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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Extension strategies to popularize the scientific technologies among tribal farm women through communication gadgets in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Access to information and improved communication is a crucial requirement for sustainable agricultural development. A study was conducted in two villages of Kothagiri block of Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu. The plant protection measures in tea crop for the pest red spider mite and blister blight disease was selected as the technology. Considering its prime importance, a newness and demand from the tribal farm women and the reconnaissance survey made in the study area paved way to select the technology. The present study was conducted with a specific objective to suggest strategies to popularize the scientific technologies among tribal farm women through communication gadgets like Interactive Multimedia Compact Disc (IMCD) and Web page, is practically feasible methodology that can be followed for farm technology transfer, provided it should be established at the village level as Village Information Shops. The novelty in the transfer of technology approach can be exploited as it is proved effective in the rural tribal community in terms of knowledge gain and symbolic adoption. The involvement of organizations, SHG's, creating rural friendly infrastructure and trainings should be given in operation of communication gadgets at village level to harness the power of IT and empower the tribal farm women.

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Introduction

Advanced communication gadgets when applied to conditions in rural areas can help improve communication, increase participation and disseminate information and share knowledge and adoption. It is being said that "Cyber Extension" would be the major form of technology dissemination in the near future. Improved communication and information access is directly related to social and economic development. However, women in tribal areas are generally less responsive to improved techniques since they are not exposed to these techniques. So, to have the adequate contributors of tribal women in development of the country, it is imperative that the tribal women should be kept abreast with the latest innovations. In order to upgrade their socio-economic status, the only option today is to improve their agricultural productivity

through the adoption of improved technologies and to boost up the overall agricultural productivity. Therefore the role of tribal farm women should be given proper emphasis so that the desirable changes can be brought about in the life style of tribal people. Keeping this in view, the present study was conducted with a specific objective to suggest strategies to popularize the scientific technologies among tribal farm women through Interactive Multimedia Compact Disc and web page.

Materials and Methods

Keeping in view the above objective, the study was conducted in two villages of Kothagiri block of Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu. The plant protection measures in tea crop for the pest red spider mite and blister blight disease was selected as the technology. Considering its prime importance, a newness and demand from the tribal farm women and the reconnaissance survey made in the study area

paved way to select the technology. Four treatments namely Interactive Multimedia Compact Disc, Interactive Multimedia Compact Disc followed by discussion, Web page, Web page followed by discussion were tested for their effectiveness. Before-After Randomized Group Design was used. The experiment was conducted in two villages and the total number of subjects was 120. The data were collected with the help of a well structured interview schedule and the data were analysed using suitable statistical tools.

Results and Discussion

Strategy is a plan designed for a particular purpose or the process of planning / carrying out a plan in a skillful way. Based on the results, the following aspects are considered to popularize the advanced communication gadgets among the farming community.

a. Rural women friendly policy

The State of Tamil Nadu is working towards IT revolution, to empower the people in rural areas so as to bridge the digital divide. Suitable innovative schemes is devised to upgrade the level of its usage in Government departments to encourage and gradually implement rural connectivity which helps for empowerment of women, provide information on various Govt schemes, reducing the need for people to move to urban areas, create rural employment opportunities. This policy is aimed at removing the illiteracy and creating opportunities especially targeting rural areas. This policy can be used for reaching the unreached people, for the tribal farm women also.

b. Involving Self Help Groups

Self Help Groups should be involved in popularization of communication gadgets and moreover groups can be formed to avail computer facility. Group subsidies can be given to purchase computers.

c. Organisations

The information / knowledge gained in research must be transferred in a meaningful and comprehensible way, so that it reaches the end-user, the farm women without much loss of time and content, avoiding seepage of information and distortion. In order to achieve this, there should be effective involvement of organisations like Horticultural Research Station, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, NGO's, KVKs, Community-based organisations for technology transfer through communication gadgets.

d. Awareness Campaigns

Orientation to modern media should be given for tribal farm women and harnessing the use of electronic media and digital revolution. Large scale awareness campaigns can be utilized in a big way to promote communication gadgets for technology transfer.

e. Establishment of Information Shops / Common Services Centers (CSCs) / Information Kiosks

The Common Services Centers Scheme, is to enable Government, private and social sector organizations to align their social and commercial goals for the benefit of the rural population in the remotest corners of the country through a combination of IT-based as well as non-IT-based services. The Public Private Partnership (PPP) model has been proposed for undertaking this challenging task and addressing the related issues in the most effective way. Common Services Centers is positioned as a Change Agent - that would promote rural entrepreneurship, build rural capacities and livelihoods, enable community participation and collective action for social change - through a bottom-up model with focus on the rural citizen. Common Services Centers facilitates integration of the existing ICT enabled and other Government Schemes into the CSC Scheme, trainings, capacity building and awareness campaigns. The State Governments may also like to leverage existing Self Help Groups / NGOs and other well-established and reputed citizen-centric organizations / groups and encourage them to participate in the CSC Scheme, by supporting them in their activities, in areas such as localisation and human resource mobilization. Rural location-specific needed information should be given in the information shops established at the villages. The information shops must provide the information regarding marketing of the produce, Weather news, Agricultural News, Rural Development Programmes. Planners/ policy makers / organizations should establish information shops and computer centre at village level .

f. Creating rural friendly Infrastructure

Womens friendly gadgets can be used so that it will be easy for their operation, Assistance of extension officer to access the information. The reason is unfamiliarity with computer and its operations. Hence the need for subject matter specialist was felt. Infrastructure facilities should be provided to install computers, Computers can be given on hire basis because affordability of computer was not possible. All the tribal farm women expressed that they could not afford to purchase computer, the reason is they possessed marginal and

small sized farms and had low annual income. Tribal farm women liked to use the IMCDs, computers in village administrative office, panchayat office and at community hall because it can be easily accessed by them if it is installed at village premises.

g. Imparting Training

Training should be given in computer utility and browsing of agricultural Websites for tribal farm women & extension workers. Access & familiarize them to communication gadgets. Capacity building programmes to enable the farm women to jump from illiteracy to e-literacy. They preferred extension scientists as trainer and liked their own village as venue of training. So that based on their comfort and convenience they can attend the training.

Conclusion

Orientation to modern media should be given for tribal farm women and harnessing the use of electronic media and digital revolution. Large scale awareness campaigns can be utilized in a big way to promote communication gadgets for technology transfer. Rural location-specific needed information should be given in the information shops established at the villages. Training should be given in computer utility and browsing of agricultural Websites for tribal farm women & extension workers. Capacity building programmes to enable the farm women to jump from illiteracy to e-literacy. All the above mentioned strategies increases self confidence / capacity building in using communication gadgets and pave way for the behavioural change of the tribal farm women which results in higher productivity, profitability and prosperity.

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