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GOVERNANCE: THE MISSING PIECE IN KVK REFORMS

Krishi Vigyan Kendras *(KVKs) do face a number of governance challenges. Addressing these issues is important to enhance the contribution and impact of KVKs argues Dr P N Ananth.*

BACKDROP

Establishment of KVKs was an important institutional innovation by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Over the past four decades, the number of KVKs has expanded to 642. While its role and contribution to agricultural technology assessment and dissemination is widely appreciated, it has also received an equal share of criticism. No other agricultural system large or small in the world has such a frontline decentralized research capacity at the district level. Recent reviews on KVK (ICAR, 2013) have raised several concerns on its performance. But several issues related to Governance of KVKs remain unrecognised over the years. This blog discusses some of these issues.

GOVERNANCE: THE MISSING PIECE

The AESA Blog 46 (Chander, 2015) discussed in detail the evolution of KVKs. KVKs face a number of challenges. This blog deals with the governance of KVKs which hasn't received enough attention so far, though NARS is discussing about Good Governance in Agriculture for some time (Box 1).I feel that the performance of KVKs directly depends on the quality of its governance.

Box 1: Good Governance in Agriculture

Governance is defined as the way a system or organisation is guided and steered. From the perspective of NARS (National Agricultural Research System), governance is related to guiding, actuating and steering its research; education and extension functions towards growth and improved performance. Growth and improved performance depend upon an enabling environment to perform (internal processes i.e., rules and procedures) and generation of S&T (Science & Technology) goods with relevance and utility to all stakeholders. Good governance certainly rises above the routine application of internal administrative and financial rules and procedures in managing the affairs of organisations.

Good governance framework is built around three dimensions—internal mechanisms, performance and accountability.

The *internal mechanisms* relate to how decision-making roles and responsibilities are defined, accepted and applied to establish overall work culture.

Performance dimension—a key external variable of good governance—relates to the use of resource inputs with product outputs.

Accountability—an external dimension of good governance, is defined as responsibility for performing those tasks or achieving those results for which the individual or the organisation is delegated the necessary authority.

Source: NAAS (2002)

The major issues related to governance that affects the performance of KVKs are discussed below.

Support from Host Institution

The success of a KVK ultimately depends on the quality of support it receives from the host institution. KVKs are hosted by different types of organisations such as ICAR Institutes, State Agricultural Universities, NGOs and even agriculture and other development departments. The host institutions at first need to fully understand the mandate of KVK and should have adequate resources to support the functioning of the KVK. While resources are available, there are cases where these are not extended to KVKs. There are several instances where host institution deploys the staff of KVKs to handle other jobs and responsibilities in the host institution. The Programme Coordinator of the KVK has little control on his staff in such situations. This is affecting the performance of the KVKs and there should be a mechanism to address this issue at the earliest.

My personal experiences with the host institution managing one of the KVK hosted by the NGO helped me to fully understand the critical role of host institution in the performance of KVK. The host institution rarely comes forward to support the KVK financially whenever there are delays in fund transfer from ICAR. While working as Training Organiser with that KVK, all my staff including myself used to get salary at the end of each month only for 6-7 months. Later, we used to get it together after 4 to5 months due to the delay in fund transfer to the KVK. The same situation prevails even today. Sometimes I wonder what other sacrifices KVK personnel need to do to support this system? Even in KVKs under the ICAR institutes, it is hard to get the powers of a Programme Coordinator fully delegated from the Institute. All these highlight the need for addressing some of these issues so as to provide the right environment for KVK personnel to perform better. Often host institutes utilise the expertise of KVKs in mobilising farmer groups for their work and allot duties based on their priorities, but rarely support the KVK in delivering its mandate. Without the full support of the host institution, it is difficult for KVKs to perform up to their potential.

Capabilities of KVK

As a team, KVKis competent to manage its mandate, as the administrative and financial guidelines regarding its management are clear. The KVK personnel are also capable of organising any type of training including training of extension functionaries, etc. The Programme Coordinator and SMS (Subject Matter Specialist) are aware of the prevailing situations, farmer needs, technologies in the market and what not. Moreover, the trainers of KVK are as equally qualified as any academic faculty from the SAU and any Scientist of ICAR. Unfortunately, the capability of professionals is assessed by their place of posting. Many believe that the training of extension functionaries should be handled by the scientists of SAUs or ICAR only (though they have little field experience) and not by the KVK faculty.

Moreover, while the KVK personnel often have the same level of educational qualification and years of experience within the system, they are placed in lower grades than people working in the research centres. Though many call KVK personnel as KVK scientists, officially they don't belong to the scientific category (except the Programme Coordinator). We need to look at these issues too while we reform KVKs. The High Power Committee on Management of KVKs has recommended converting the SMS positions in KVKs to the scientific cadre (ICAR, 2014). I hope a decision on this would be taken soon.

Issues on Technology Assessment

One of the major features of KVK (which really differentiates its functions from the state line departments such as Department of Agriculture, Horticulture, etc) is its mandate on technology assessment and refinement. (But unfortunately many consider KVKs as merely training centres). But whether the KVKs have real capability to assess and refine technologies is an important question? Do they have a concrete mechanism to pass on assessment results to the research system though they report annually to controlling agencies? Every year, KVKs search for new technologies to be tested for its micro location specificity and many KVKs are constrained in obtaining these technologies for testing and also for demonstration. Invariably ICAR institutes demand KVKs to pay for these technologies. In some cases, for instance, getting good hybrid seeds for assessment and demonstration from public sector is extremely difficult.

Visibility Crisis of KVK

Many talk about the poor visibility of KVKs at the district level and they expect every farmer in the district to know about the KVK. A KVK with 16 staff members cannot do wonders in a district on its own. Until and unless it collaborates with the mainstream extension machinery of the state and organises proper assessment and communication of technologies its effectiveness and visibility will always be questioned.

Every year a KVK is set with a target of 24 On-farm trails, 24 Front Line Demonstrations and 72 trainings by its six experts. To perform these activities each KVK is approximately provided with INR 6-10 lakh. Cost of all critical inputs for trials and demonstrations, cost of fuel, post, telephone, teaching materials, food charges during training and other daily expenses in each KVK have to be met from this meagre operational budget. Keeping in view this limitation, KVKs should avoid the temptation to initiate larger development interventions in the district to show its impact. KVKs should focus on technology assessment and supporting agricultural planning in the district.

As noted in one of the good practice note from KVK shared through AESA web portal (www.aesa-gfras.net) "while the KVK demonstrations could convince several farmers to use a package of scientific practices and learn from their impacts (reduced use of inputs, less pollution, higher profits and enhanced climate resilience),the upscaling of the technology package was possible only through the concerted efforts of the Department of Agriculture, ATMA, Local Self Governments and input agencies"(Muralidharan, 2015). Despite the guidelines to work together, there is lack of partnership between KVK and ATMA (Glendenning, et al 2010; Babu et al, 2013). Exceptions do exist but these are mostly driven by individual interests.

Box 2: Successful impact of collaboration: KVK-Puducherry

Apparently, farmers in Sorapattu village of Mannadipattu in Puducherry have a lot of information on using integrated pest management (IPM) for protecting their crops rather than using chemical pesticides for the same. The emphasis on IPM in the region is in practice since 1994, in order to bring down the indiscriminate usage of pesticides to contain crop pests and diseases while conserving and protecting natural insects in crop ecosystem. Perunthalaivar Kamaraj Krishi Vigyan Kendra (PKKVK), Puducherry, in co-ordination with the agriculture department is responsible for bringing this tremendous change in the attitude of the farmers towards this method. Pesticide consumption in this region has come down significantly from 163 metric tonnes in 1990-91 to 40.92 tonnes in 2013-2014, resulting in a two-thirds reduction in its consumption. Similarly, the number of pesticides outlets has decreased from 196 in 1990-1991 to 115 in 2013-2014, nearly a 30 percent decrease.

http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/an-entire-village-shuns-using-chemicals-for-growing-crops/article6809021.ece.

Partnership Experience from KVK-Khordha

To enhance the contribution and impacts KVK-Khordha under ICAR-Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture started an initiative called "People and Partnership". The initiative helped it in developing strong networks with more than 10 organisations having similar mandates in the district. Partners started seeking help from the KVK in different ways to work in tandem for the development of agriculture in the district and it helped the KVK to increase its reach from 7000 to 14,000 farmers/year. Certain partners provided funds and others provided manpower for larger development (Table 1).

Table 1: People and Partnership at KVK, Khorda-An Analysis

Partners	Role of KVK	Benefits to KVK	Reach of activities	Provision of resources
State Employment Mission, Government of Odisha	Entrepreneurship development through skill development	KVK entered into entrepreneurship mode in freshwater aquaculture Strong link with State Department of Fisheries; KVK posses technical resources in local language	250 Entrepreneurs from three districts in fisheries	Finance
Odisha Community Tank Management Project	Joint implementation of Agricultural Livelihood Support services component	Community mobilization through Pani Panchayati. e Water Users Association; Additional manpower to KVK; Extensive outreach of activities by KVK; Experience in Farmer field school approach; Envisaged farmer to farmer extension model	Developed operational infrastructure for KVK at two blocks; Strengthened the footing in four blocks; 7556 ha benefitting 6000 farmers in agriculture/horticulture, 2000 in livestock and 500 households in fisheries in the command villages.	Finance, Manpower
Odisha Watershed Mission	Training on off season vegetables; Training on rural livelihoods	Sharing experience to farmers of Nuapada district; Developed local language training modules on off season vegetable cultivation; Established link with Department of Horticulture with Orissa University of Science and Technology; Trained 140 extension workers of mission on rural livelihoods	Extended services to farmers of Nuapada district; Trained 140 watershed Management Teams on rural livelihoods	Finance, Manpower
ATMA-Khordha	Technical Backstopping, varietal trials and Skill Development Training	Massive coverage of paddy land under line transplanting; Concluded varietal trials	10,000 ha of paddy land under line transplanting; 5921 farmers benefitted over four years	Finance

KVKs do convergence not only with ATMA but others too. But some organisations only want to sub-contract a few set of activities (e.g.: Training) without engaging in sharing expertise and experiences which may not be ideal. A lot more needs to be done to promote sustainable and mutually rewarding partnerships at the KVK level.

Reporting

While KVKs do a lot of interesting and innovative work, they have been generally poor at reporting, reflecting and sharing their experiences. The current reporting requirements do not appreciate documenting best practices and preparing quality case studies. For instance, Programme Coordinators of KVKs working under ICAR institutes have too many to report and these include, Controlling Officer of the host institute, Director, Extension of the concerned state agricultural university, Zonal Project Directors of the concerned Zone and at times even to the District Magistrate/Collector. Day-to-day reporting has become very cumbersome and apart from this many other works are also entrusted to KVKs. This also needs review. Fortunately we currently have an e-platform like AESA (Agricultural Extension in South Asia) which is keen to publish good practices of KVKs. However, KVKs do need more support and encouragement to document, analyse and promote their innovative experiences.

WAY FORWARD

KVKs are viewed as one of India's important institutional innovation inspiring the world in the 21st Century (ICAR, 2012).This institutional innovation is also likely to spread to other parts of the world like Africa (Kumar, 2013). If KVKs have to contribute effectively, their roles need to be clarified and their relationships with the host institute needs to be streamlined. KVKs should have the freedom to decide on its functioning without getting involved in the activities of the host institute which are not in line with the mandates set for the former. Powers to implement the approved technical programme of the KVK should be fully delegated to the PC. KVKs being a field oriented organisation need a different type of management which is different from the way a research institute is managed. KVK personnel working in the host institutions have to be brought back and existing vacant posts in KVKs should be filled up urgently. The recommendations of the High Power Committee on Management of KVKs should be implemented without any further delay. Without addressing these types of governance challenges, one shouldn't be expecting any major impact from the KVKs.

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