressive farmers had the highest score of 2.25 followed by smartphone (1.91) and agricultural scientists (1.77). The high level of usefulness of information acquired from progressive farmers might be due to frequent contact with fellow farmers and smartphones penetration of internet to rural areas and ease of access to information. The findings gain support from Das *et al.* (2012) and Dharanipriya (2019).

Conclusion

Information contributes a key role in enhancing agricultural production and productivity in the study area. Identifying sources of information and information utility might help in planning strategies to adopt for information dissemination and improvement of agriculture productivity in tribal areas by applying relevant information. A variety of sources of information were available to the members of tribal FPGs in the study area. Different sources of information identified were progressive farmers, fellow farmers, agricultural scientists,

television, radio, extension officers from state department of agriculture, newspapers, Subject Matter Specialists from KVK, magazines and smartphones. Most of the information was communicated through progressive farmers. Agricultural scientists and smartphones were found to be among the important sources of information with higher information utility and information scores. Based on the conclusions drawn, the study recommends that government and nongovernmental institutions have to work to effectively and efficiently to enhance rural electrification. Moreover, repackaging of agricultural information into simple and understandable language and promoting modern ICTs makes a difference in overcoming barriers that smallholder farmers are facing in seeking relevant agricultural information.

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