

Agricultural Extension in South Asia

WHAT EVERY EXTENSION WORKER SHOULD KNOW- CORE COMPETENCY HANDBOOK

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Although, agriculture world over is experiencing sea changes, most of the stakeholders including policy makers and extension professionals consider “Transfer of Technology (TOT)” as the only role of extension. In the past, the activities of extension professionals revolved around researchers and farmers. The present day extension professionals need to deal with several stakeholders including policy makers which, obviously necessitates them to play multiple roles. In fact, the multiple roles of extension professionals are neither recognised nor appreciated by all those associated with agricultural development for a variety of reasons.



This core competency handbook is timely in the current context as it could elucidate multiple roles of extension in agriculture and rural development. Demands of several stakeholders on extension are increasing and so is the demand for enhanced capacities of extension professionals. Suvedi and Kaplowitz, the authors of this handbook, have identified core skills necessary for agriculture extension field level professionals to improve their capacity to address the emerging problems of the farming communities.

The book has nine chapters. The first chapter contains a brief history of extension services. The narration includes the evolution in extension approaches from the TOT of yesteryears to the present day demand-driven participatory and pluralistic extension. There must be a change in the mindset of the extension professionals to focus not

only on technology transfer but also to deal with several challenges the farmers are encountering in their endeavour to increase the agricultural production and income from farming.

The role of extension in development and the roles extension workers have to perform while working in the community are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. The changing role of extension workers and the core competencies needed by extension workers are presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

The weakest link in agriculture extension programmes are poor planning, ineffective implementation and improper evaluation of the programmes. The focus of this book is on planning (Chapter 6), implementation (Chapter 7) and evaluation (Chapter 8) of agricultural extension programmes which are explained explicitly with the help of 32 useful tools. These tools are explained in such a way that even novices can understand and use these tools in their respective field situations.



Most of the complex challenges faced by farmers require solutions which are beyond the decision making capacities of individual farmers and extension personnel need to organise farmers to ensure collective decision making ©Nimisha Mittal

Often the extension professionals are not in a position to understand the farming communities. The tool for conducting needs assessment is quite useful for field level professionals to develop a thorough understanding about their target group. These tools include a brief description on needs, types of needs, significance of needs assessment, important methods to assess the needs, types of information to be collected and methods to prioritize the needs. Likewise, all the tools are explained with a brief theoretical description along with a method to employ the tools with their strengths and weaknesses.

Many extension programmes are not able to achieve the desired results mainly because of the poor participation of the stakeholders especially, the farming communities. The tool to identify the key stakeholders and methods to engage them in the extension programmes is useful and necessary for the field extension personnel to successfully plan, implement and evaluate the agriculture development programmes. Similarly, “how to design extension and advisory services based on gender analysis” is another important tool which the extension field functionaries can employ in their programmes.

Several extension books explain about various extension teaching methods along with their merits and demerits. The speciality of this handbook is that it explains these methods which could be very easily followed by the field extension functionaries. In addition, this book contains mechanism to promote pluralism, managing conflicts in the villages, understand group dynamics and time management which are of paramount importance to the extension professionals.

How to evaluate extension programmes in different stages of programme planning, implementation and final results is very well dealt with the description of modified Bennett's hierarchy. The tools necessary for conducting both formative and summative evaluation include design of survey instruments, methods to conduct surveys, participant observation, rapid rural and participatory appraisals, focus group discussions and preparation of evaluation reports.



Organising diagnostic visits to farms and providing advice based on field visits are important functions performed by field extension personnel

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The last chapter is on communication in extension which relies heavily on the Diffusion of Innovations book by E. M. Rogers (2003). Extension professionals must be effective in communicating with their stakeholders. How to communicate effectively with various groups of audience, using different communication media including ICTs are very well presented. The contents of this book are enriched with appropriate paradigms and beautiful photographs.

This handbook serves as a good reading material for field-level extension professionals and those who wish to enhance their capacities. However, senior managers and policy makers in the extension sector would need additional competencies and perspectives, which are not addressed in this book.

This book is freely downloadable from http://www.csus.msu.edu/uploads/457/48841/MEAS-2016ExtensionHandbook.pdf?utm_source=MEAS&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=MEAS

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