

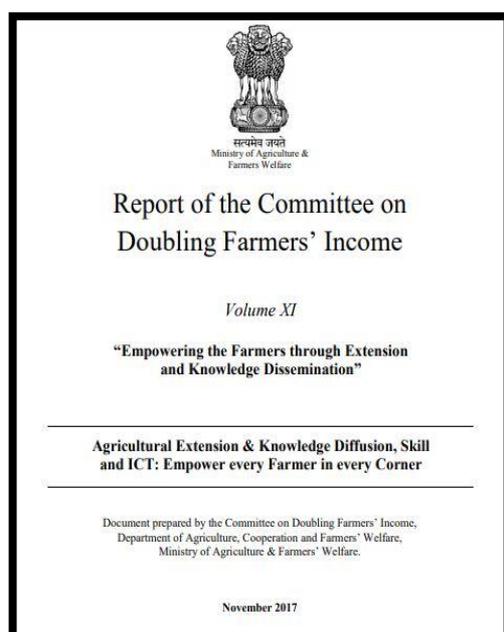
SERIOUS MANPOWER CONSTRAINT

The committee has recommended minimum ratio of extension service provider to farming family: 1:400 in Hilly areas; 1:750 in Irrigated areas; and 1:1000 in Rainfed areas. The Committee has provided the current status of manpower in Agriculture Extension in Table 4.1 on page 66 of the report. It has revealed that the current ratio of operational holdings per extension functionary was 1:1162. However, while many states may get at par with the needed ratio if 30% of vacancies are filled up, other states, including big states such as Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, would continue to suffer because of manpower shortage and hence would need additional sanctions.

Present experience indicates difficulties not only in new sanctions but also in filling up vacancies. Although the number of operational holdings is as per the 2010 census, this shall keep increasing with the continuous break up of holdings. Therefore, while making efforts for new sanctions and filling up vacancies is important, yet efforts need to be made to achieve the objective with the existing status of extension manpower.

PLURALISM IN EXTENSION DELIVERY

While recognising pluralism in extension delivery, the report noted that (paragraph 1.4.1) currently extension services are provided by various agencies representing public and private sector players. The list of extension service providers is indicated in Fig. 1.2 of the draft report.



It shows 107 categories of public and private extension service providers. This includes 22 institutions of DCA&FW, 4 institutions of DARE including ICAR, KVKs and CAUs, four institutions of DAH, D&F, 8 belonging to the Ministry of Commerce, 22 Inter Governmental Institutions, and 16 categories of private extension service providers.

Besides these, on page 68, the Committee has identified the vast network of institutions in delivery of credit-linked extension activities, including the immense cooperative network and public and private sector banking network.

On page 69 the Committee has identified various other agencies that provide core extension, including 1.57 lakh common service centres, and self-help groups. There are 1.71 lakh milk cooperatives as well as cooperatives and institutions for fisheries, bee keeping, etc.

The Committee also notes that extension resources active in the field and thus available for extension is huge and belongs to diverse organisations and sectors, and are not limited to only those working within the ambit of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare agriculture or the agriculture sector. Organisations listed in the DFI Committee report are those known to the ministry. There would be a large number, particularly in the private sector, which may be unknown to the ministry as it would only be aware of those service providers in the agriculture sector known to them.

CONVERGENCE

Despite the large network of public and private extension service providers the Committee has recognised several important concerns on page 9 of the report. One of its main concern is as follows:

Does there exist an institutional mechanism to review and converge the number of extension functionaries and the extension approaches adopted by private sector?

The report notes that “While the private sector plays an important role in agriculture extension it is natural that they would concentrate more on providing information to farmers that is related to their commercial interests, and on marketing their products. These efforts need to be made complimentary and supplementary to public extension efforts. There is scope to develop a mechanism to converge all the private extension efforts onto a single platform and achieve the needed coordination to serve larger areas and an increased number of activities. Synergy in effort by the two systems will benefit the farmers better. This will become an example of Public-private platform of extension machinery”.

BROADENED MANDATE OF EXTENSION

In paragraph 2.4 (page 22) of the report, “Agriculture demands added role from extension manpower” the Committee has listed 24 roles under agriculture extension in Table 2.1. The success expected by government in revitalising the agriculture sector and doubling farmers’ income depends upon extension being able to perform these 24 functions as anticipated.

Table 1: Roles under Agricultural Extension

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing information on going schemes and programs in agriculture & allied sectors • Capacity building, Skilling in emerging areas • Advocacy on farmers’ interests • Counselling for farmers’ well-being • Credit facilitation • Critical assistance in risk management including climate change, crop insurance etc • Documentation and Reporting roles • Enforcement of Farmers’ Charters • Issuing Advisories on soil health management, water conservation, pest management etc. • Facilitating access to production and post-production inputs & data • Facilitation & feedback • Friend, philosopher and guide to farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging in research planning • Promoting projectised mode of extension delivery • ICT enabled services • Intermediation • Linking farmers to markets • Building managerial competence • Linking various support & service networks • Organizing user/producer groups • Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation • PPP Promotion • Promoter of farmer led innovations • Redressal of grievances • Technology selection, etc • Feedback to research system
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TACKLING RESOURCE CONSTRAINT

Performing the above-mentioned roles require massive resource commitment in terms of manpower, finances, and infrastructure. Resource commitment on this scale cannot be provided whether by central government or state government. The only option is by converging all extension efforts as recommended by the Committee. This, therefore, becomes a prerequisite for taking various other initiatives and efforts as recommended by the Committee for meeting the challenge of doubling farmers’ income.

DATABASE OF EXTENSION SERVICE PROVIDERS (ESPs)

Creating a database of all extension service providers and resources is the first step towards convergence of extension efforts. Accordingly, an Extension Census needs to be conducted to map all extension service providers and extension resources. Methodology for the same will need to be evolved – including formats for collection of data, creating a platform for collection of data, actual collection and compilation of data, and creating protocols for their storage, protection, and retrieval. This will, furthermore, call for a digital platform wherein information can be uploaded by the concerned extension service providers. Further steps for convergence can thereafter be taken, which itself is a big exercise.

CONTENT OF EXTENSION CENSUS

ESP census needs to be a census of extension resources that is not restricted just to extension personnel. A few suggestions may be considered:

1. For each ESP extension resources may be indicated including personnel, infrastructure and activities including funding commitment;
2. Personnel may include numbers and skill sets as also whether they are regular or contractual;
3. Work done over the years;
4. Terms and conditions of resource deployment, including geographical area;
5. Census may include every ESP who can contribute and should not be restricted only to those belonging to the agriculture sector. A large number of other organisations may be willing and keen to contribute, including contribution under CSR.

WAY FORWARD

1. The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare should designate a nodal institution to conduct census, and to create and manage the database as its custodian. MANAGE appears to be the natural institution for this task. Alternatively, the ministry may designate another suitable organisation.
2. The nodal organisation should set up a dedicated cell for this purpose instead of trying to carry out the work through existing staff.
3. The nodal institution should conduct a workshop for probable major ESPs in order to flesh out the concept in detail. Basic information may be collected and compiled in the workshop.
4. A start can be made with the information compiled from the workshop.

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