

Institutional Shift: From Extension to Entrepreneurship



Unless the entrepreneurship competencies are added to the extension capabilities, the application of extension may not bear expected results, argues Dr S. Ramkumar

Agri-“culture” is increasingly changing to Agri -“business” in rural India. Though youth are generally apathetic to get themselves involved in agriculture, many are keen to pursue agribusiness as an enterprise. They consider agribusiness as a profession which bestows reputation in the society (amidst the competing IT and related sectors). It also offers better income. Such a change calls for an extension approach beyond the conventional thinking on “crop and livestock production” or “technology”. Entrepreneurship development gains momentum in this emerging context. Hence approaches on developing entrepreneurship needs to be discovered and appropriately synthesized with extension so as to have a meaningful and relevant extension system that suits to the entrepreneurs who are engaged in agriculture, livestock and related activities. It is this realization that led the Kerala Veterinary and Animal Science University (www.kvasu.ac.in) to establish a Directorate of Entrepreneurship under it.



Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU), Pookode, Wayanad district, Kerala

Box 1: Time, Technology and Territory

Extension is a product of time, technology and territory. The concepts and practice of extension has evolved through different contexts overtime. Approaches such as Transfer of Technology, Lab to Land, Land to Lab, Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems etc have evolved to improve the contribution of extension at different points in time. We are currently in a period of time which is characterized by accelerated knowledge generation and dissemination aided by advances in information and communication technologies. Better technology design & delivery systems have opened up new possibilities to improve technical efficiencies and new territories to market farm produce. It is time now for extension to find new approaches that are relevant to these three “T”s. This calls for a paradigm shift in thinking and practice of extension.

Probably KVASU is the first university within the agricultural university system of India, which has an exclusive Directorate of Entrepreneurship, without a Directorate of Extension. All the activities associated to extension like farmer/stakeholder outreach programmes, capacity building, publications, e-learning are all implemented under the Directorate of Entrepreneurship. But there is a special focus on institutional innovations aimed at promoting entrepreneurship within all these activities. For instance, in Wayanad district, KVASU developed partnerships with Panchayat administration; initiated technology enabled learning courses; and enhanced capacity of resource persons on commercial dairy farming.

To improve milk production from crossbreed dairy cows (which are predominant in cattle population of Kerala), the conventional extension systems (through grass root level extension workers of animal husbandry department, Dairy development department, milk cooperative society etc) focus on improving production in terms of unit cost involved in feeding, breeding and management. But in the changing situation, the commercial dairy farmers (whose numbers are increasing) are more keen to know about project formulation, licensing, climate change, pollution control, budgeting, sources of funds, market rates, dairy machineries, value addition etc which are beyond the conventional thoughts of extension like increased milk production through feeding, breeding & management.



Capacity development in value addition and marketing - a project promoted by the Directorate of Entrepreneurship

Essentially this means that the information, advice, technologies, ideas, practices being promoted by extension have to consider the market. Extension agents should also have a clear understanding of the risks and opportunities (including value addition and marketing) while promoting or advising an enterprise. Unless the entrepreneurship competencies are added to the extension capabilities, application of extension in such situations may not bear expected results.

One way of improving this capability would be through identifying topics of commercial agriculture and developing Industry-University partnerships. This will help in identifying areas of relevance, on which the knowledge and skills could be developed. Another approach is to develop a resource pool of veterinary professionals who are competent to advise on commercial dairy enterprises. KVASU is currently engaged in this activity. Initiating a Community of Practice (CoP) in Entrepreneurial Extension concepts is yet another approach worth considering.



Athulya, a bird that lays 305 eggs an year was a commendable technology from KVASU. By putting together five birds, a Pre-fabricated cage, feed and essential medicines, the Directorate of Entrepreneurship developed a successful project named as “Aiswarya Poultry”. It is ideal for peri-urban and urban houses and is aimed at achieving self sufficiency in egg availability and consumption

Conclusions

- It is not the technologies *per se* that are going to make changes, but the innovativeness in applying these technologies among farmers with participation and support from different stakeholders. Extension workers have to build this capacity, rather than evading such a challenge.
- Extension has a large role to understand markets and analyse market trends as the present day agriculture is increasingly turning out to be a business proposition.
- Entrepreneurial extension is an essential area for capacity development among extension staff.

Publications of relevance

Rao, S.V.N., Ramkumar, S., Natchimuthu, K and Joseph, A.K. (2008) *Quality Veterinary Education for effective livestock service delivery*. CALPI Programme Series 10. Intercooperation in India: Hyderabad (pp 1-38)

Van den Ban, A.W (2008) *The Role of Agricultural Extension in the Alleviation of Rural Poverty*. Discussion paper for the International seminar on “Strategies for Improving the livelihood security of Rural Poor” held in September at Goa, India

Wenger, E (2006) Communities of practice-A brief introduction, <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/>

(Dr S Ramkumar is Director of Entrepreneurship at the Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) at Pookode, Wayanad District, Kerala, India (Email:suku.ramkumar@gmail.com)