

Rebuilding the Confidence of Farmers- Experiences of an Innovative Extension Project

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According to available data and feed back from several quarters, farmers in general and farm youth in particular are losing confidence in farming. Given the choice more than 40 per cent of farming families wanted to leave farming in Punjab. In a progressive state like Punjab where the farmers are relatively well assured with resources compared to majority of other states in the country, are losing confidence in farming, it is difficult to imagine the mindset of farmers in other parts of the country. The situation is more or less same in many developing as well as few developed countries.

There are many factors that have contributed for disinterest and apathy among farmers. The major factors are indiscriminate increase in cost of production, lack of assured market and price, uneconomical and fragmentation of land holdings, timely non availability of labour, inadequate and timely availability of critical inputs at the easy reach of majority of farmers, decline in soil productivity and depletion of under ground water resources, increasing ecological degradation and ravaging climate change have posed a serious threat to farmers' economy and living conditions. In the process farmers are losing confidence in the recent days, shifting to non agriculture vocations, migrating to urban areas and in extreme cases they are committing suicide. Youth are in the verge of leaving farming. All those in the helm of affairs today, should seriously think of how to restore the confidence in farmers, particularly farm youth. Otherwise a big vacuum is going to be created in the coming years leading to many unsolvable crisis. Therefore there is need for specific extension strategy to improve the economy and living standards of farming people. Once the farmers' conditions are improved, it will have chain reaction in improving the conditions of other segments of rural people leading to rural prosperity. The experience of Rural Bioresource complex Project

implemented by five Centres across the country can be of great opportunity to improve rural economy and living standards.

Department of Bio technology, Government of India has launched five RBCs across the country and one such RBC is implemented by the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore since April 2005. The project envisages to improve the income and standard of living of the intended families in a span of five years. The project is implemented in Tubagere Hobli of Doddaballapura Taluk of Bangalore Rural District covering 8340 families spread over in 75 villages of five panchayats in a contiguous area. Base line information was collected, analysed and documented for the entire families. Majority of farmers were cultivating traditional crops realising 60 percent of the potential yield. The extension participation of farmers was only 25 per cent. More than 85 per cent of the area is under rainfed with less than 760 mm average annual rainfall. In the last three years, the Project was able to bring about significant changes in productivity, income and employment generation with considerable influence on standard of living.

Special Features of the Project : The achievements were possible due to contribution of six important factors namely; identification of most profitable, sustainable and location specific technologies, timely and dependable information at the easy reach of rural people, providing critical inputs free of cost at the easy access, effective functional linkage, marketing empowerment and commodity based associations. The salient features of these factors are detailed below.

Profitable and sustainable technologies: Altogether five categories of technologies consisting of 19 interventions were identified and promoted in the project area keeping in view type of land, water availability,

marketing opportunity and resource status of stake holders. The lists of these interventions are given below.

Interventions 2007-08

I *Rainfed*

a) *Arable*

- i. Improved cultivation of Ragi and redgram
- ii. Improved cultivation of Maize (All rounder)

b) *Non-arable*

- i. Bio-Fuel Plantations
- ii. Dry land Orchard

II *Under Assured irrigation*

a) *Hi-Tech Intervention*

- i. Improved Rose Cultivation
- ii. Improved cultivation of Sweet Corn
- iii. Improved Cultivation Baby corn

b) *Other than Hi-Tech Interventions*

- i. Improved Ragi Seed Production
- ii. Improved Beans Seed Production
- iii. Improved cultivation of Hybrid Maize
- iv. Improved cultivation of Popcorn
- v. Improved cultivation of Sunflower
- vi. Improved cultivation of Mulberry

c) *Subsidiary interventions*

- i. Improved Sheep Rearing
- ii. Improved Fish Rearing
- iii. Improved Poultry Birds Rearing
- iv. Agro processing unit -Value added Products in Ragi (Ragi Malt)
- v. Water use efficiency
- vi. Integrated farming system
- vii. Infrastructure for Farmers Associations

Information support system: Inadequate, untimely and undependable information has weakened the mindset of farmers in farming. Project took all the initiatives to provide best information support to stake holders and they are as follows.

1. Eight junior Scientists were recruited to work with 1500 to 2000 families per each junior scientist. They are trained and guided by 30 senior scientists regularly to update their knowledge and skill matching with project mandates. They are provided with motorcycles for which mobility and timely guidance to farmers.
2. Organizing need based training programmes both on campus and off campus on the interventions promoted and other related areas to stake holders.

3. Established one Village Resource Centre (VRC) at Project area and an Expert Centre at GKVK Campus to provide continuous information support to all the stake holders.
4. Other educational activities namely field visits, field days, study tours, melas, Krishi melas, campaigns, exhibitions, and vanamahotsava were organized.
5. Recognitions and awards: Best farmers, Farm women, Farm youth and local leaders are recognised/given awards during field days, Krishimela and other occasions which is the greatest satisfaction, as well as motivating fellow stake holders for achieving excellence.

Providing Quality Critical Inputs: The biggest problem many farmers and rural people facing today is inadequate availability of quality critical inputs at the easy reach of stake holders. The project has made special provisions to provide best quality critical inputs to beneficiaries tailored with respective interventions at the appropriate time. Even the seedlings/tissue culture banana seedlings/rose cuttings/fingerlings were provided using the common transport facility. The start of farmers associations /commodity based associations have been instrumental in starting various nurseries in the local area which helped even marginal farmers to take up planting at his convenient time.

Effective Functional Linkage: In all 13 agencies are collaborating with the project representing three research organizations, development departments, commodity Boards and one financial institution.

Marketing Empowerment: The major problem faced by all farmers and rural people is the issues relating to marketing of their produces. The Project has undertaken various initiatives to provide best options for the sale of produce. The efforts to ensure best price for the produce are as follows.

- i) *Establishing marketing linkage:* Timely information on marketing places, prices prevailing, quality requirements and associated aspects helped farmers to realize potential profit.
- ii) *Direct sale by producers:* Many farmers /Farm women/Farm youth were encouraged to undertake sale of produces by themselves particularly watermelon, Ragi malt, Dhal, Nursery seedlings, Vermi compost, worms/manure etc. The system of sale by producers themselves did not stand in the long run in view of the following facts. Almost

all are nuclear type of families. Costly and inadequate transport is the biggest problem the great majority of the farmers are facing. As individual find difficulty to bargain.

The start of Producers association becomes inevitable and hence the initiatives were taken to start various associations to find sustainable solutions to producers' problems.

Start of Producers Associations: In order to ensure minimizing cost of production, maximizing profit margin, undertake marketing and create additional employment opportunities, various associations were started. The Associations are expected to address end to end issues relating to a intervention/group of related intervention

Associations functioning:

- * Rural Biofuel Growers Association, Hadonahalli - KMF
- * Flower Growers Association, Hadonahalli – KSDH
- * Jack Growers Association, Tubagere – KSDH
- * Federation of SHGs of Tubagere Hobli, WCWD
- * Organic Farming Farmers Association, Karnala – KSDA & APOF
- * Chawki Rearing Centre, Heggadihalli – KSDS & CSRTI, Mysore
- * Chawki Rearing Centre - Gangasandra, CSRTI, Mysore and KSDS
- * Corn Growers Association, Hadonahalli

Associations in pipeline:

- * Fruits and Vegetables Growers Association, Hadonahalli - KSDH
- * Sericulture Growers Association, Hadonahalli – KSDS
- * Fish Farmers Association

Out come of the Project : In a span of three and a half years, the project is able to bring about significant impact in terms of shift in cropping pattern, net income, employment generation and improving social status. There was a shift in the cropping pattern from low value crops to high value crops, as well as Hi-tech interventions, introduction of subsidiary enterprises and value addition together enhanced opportunities for improving the income. The income during the benchmark period was Rs.3,96,74,431/- and it has increased to

Rs.10,15,52,756/- during the project period. The net income generated was more than two folds during 2007-08, compared to bench mark period from among few selected interventions. The employment generated during the corresponding period due to those selected interventions was 2,52,875 man days per annum. The recognitions and awards for achievements and active participation in various commodity based associations have helped them to derive improved satisfaction in their vocations. The DBT Monitoring team, Government of India observed RBC-UAS (B) as one of the best models at all India level (figure 1). The 5th NBDB meeting held on 14-07-2008 at New Delhi has advocated for replication of UAS (B), model for North Eastern States.

Case study - A successful farm entrepreneur : Sri Sadanand aged about 45 years educated up to 10th standard was working in a public sector company way back in 2000. He resigned for the job and took up farming in his two acre and twenty gunta land inherited from his ancestral property located at Tapasihalli, in Tubagere Hobli. The family consists of wife, son and two married daughters and he is residing on the farm. He was deriving a net income of Rs 2.2 lakh during 2004-05. After Project staff intervention, the farmer is realizing a net income of Rs. 6.7 lakh per annum as on 2008.

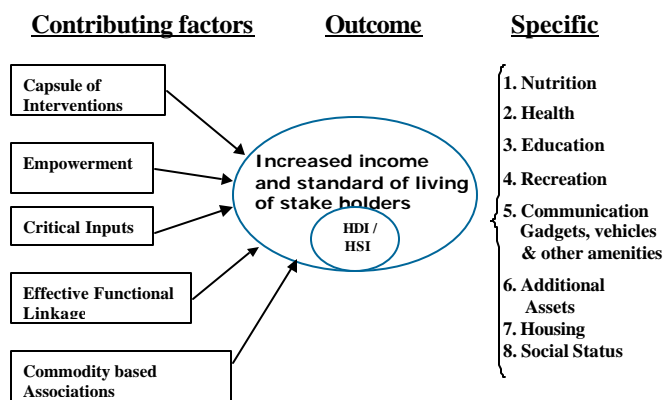


Fig-1: RBC Model UAS (B)

CONCLUSION

The farm families and rural people at large are gaining confidence and satisfaction in their vocations because of increased income and improved standard of living in the project area. Many visitors both with in and outside the country have visited project area, expressing great satisfaction on the achievements of the project.