SUSTAINABLE INFORMATION - KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM: SINE QUA NON FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Sujeet K. Jha[1], Sabyasachi Das[2], S.K. Jha[3] & S.R.K. Singh[4]

Information–dissemination apropos new and frontier technologies among the farmers invariably forms the back-bone upon which the traditional knowledge being possessed by the peasants is based. Any information, at the stage of diffusion, is perceived as relatively new by the intended clientele, in terms of its contextual meaning...albeit, once that piece of information is possessed, interpreted in the intended sense, and stored in the user's memory in a proper way, then that process results in "knowledge-possession". Here, the new information could be presented in various forms, viz., oral, written, demonstration, pictorial, sign-language, motor and skill-oriented learning, etc.. And, once the same is being utilized from generation-to-generation, after being passed on by the elders/ancestors to the youngers, this "possessed-knowledge" takes the form of "traditional knowledge". Alternately, it may be argued that the same piece of information which happens to be 'new' at the time of dissemination will be contributing, in the due course of time, towards formation of the "Traditional Knowledge" (TK) or "Indigenous Technical Knowledge/ know-how" (ITK), on the part of clientele.

In fact, the situation seems to be full of paradoxes, when people belonging to one school of thought, invariably blame the farmers for not adopting the latest recommended agricultural practices/innovations while citing their (farmers') "traditional knowledge" as the major hindrance in the process of "diffusion of innovations"... whereas, on the other hand, the people belonging to another school of thought are full of praise(s) for farmers' "traditional knowledge"; and not only that, they are also trying their best for preserving it!

Sustainable Information-Knowledge System–All these aforesaid arguments point towards a pertinent fact that there is nothing like a modern knowledge or a traditional knowledge per se... since, the only difference between these two lies in 'time-factor', that is, the span of time consumed/taken to follow such knowledge! In another words, if the farmers happen to follow certain practices recommended by experts (albeit at an earlier period of time) for too long, and they stick to it (due to some perceived benefits) for generations, then that sort of knowledge/ wisdom, on the part of farmers, would be deemed to be 'traditional'!! Moreover, this issue of "traditional knowledge" crop up in the context of agricultural development, wherein the experts as well as the planners/policy makers generally blame the traditional/ conservative attitude of the farmers for poor adoption or non-adoption of recommended innovations among them (farmers). Therefore, keeping all this in view, it is suggested by the authors of this paper that there should be a "Sustainable Information-Knowledge System" (SIKS) meant for the farmers, for the overall purpose of agricultural and rural development, wherein following important points have to be taken care of–

(1) Empowering the farmers through knowledge-information, which would enhance

1. Scientist (Sr. Scale), 2. Ph.D. scholar, Division of Dairy Extension, NDRI, Karnal-132 001 (Haryana).
3. Scientist (Sr. Scale), Agril. Extension, Regional Station of CSSRI, Canning Town-743329 (West Bengal)
4. Scientist, (Agril. Extension), VPKAS, Almora, (Uttaranchal)

their capability of decision-making-process apropos adoption of certain relevant/ innovative practices as per the objectives/goals set by themselves.

(2) Providing information to the rural people regarding several relevant things, viz., Government programme and schemes, available opportunities of employment/job, entrepreneurship-skills, weather-forecasts, watershed management techniques, soil and water conservation techniques, land-use pattern, package of practices for the concerned enterprise (e.g. crop-cultivation, dairying, animal husbandry, poultry, piggery, goat-keeping, fisheries, bee-keeping, etc.,), packaging and preservation techniques, market-opportunities, buying and selling prices of the commodities being used by the rural-folk, details of the procedures involved in export and/or import of the agricultural produces, etc,.

(3) Specific information meant for commercial, Green Revolution(GR), and Complex, Diversified and Risk-prone (CDR) farmers should be prepared and disseminated, separately, among the intended group of clientele.

(4) As far as possible, efforts should be made to have a 'family-oriented' information package...instead of keeping it 'women-oriented' or 'youth-oriented', as this will eliminate any chance of 'conflict' arising among members of the same family.

(5) Timely and seasonal information regarding various agricultural and allied practices/operations could be made available to the rural people; and this may be done with the help of regional newspapers, radio, and television...like the way it is being done in the cases of providing information regarding malaria, dengue-fever, TB, Pulse Polio, etc.. And, such type of messages must be repeated time and again.

(6) Availability of one "Village Information Centre" (VIC) in each village has to be ensured, wherein, apart from the Consultancy-services to be provided to the clientele, their (clientele's) feed-back would also be taken care of.

(7) In order to enlighten and educate the clientele on various aspects of agricultural and/ or allied enterprise(s), the help of audio and/or video cassette-recordings may be taken (preferably among large gathering of villagers). And, this session may be followed, immediately, by a 'question-answer cum discussion' session.

(8) Taking the help of some famous personalities (like, film actors or actresses, cricketers, politicians, etc.) in the advertisements meant for agricultural and rural development; and such advertisements have to be issued in the public interest, in different media (viz., radio, television, newspaper, etc.), from time-to-time. This will, definitely, have a greater impact on the psyche of the rural population.

(9) Compilation and documentation of available 'traditional knowledge (TK)' or 'indigenous technical knowledge/know-how (ITK)' must be done properly, so that such "intellectual property" is neither eroded nor destroyed.

(10) Some sort of 'recognition' must be provided to the farmers/villagers possessing TK or ITK, as this will go a long way in building rapport with the local inhabitants. Moreover, protection is important to the owners of TK, as it can be considered as a valuable tradable commodity which will bring economic benefit to them1.

(11) The traditional knowledge being possessed by the farmers is born of long practice spread over generations; and hence, the knowledge, abilities, and general level of education of the target-groups belonging to different cultures should never be ignored or underestimated.

(12) Discard the general notion/assumption, ill-conceived by the 'experts', that the farmers, in general, would react to any given information (including statements and illustrations) in the same way as the source(s) of such messages.

(13) The 'frame of reference' as applied by the farmers usually happens to be their own

'practical experience' and therefore, any new information provided to them has to be measured by this... and, not by the 'frame of reference' suggested by the experts.

(14) The knowledge-base (as possessed by the farmers), including the 'traditional knowledge', is usually organized along different lines. For example, their concepts of production-measures and marketing-methods are organized as per their own 'thumb-rules' unlike the scientific/recommended ways of doing the same... yet, such rules seem to be 'time-tested' for them, as the farmers are applying such yardsticks, efficiently.

(15) Providing the detailed information (along with the respective addresses and telephone numbers) to the clientele about different Government agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Voluntary Organisations, extension personnel, Subject Matter Specialists, contact persons, etc. working in the locality, so that the local people can have easy access to them, in case of any emergency.

CONCLUSION

Of late, "Information-Knowledge Revolution" is taking place, at a rapid speed, in our country through an effective and meaningful use of latest communication technologies... but unfortunately, the rural population of our country is still unable to take the benefits in toto, as the contents of the messages delivered to them rarely take care of their varied geographical, cultural, socio-economic and linguistic needs! And, remember, this is the state of affairs even when there is a thirst among rural people for having 'up-to-date' information and knowledge on various aspects of their day-to-day life!! One of the possible reasons behind this 'poor' level of 'knowledge empowerment' amongst our rural folks could be: the system of providing "information-knowledge" to the rural people is not sustainable in nature...that means, the 'Information-Knowledge' being supplied to them is not 'demand-driven' in nature!!! Moreover, the local conditions and ground realities are not being taken care of while passing on the 'Information and knowledge' to the intended clientele. Again, usually, the system of 'follow-up' action(s) on the part of suppliers of such 'Information-Knowledge' is almost absent/nil or negligible in several instances... which, naturally, makes it very difficult to assess the modus operandi being used by the clientele while using those supplied 'Information-Knowledge'. At the same time, in a country like India, where bulk of the rural population have no access to electricity, it needs to be ensured that the rural people have easy access to the modern means of information and communication gadgets through some alternate sources of energy... so that the power-failures or erratic supply of electricity should not affect the 'Information-Knowledge System', adversely. In a nutshell, for making the 'information-knowledge system' sustainable in nature, we must focus our attention on the aforesaid statements/ deliberations, and make it 'user-friendly' in the sense that it takes care of : clientele's profile and their needs, local conditions and ground realities, ensuring the accessibility and availability of all means of modern communication to the maximum, arrangement of alternate sources of energy (in case of power scarcity), and regular 'follow-up' actions for ascertaining clientele's feed-back apropos the strengths and weaknesses of this system. And, only then, a day will come, when all such endeavours would result in a "Sustainable Information - Knowledge System" (SIKS)... albeit... for that to happen, even a subtle amalgam of IT- (Information Technology) and ITK (Indigenous Technical Knowledge/Know-how) is not uncalled for!

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