

WORKSHOP

CAPACITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF EXTENSION AND ADVISORY SERVICE PROVIDERS IN ODISHA

International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)

Centre for Research on Innovation & Science Policy (CRISP)

ICAR-Central Institute for Women in Agriculture

3-4 July 2018, Bhubaneswar, Odisha



The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in collaboration with the Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP), and the ICAR-Central Institute of Women in Agriculture (ICAR-CIWA) organised a workshop on Capacity Needs Assessment of Extension and Advisory Service Providers in Odisha, on 3-4 July 2018 at Bhubaneswar, India. Here, Ms Rohini Ram Mohan shares her experiences garnered from this workshop.

CONTEXT

“Agricultural Extension and capacity building must be looked at in a futuristic manner, assessing what is currently there, which departments will need to be strengthened in the future, what are the skills that will be required, which are those that won’t be required, and thinking about how these can be rationalised.”

Nagesh Kumar Barik, Participant (ICAR-Central Institute for Fisheries and Aquaculture)

This sentiment echoed throughout the two-day intensive Capacity Needs Assessment Workshop conducted with key extension functionaries from the Government of Odisha and its stakeholders. The workshop, jointly organised by IRRI, CRISP and ICAR-CIWA from 3-4 July 2018, was a forum for over 20 participants from various departments and organisations to come together, and reflect on the key areas of capacity building that can transform their role as agricultural extension service providers in a context where the needs of farmers are rapidly changing.



Reflecting on various challenges faced by farmers including climate change, there was broad consensus among participants that there is need for a paradigmatic shift in how extension as a function is approached. Over the two days, many participants noted that the role of an extension functionary can no longer be restricted to just ensuring that farmers increase yield and production. They must also address the growing need to see how extension can help the farmer go beyond production into other activities in the value chain, and in ensuring that farmers are able to make agriculture profitable.

Moreover, participants articulated the need to rethink capacities – both at the organisational as well as individual level – as farmers are getting their information and advice from various channels, including social media. Through various interactive sessions and team exercises built around skills, competencies and capacity needs of extension staff at various levels, participants identified various technical and managerial skills that are necessary for executing their functions. Each session prodded participants into reassessing the roles of functionaries at various levels.

KEY OBSERVATIONS FROM THE SESSIONS

Emerging areas of extension

Participants explored a range of specialised extension services, which other organisations were engaged in, through a card exercise where each participant listed three core extension activities of their organisation or branch. Many new areas beyond conducting demonstrations and trials emerged, such as network building, and even entrepreneurship. However, it was assessed collectively that capacities in areas like climate change-based agro advisories, entrepreneurship based farmer producer companies, and ICTs, had to be addressed to meet the needs of the changing agricultural landscape.



Addressing gaps in extension systems

A very lively discussion ensued when participants were asked to reflect on the gaps in extension services. Most groups pointed out that the agricultural extension system in its current state did not adequately address the demands of extension, so there is a need to revisit the goals of agricultural extension. Most participants were clear that production and yield increase which had been the goals for extension did not always translate into improved livelihoods or better incomes, therefore there is a need to go beyond a production target to a market target-based system that would ensure that a farmer is also able to sell what he produces. A few groups reiterated the significance of policy level changes and formal commitment at the highest level in order to develop market-led extension services that can go on to establish important value chains, business plans for agri based enterprises etc. Most groups alluded to the need for capacity building in ICT-based services and integration of various platforms and extension functionaries, and developing a robust monitoring and evaluation system.

The participants were also introduced to the New Extensionist Position Paper¹ and exposed to the various modules of the New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK)² put together under the GFRAS (Global

¹GFRAS. (2012.) The New Extensionist: Roles, Strategies, and Capacities to Strengthen Extension and Advisory Services (RV Sulaiman and K Davis, eds.). Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services, Switzerland. <http://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/gfras-publications.html?download=126:the-new-extensionist-position-paper>

²GFRAS. (2017). The New Extensionist Learning Kit. Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services, Switzerland. <http://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/new-extensionist-learning-kit-nelk.html>

Forum for Rural Advisory Services) Consortium on extension education and training, as additional resources and tools that could be used by the participants.

Fig. 1: Matrix depicting important action points to address gaps in existing extension systems



Capacities at organisation/institutional level



This workshop also gave participants an opportunity to think beyond individual capacity building trainings and look at capacity building from an organisational perspective. Most participants emphasised the importance of organisation-level commitment to changes that would enhance their autonomy and freedom to deliver the outputs they desire. Overall, participants envisaged a greater



role for the Human Resources Department, and their role from recruiting the right persons to assessing capacities and identifying the right capacity building trainings according to the actual needs, roles, and responsibilities of the staff.

PRADAN, a renowned NGO, was called upon to present its good practices as an institution committed to regularly updating the skills of the various staff members. The role of HR in identifying the right programmes for the right people and committing at least 20-30 training days per year was seen as critical in ensuring career development and low attrition rates among staff members.

Fig. 2: Matrix depicting the action points and areas for organisational capacity building



Capacity building for each level

A significant aspect of this workshop was the ideation around what capacities must be developed at which level. Participants were asked to reflect on various skills (existing and new) that could be added or developed at each level in the organisation. After identification a priority assessment was conducted and once the three most-voted priority areas were identified (Fig 3), the participants were asked to prepare a roadmap for the execution of these plans (how these capacities will be developed/enhanced), through a ‘world café’ approach requiring participants to move in groups to add inputs at the field level, middle management level, and senior management and organisational levels. The inputs from this exercise will be consolidated into a comprehensive policy note that will be shared as an output of this workshop.



Fig. 3: Top priority capacity development areas at field, middle and senior level



OUR PARTICIPANTS SPEAK



What I took away from this workshop were the various methods used to assess and understand the priorities of capacity building through the priority mapping exercise. We already do this with Community Building officers or the CBOs, but what I learnt from this workshop is the list of themes we need to add when we do this exercise next time with the CBOs, especially in areas relating to new challenges. It is a useful method for helping them identify their training priorities as well. Some of the issues discussed here are not just important for applying to our current situation but for future career development as well. While there was some experience sharing from PRADAN, it would be good to have more exposure visits to these kinds of organisations.

Geetanjali Mohanty, LutheranWorld Service India Trust , Bhubaneswar

Market led extension and adoption of new technologies are the two areas that need to be looked into. The inputs from this workshop must feed into an advocacy plan. This workshop is useful in the sense that if we ever participate/are nominated for committees; the quality of our participation will certainly improve in those contexts.

A.K Sahu, Water Management Specialist, Department of Agriculture, Government of Odisha





Extension is driven by science, not just formal (technical knowledge) science but also tacit knowledge. We are always dealing in the social sciences and society as extension is an activity that deals directly with people. Capacity building must involve both aspects of extension science, technical/scientific and the implicit knowledge aspects of it.

It is important to ask the question: What is an extension officer working for? Most of the current targets are focused on increasing farmers' production, but what is the point of increased production if there is no way to sell the produce? In such a scenario the objective of the extension worker is to not only increase the farmer's production but also increasing his income by selling what he produces. Hence the extension worker's core objective is to resolve this difference. Targets for both should be aligned. The focus of extension activities should be on value chains and the economic systems within which the farmer operates. We need to look at the whole ecosystem and then understand how the farmer can adapt better to the value chain. Extension targets must be evaluated on its effects in terms of impact.

This workshop adds value in the sense that it brings conceptual clarity on various reforms. One of the important suggestions is that, these workshops should involve more senior level staff as the shift must come from the policy level.

Nagesh Kumar Barik, Central Institute of Fisheries and Aquaculture

END NOTE

This workshop served as a forum for extension officers across various organisations and departments so as to critically reflect on their capacities in executing their functions in a dynamic context, as well as to encourage these officers in articulating their capacity development needs in a structured manner. Exchange of ideas during the various sessions helped in exposing these functionaries to new possibilities in extension, and in simultaneously creating space within the extension community to think through some of the challenges they face when trying to work on their mandate. This engagement with capacity building in Extension and Advisory Services is but a single step in tackling the challenges in upgrading techno-managerial skills available within the extension systems and revamping the eco-systems within which extension personnel function. Policy engagement with skill building, identification of priorities and the skills associated with them, and working in tandem with the changing needs of agricultural systems are pressing needs.

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