

**Short course on
'Empowerment of farming communities through hybrid communication tools'
21-30, October, 2013, Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Izatnagar, India**



ICT based communication methods & tools, if used appropriately have tremendous potential in transferring knowledge on improved agricultural practices among farmers. The recent short course on hybrid communication tools organized by the Division of Extension Education, Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), Izatnagar, Uttar Pradesh, India clearly highlighted their potential. Dr. Akila Natarajan, Associate Professor and Head, Veterinary University Training and Research Institute, (VUTRC), Karur of TANUVAS reflects on her participation in this short course.

CONTEXT

The short course was aimed to provide hands-on training on hybrid communication tools for improved technology transfer in agriculture sector. The course consisted of lectures, group discussions and practical sessions (Box 1). The trainees comprised of 15 participants representing Universities and Krishi Vigyan Kendras from 9 states. The course was organized as 26 sessions (comprising 15 theory and 11 practical sessions).



BOX 1: Hybrid Communication Tools?

In biological sciences, an offspring resulting from crossing two genetically distinct entities acquire superior characteristics and is called as a hybrid. Similarly, when we combine the strengths of distinct communication tools such as computer, internet, mobile phones etc to deliver information, we call these as hybrid communication tools. Examples include: webinars, SMS based knowledge exchange through mobile telephony, voice KVK service for farmers, Interactive educational tools, ICT enabled information centres, internet enabled TVs, media mix, knowledge management through web portals, data digitalization & video/skype conferencing, and community Radio available through FM channels & accessible through mobile phones.

LESSONS LEARNT

1. Video Conferencing and webinars – novel tools of communication:

Video conferencing as most of us know offers a live connection between people in separate locations and it involves audio, text as well as video. It provides transmission of full motion video images and high quality audio between multiple locations. To demonstrate video conferencing, trainees were divided into two groups placed at two different locations and a live debate was arranged via video conferencing.. The trainees enjoyed presenting their views for & against the use of ICTs by actively participating in this video conference session and experienced the hassles in conducting the same. This also helped us in understanding the logistic problems and ways to address these problems usually encountered in utilization of ICT tools like video/skype conferencing. The concept of webinars was also explained by Dr Mahesh Chander with a live example of recently organized (17th October, 2013) FARMD webinar presented by Dr Kristin Davis, Executive Secretary, Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS).

(<https://worldbankva.adobeconnect.com/a833642795/p8n9j5ddqdf/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal>). Webinars are becoming popular and are increasingly used to share knowledge globally.



Debate by participants through Video-conferencing



Address by Dr.Ajit Maru

2. Location specific customized information delivery through ICTs

Dr. Ajit Maru, Senior Officer, Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR), delivered his lecture through video conferencing from his office in Rome. He argued that agricultural research and innovation is not limited to only research in laboratories and research stations that generate technologies, but should also include the users who also innovate while using it. There is a need to apply ICTs at all levels by all who can use it and not just at one place. Location specific, regularly updated customized information therefore should be available to the farming community through web portals. This session was highly interactive as Dr. Maru encouraged participants to ask questions and for many of us this was the first direct interaction via video conferencing.

3. Interactive electronic educational tools and Information systems could support extension functionaries:

Interactive electronic tools refers to techniques, methods and tools used to access information and these are emerging as important in facilitating communication and enhancing access to information for agricultural and rural development. The major steps in ICT tools/information system development include processing, storage and retrieval of information and developing effective tools for communicating the information represented in various formats. The

information may be contained in the form of text, image, graphics, audio, video or animations. We were to develop an interactive information system by collection of desired information, simplification, language conversion, audio scripting, visual scripting, visual collection & content development, audio recording & editing, final mixing; processing and screening. The trainees enjoyed practicing Adobe Photoshop, Flash, voice recording and film making by using movie maker software.

- 4. Customized Information Delivery system Using Mobile telephony can enhance adoption rate:** With rapidly increasing tele-density even in rural areas, mobile phones are increasingly being used by farmers across varying social and economic status. It was a wonderful experience for the trainees to listen to the practical and innovative experiences of Mr. Kamal Jeet, founder of Kisan Sanchar Ltd (<http://www.kisansanchar.com/>). His company has developed an intelligent Mobile based Information Delivery System by linking up with KVKs. It was demonstrated that it is possible to provide customized solution to each farmer irrespective of the telecom circle. This is being implemented using three layered channel which includes Text SMS, Voice SMS and Android based Mobile Application (SMART Channel) which can be downloaded from Google Play Store. The nature of collaboration of this company with ICAR (Zone -1 and Zone – 6) was also discussed. The major objective of this initiative has been to disseminate authentic actionable knowledge related to agriculture, agri-business intelligence, organizing farmers' club and career counseling. He also narrated the challenges like costs and consumption space in the mobile inbox. Problems such as similarity in messages, problems in user group selection and unwanted less utilized messages etc were also elaborated. The trainees realized the enormous potential of SMS based advice delivery for farmers, KVKs and scientific research institutions in speedy dissemination of technologies. The participants were asked to create and record a voice message in the class, and the same message was transmitted to the mobiles of all the participants and this was finally reviewed on several parameters such as relevance, time, clarity etc. The session being highly interactive was very useful to trainees, since all of their queries were satisfactorily answered.



Participants at CRS, Pantnagar



Mr. Kamaljeet briefing about Kisan Sanchar Ltd

- 5. Agropedia (<http://agropedia.iitk.ac.in/>)- a Knowledge management Platform:**

It envisages being a one stop shop for any information, pedagogic or practical knowledge related to agricultural extension services. The concepts of Agropedia, Krishi Voc, Voice POP, vKVK, KVK-net etc were explained by Dr. Vinod Kumar and his team from IIT, Kanpur. The participants also got the opportunity to practice voice POP and vKVK in this session and this was an unique experience for the participants. We found that Agropedia if used well can be one effective bridge between explicit knowledge holders like agricultural researchers, experts & tacit knowledge holders like farmers & other field workers. The take home message from this session was how

the Knowledge platforms like Agropedia can be used in our own situations by using it and also helping our institutions to create institutional Agropedia, by developing location specific content related to agriculture.

6. Community Radio enhances people participation:

Community based independent media is now perceived by media activists and grassroots organizations as a means of enabling rural communities in managing their own development. The pioneering efforts of G. B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology in establishing community radio '*Pantnagar Janvani*' at 90.8 Mhz - the first campus based Community Radio Station (CRS) of Uttarakhand in 2011 was presented by Dr. S. K. Kashyap during our field visit to CRS, Pantnagar. The three essential principles of community radio, viz. non-profit making, community ownership & management and community participation were highlighted. The work experiences were shared by the team members of *Janvani*. The benefits of CRS in bridging the information gap with latest and relevant information were discussed. Further, *Janvani* strived hard in preparing and broadcasting programmes to sustain interest among the various groups among the community such as children, youth, women, farmers, students, etc. and that too without any repetition of the programmes. We learnt about ways of establishing and managing community radio station from this field trip and interactions.

7. Constraints in using hybrid communication technologies:

Use of Personal Digital Assistant, smart phones, phablets etc., by farmers can potentially reduce the cost of information delivery, but their use is highly dependent upon their level of technical skills and education. We also realized that new ICTs cannot answer all the problems by itself but it does widen the choice of communication channels for farming communities. A demonstration about CIARD (<http://www.ciard.net>) led by Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) (<http://www.egfar.org>)- CIARD RING (<http://www.ciard.net/ring>), an openly accessed information service portal related to agricultural research and development initiatives globally, was also organized for the trainees.

FINAL IMPRESSIONS

- The keen interest and professionalism of the core faculty members of the Division of Extension Education of Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) and the invited resource faculty provided the trainees more confidence in trying some of these hybrid communication tools. The programme was very interactive and trainees had enough time to present their views during the programme. A mix of group discussion, practical exercises and field visits helped in reinforcing new knowledge and skills imparted at this short course.
- Rapid expansion of communication networks and ICT tools provide significant opportunities for extension professionals like me in reaching farmers effectively. However, poor evidence of impact and precise analysis of what works under what conditions still delay deployment of hybrid communication tools. Poor infrastructure and lack of locally relevant information also constrain extension staff and farmers in using ICTs in managing knowledge. But a "mix and match" approach of combining various tools can address some of these constraints to a large extent.

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