

RESEARCH NOTE

Farmer To Farmer Extension through Farmer Friend

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ABSTRACT

The present study mainly focused on Farmer Friend (FF) under ATMA scheme who served as a vital link between extension system and farmers at village level (one for every two villages). FF helped in activating much needed village-based, bottom-up planning process and served as vital link, between extension system and farmers at village level. Farmer Friend had up graded skills and was available in the village to advice on agriculture and allied activities. The FF was engaged by Block Technology Team (BTT) on a resolution of Gram Panchayat (GP). The study was carried out in Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu during 2014. Presently twelve blocks and 295 revenue villages are present in Coimbatore District. Totally 144 Farmer Friends were available in 12 blocks. Three blocks were randomly selected and all the Farmer Friend available in twelve blocks was considered as sample for the study. The main objective is to study the level of participation of farmer friend under ATMA scheme. The study was conducted using a well-structured and pretested interview schedule. Most of the respondents had middle and secondary level of education. A majority of them had agriculture as their main occupation and medium level of farming experience. Most of the respondents had medium level of participation in extension activities under ATMA. Majority of the farmer friend perceived lack of coordination and poor response from their village farmers to conduct ATMA related extension activities.

Key words: Farmer friend; Farmer to farmer Knowledge; ATMA; Participation;

ATMA is a registered society of key stakeholders (farmers, line/development departments, non government organizations, input dealers, mass media, agri-business companies, farmer's organizations, etc.) involved in agriculture activities for sustainable agricultural development in the district. ATMA is a more comprehensive farmer centric bottom-up approach extension program which is in operation in all the districts of the country. The present study mainly focused on farmer friend under ATMA scheme. Extension Support at the village level would be provided to the farmers through a Farmer Friend (FF) for every 500 farmers or one FF in every village, whichever is higher. This would be very useful in extending the reach of the agriculture extension system up to the farmer level. At present the ratio of the farmers to the extension worker is 1500:1 which is a not good trend at present status of Indian agriculture. (*Planning Commission, GOI; 2011*). Although the Extension officers disseminate the information to the farming community but it is not reaching all the farming community due to more

responsibility assigned with the extension functionaries. Adhiguru *et al.* (2009) reported that only 40% of the Indian farmers access information about modern technology through public extension system. Remaining percentage of farmers depends fellow farmers, progressive farmers input dealers than public extension system. A key source of information for farmers is other farmers, because it is readily available and its utilisation does not impose high transaction costs. This is confirmed by survey data showing that farmers cite other farmers as their main source of information regarding agricultural practices. (*Feder and Slade, 1986*). Recently, farmer-led extension approaches have come to be considered as appropriate for farmers' need. These approaches increase farmer's basic knowledge and ability to make their own choices and decision on particular technologies. Farmers assume a central role and become key players in technology identification, generation, adaptation and dissemination *Kokate et.al. (2009)*. *Feder and Slade (1986)* reported that while farmers in India without access to formal extension service use

farmer-to-farmer communication, most farmers also preferred fellow farmers as their major source of information were the Training and Visit extension system exists. A strong, vibrant and responsive extension system which can play a pivotal role in enabling the district to achieve the Plan objective of faster, sustainable and more inclusive agricultural growth is the need of the hour. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. To study the profile characteristics of farmer friend
- ii. To assess the level of participation of farmer friend under ATMA activities
- iii. To find out the constraints faced by farmer friend in enacting his duties

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu. Coimbatore district constitutes 295 revenue villages and 12 blocks. Totally 144 farmer friend were available in all the 295 villages. Three blocks were randomly selected for the study. The selected blocks and the number of FF existing in each block are as follows; Thondamuthur (12), Madukkarai (10), and Periyanyakan Palayam (9).

Ex-Post facto research design was used for this study. Totally 12 independent variables and one dependent variable were considered for this study. The study was conducted using well-structured & pretested interview schedule. Data analysis was done using appropriate statistical tests i.e. frequency analysis, percentage analysis, mean and standard deviation. Ranks were assigned based on the frequency and categorisations of the respondents were done based on mean and standard deviation values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile characteristics of respondents:

Age: The age of the respondents was categorized into three groups in view of their maturity, viz. young (below thirty five years), middle (36-50 years) and old (above 50 years) as per NAEP categorization. The distribution of respondents according to their categories revealed that majority of the respondents belonged to middle age category (45.16%), followed by old (38.70%) and young (16.10%) categories (Table 1).

Sex: Among the 31 respondents, two were women. According to ATMA revised guidelines women also have chance to work as farmer friend. However the

Table 1. Distribution of respondents based on their profile characteristics (N=31)

Characteristics & categories	No.	%
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	29	93.58
Female	2	6.42
<i>Age</i>		
Young (< 35 years)	5	16.1
Middle (36-50 years)	14	45.16
Old (> 50 years)	12	38.7
<i>Educational status</i>		
Primary education	-	-
Secondary education	12	38.70
Higher secondary education	13	41.90
Graduate	4	12.90
Post graduate	2	6.50
<i>Occupational status</i>		
Agri + Allied	5	16.10
Agriculture	21	67.74
Agri+Business	3	9.66
Agri+Service	2	6.50
<i>Farming experience</i>		
Low (<10 years)	4	12.90
Medium (10-20 Years)	14	45.20
High (>20 years)	13	41.90
<i>Farm size</i>		
> 2.5 acres (Marginal farmer)	4	12.90
2.50-5.00 acres (Small farmer)	9	29.00
5-10 acres (Medium farmer)	12	38.70
>10 acres (Big farmer)	6	19.40
<i>Annual income</i>		
<50,000	8	25.80
50,000-1,00,000	4	12.90
1,00,000-2,00,000	11	35.50
>2,00,000	8	25.80
<i>Social participation</i>		
No membership	9	29.00
One	19	61.3
Two	3	9.7
<i>Extension agency contact</i>		
Low	1	3.22
Medium	4	12.90
High	26	83.87

proportion of women as Farmer Friend was found to be negligible (6%).

Educational status: It is evident from the Table 1 that majority of the respondents were studied up to higher secondary (41.90%) and secondary school (38.70%)

level of education followed by graduates (12.90%) and post graduates (6.50%).

Occupational status: From the above Table 1, it could be inferred that nearly two-third of the respondents (67.74%) had agriculture as their major occupation followed by agriculture + allied activities (16.10%). A meagre proportion of the respondents worked in agriculture + service sector (6.50%) and agriculture + business (9.66%).

Farming experience: The results revealed that majority of the respondents had medium (45.20%) and high (41.90%) level of farming experience. Nearly one-tenth of the respondents (12.90%) had low level of farming experience. It infers that those who are having higher level of farming experience are interested in working as a Farmer Friend under ATMA.

Farm size: It is inferred that a majority of the respondents belonged to medium (38.70%) and small (29.00%) sized land holdings (Table 1). Big farmers occupied 19.40 per cent of the total. Only a meagre 12.90 per cent constituted marginal farmers category.

Annual income: It could be seen from the Table 1, that a majority of the respondents (35.50%) earned Rupees one to two lakhs as annual income followed by less than Rupees fifty thousand and more than two lakhs (25.80%) and Rupees fifty thousand to one lakh (12.90%). These results indicated that medium level of farm income groups have been highly involved in ATMA activities, due to their higher level of awareness and interest to know about government programmes and schemes as compared to that of other farm groups.

Social participation: The data collected regarding the social participation of the farmer friend is presented in Table 1. The findings revealed that a majority of the respondents (61.30%) had membership in any one of the social organisations in the society. Nearly one-third of respondents had no membership in the social organisations. A meagre proportion of the respondents (9.70%) had membership in two social organisations.

Extension agency contact: The results are available in Table 1. Majority of the respondents (83.87%) had high level of contact with extension agency. One-tenth (12.90%) of the respondents had medium level of contact with extension agency. Only a meagre portion of the respondents (3.22%) had low level of contact with extension agency. The reason for farmer friend having high to medium level of contact with extension

agencies might be due to the fact that most of the farmer friend contacted subject matter specialists (SMS), input dealers, private farm consultant, and line department officials. They are very much interested to know more about agriculture schemes and programmes offered by government. Most of the farmer friends participated in the extension activities, such as training, demonstration, field visit and extension meeting.

Participation in extension activities: Further an attempt was made to assess the activity wise participation of farmer friend in ATMA. Among the many activities carried out under ATMA programme, the major activities (Farmer friend oriented activities) such as exposure visit, participation in exhibition, conducting field day in their villages, trainings attended in ATMA programme, demonstration conducted in their villages was selected for the study. The farmer friend activity wise participation of extension activities was studied and the results are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents based on their overall participation in extension activities (N=31)

Category	No.	%
Low	06	19.36
Medium	17	54.84
High	08	25.80

It could be inferred from the Table 2 that most of the respondents had medium (54.84%) level of participation followed by high (25.80%) and low (19.36%) levels of participation in extension activities. Time and duration of activities, place where such activities were held and relevancy to their needs influences the respondents' participation.

Table 3 revealed that exposure visit activity, cent per cent of the respondents had participated within district farm visit followed by within state (74.19%) and inter-state visits (32.25%). The participation of farmer friend within district might be due to proximity and convenience to all the respondents.

In exhibition activity, about forty per cent (38.70%) of the respondents had visited more than six exhibitions followed by two to three (32.26%) and four to five (29.04%) number of exhibition related to agriculture. The reason for high level of participation in exhibition activities might be due to frequent conduct of farmer's exhibition in their districts through public and private agencies.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents based on their activity wise participation of extension activities (N=31)

Extension activities	No.	%
<i>Exposure visit</i>		
Within district	31	100.00
Within state	23	74.19
Inter-state visit	10	32.25
<i>Exhibition (in numbers)</i>		
One	-	-
2-3	10	32.26
4-5	9	29.04
>6	12	38.70
<i>Field day (in numbers)</i>		
One	5	16.12
Two-three	25	80.66
Four-five	1	3.22
Above five	-	-
<i>Trainings (in numbers)</i>		
1-5	9	29.03
6-10	7	22.58
>10	15	48.38
<i>Demonstration (in numbers)</i>		
One	2	6.45
Two –three	-	-
>3	-	-
<i>Frequency of meeting farmers</i>		
Daily	2	6.40
Weekly	10	32.30
Fortnightly	9	29.00
Monthly	3	9.70
If necessary	7	22.60
Season wise	-	-
<i>Length of time served in a month (in hours)</i>		
<5	-	-
6-10	5	16.10
11-20	17	54.83
>20	8	25.80

A majority of the respondents (80.66%) had participated in two to three field day activities. Meagre percentage of respondents had participated in one field day activity (16.12%) and four to five field day activities (3.22%). The reason for high level of participation in field day activities might be conducting field day activities in their village is one of the responsibilities of farmer friend. Some interested respondents had attended nearby villages' field day activities also.

A majority of the respondents (48.38%) had

attended more than ten trainings followed by one to five trainings (22.58%) and six to ten training programme (22.58%) on agriculture.

A meagre per cent of the respondents (6.45%) conducted demonstration in their villages. The reason for low level of conducting demonstration might be, high cost of inputs and difficult to mobilize farmers and lack of coordination of among farmers. The cash compensation of farmer friend would not be sufficient to conduct all meetings in their villages. Nearly one-third of the respondents (32.30%) weekly met their village farmers followed by fortnightly (29.00%), if necessary (22.60%), monthly (9.70%) and daily (6.40%).

Most of the respondents (54.83%) had served 11-20 hours in a month followed by more than 20 hours (25.80%) and six to ten hours (16.10%).

Correlation analysis between characteristics with dependent variable: Correlation analysis was performed to find out the association of independent variables namely Age, Sex, Educational status, Occupational status, Farming experience, Farm size, Annual Income, Social participation and Extension agency contact with the dependent variable participation.

Table 4. Correlation analysis of independent variables with participation of Farmer Friend under ATMA

Name of the variables	"r" value
Age	0.352*
Sex	0.316*
Educational status	0.567**
Occupational status	0.105
Farming experience	-0.145
Farm size	0.368*
Annual income	-0.086
Social participation	0.104
Extension agency contact	0.580**

Table 5. Constraints faced by the Farmer Friend in technology transfer (N=31)

Constraints	No.	%
Difficult to mobilize farmers	28	90.32
Less response	24	77.41
Honorarium is not sufficient	22	70.96
Distance	15	48.38
Time duration	12	38.70
Lack of arrangement of extension activities	10	32.25
Inadequate needs	9	29.03

The results exhibited that out of nine variables studied, five variables had shown positive significant relationship, out of nine variables, Educational status and Extension agency contact had shown positive and significant association with participation at one per cent level of probability. Remaining variables viz., Age, Sex and Farm size had shown positive and significant association with participation at one per cent level of probability. The rest of the four variables viz., Occupational status, Farming experience, Annual income and Social participation had shown non-significant relationship with participation.

Constraints faced by the farmer friend to enacting his duties: A majority of the respondents (90.32%) felt that lack of coordination among farmers as the major constraint followed by poor response among village people (77.41%). Nearly 70.00 per cent of the respondents felt that honorarium is not sufficient. Nearly half of the respondents (48.38%) felt distance from their home to farmer's home as one of their constraints. Nearly one-third of the respondents (32.25%) felt that lack of physical arrangements is one of the major problems in the conduct of the meetings at village level. Less than

one-third of the respondents (29.03%) faced most of their programmes inadequate according to their needs.

CONCLUSION

The results revealed that farmer friend exhibited medium (54.84%) level of participation in the extension activities assigned under ATMA scheme. It is noted that most of the respondent's perceived difficulty to mobilize farmers (90.32%), poor response among farmers (77.41%), and inadequate honorarium (70.96%) and lack of physical support (32.25%) as major constraints. The criteria to select farmer friend must be done in letter and spirit so that they can mobilize the farmers effectively in all extension activities organized under ATMA. The honorarium paid for farmer friend may be enhanced as a token of motivation to the farmer friend. The constraints enlisted and suggestions given in the present study will not only serve as an indicator of prevailing condition but will help the policy makers and administrators to modify the present guidelines for successful implementation of the programme.

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