

**National Seminar on Agriculture Extension**  
**27-28<sup>th</sup> February, 2009, NAS Complex, PUSA, New Delhi**

**Background Note**

There has been a steady transformation of Indian agriculture from the food deficit subsistence farming to food self-sufficient commercial farming. Modern technologies, dedicated efforts of Indian farmers and the programmatic support of Central and State governments have all contributed significantly for the current land mark achievement of 230.67 million tones food production. However, sustaining this growth rate and achieving the required foodgrain production of 320 million tonnes by 2025 would be a Herculean task considering some of the challenges like non-expanding land, depleting soil and water resources, adverse impacts of climate change, rising cost of production, diminishing agri labour availability and farmers' reduced interest in agriculture. Addressing these complex issues requires multi-prolonged strategies to have an effective and efficient service delivery mechanism which meets the diverse needs of a better informed, skillful farming community in terms of technologies and policies.

Agriculture being the State subject in India, the agriculture development largely depends on its extension machinery. Many States are, however, finding it difficult to empower the farmers with the requested knowledge, skills, technology and input support as the extension machinery is not only depleted in terms of manpower but also burdened with so many additional tasks other than the advisory services. This is also reflected through the findings of National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) report which reveals that only 40% of the Indian farmers are reached by extension service providers.

Fortunately, agriculture extension in India is more of pluralistic in nature wherein large number of private and informal extension service providers co-exist with the public extension system. The opportunity in the form of convergence of extension service providers under the overall ambit of public extension system may help to change the scenario, if properly stewarded.

It is in this context that the Ministry of Agriculture finds it relevant to organize a National Seminar on Agriculture Extension which may provide a forum to bring all stakeholders viz. extension service providers as well as representatives of farming community at one platform to share the experiences/ lessons and jointly work for the future strategies to meet the impending challenges.

The seminar would deal on five major issues concerning agriculture extension namely (i) Knowledge Management for Agriculture Extension; (ii) Public Extension System with focus on Convergence of Extension Systems; (iii) ICT and Mass Media Role in Agriculture Extension; (iv) Private Sector initiatives including PPP in Extension; and (v) Farmer Led and Market Led Extension Approaches.

Due to changing face of agriculture, the farmers today have to make number of complex decisions, e.g. what technological option could be used profitably keeping in view the potential resource constraints (land, capital, labour and knowledge); how to manage various technologies (optimal use of new inputs); how and when to change the farming system (from crop production to diversified agriculture); how, when, where to buy inputs and sell produce at a competitive rate; how to collectively decide on resource use and marketing; how and where to quickly find the most relevant and reliable knowledge and information; and what would be the implications on the farming if the trade in agriculture is liberalized and subsidies phased out? The most important challenge for the present day extension managers is thus to help farmers to take such appropriate decisions.

The arrangements for agriculture extension in India have grown over last six decades, in terms of activities, organizational types and available manpower. While the public sector extension is represented by State Departments, SAUs and ICAR Institutes, the private sector extension is represented by input agencies, mass media (print and electronic), Non Governmental Organizations

(NGOs), Producers Associations etc. The performance of public extension system has come under scrutiny for quite some time and questions are being raised on its capability to deliver goods in the rapidly changing environment. To be effective and remain relevant in the years to come, the public extension system has to play the role of a 'facilitator' or an 'enabler'. The ability of the system to perform this role would entirely depend upon the pace with which it promotes synergy and convergence amongst various service providers. **Achieving convergence and complementarities is thus the greatest challenge the public extension system in India is confronted with.**

The shifting emphasis of Indian agriculture towards diversification, commercialization, sustainability and efficiency has made it necessary for the extension machinery to critically examine its extension approaches, strategies and technological content. The success of a farmer in the years to come is since going to be primarily dependent upon his level of knowledge, the next big challenge for the extension agencies, apart from establishing necessary linkages, is the management of knowledge. The overall goal of knowledge management is accelerating learning, innovation and adoption to maximize agriculture prosperity. The new ways of managing knowledge have emphasized participation, collaboration and joint learning between farmers and other agents. It requires organizations and individuals to identify, create, accumulate, re-use apply and distribute both explicit (formal knowledge) and tacit (informal) knowledge. **The knowledge since makes it possible to produce more with less land, labour and other resources, its management and timely availability gains needed impetus in present day context.** In many countries, farmers, who are farming at a knowledge level of a good farmer of 10 years ago, have to go out of business because they can no longer compete with more competent farmers

In view of the constrains faced by public extension system in terms of limited resources, wide ratio between farmers and extension personnel and added responsibility of handling emerging issues like marketing extension, agri-business, quality consciousness and WTO, **the need of the hour is to promote**

**a multi agency extension system. Such a system would contrast of private / corporate sector, farmers organizations, co-operatives, NGOs, para professionals, agripreneurs, self-help groups, input dealers and suppliers, electronic and print media and information technology each contributing according to its own strength and capabilities.** There exist outside the public domain not only vast financial resources but a whole universe of talent and wisdom which can meaningfully serve the agrarian community. We need to harness all possible resources, both human and financial, for the gigantic task of meeting the diverse needs of our farming community. It would be a great challenge to achieve convergence in the light of multiple approaches and priorities of innumerable private extension service providers. The platform created in the public extension system for such a convergence through ATMA needs to be fully exploited by private service providers, including corporates.

Farmer led and Market-led extension has so far remained a peripheral issue in the present day extension scenario which now needs to be brought to the center-stage. Banking upon the principle of 'seeing and harvesting is believing', it is the farmers themselves who need to be promoted as extension agents. Effective models of farmer to farmer extension such as Farm Schools being run by outstanding farmers themselves under ATMA Programme need to be promoted sincerely and effectively. Also, in order to make agriculture a more profitable venture the production needs to be guided by market requirements. The extension system is to thus gear up for developing necessary skills in identification and analysis of market demand for agricultural products; to support the farmers for profitable marketing of their produce and to expose them to successful experiences of market led extension. **The combination of farmer led and market led extension systems is to be promoted** as is evident from the successful models of Mahagrapes, Amul, Rubber Board etc.

In our pursuit of achieving twin challenges of livelihood promotion and sustained economic growth through technology intervention, the importance of extension services cannot be overemphasized. The extension system ought to be efficient enough to solve both the first mile and last mile problems through cost effective, easily deployable and maintainable information mediation. **Integrated use of both the conventional as well as upcoming electronic media like Intra and Internet, Information Kiosk, Cable T.V., Radio (including HAM, Community Radio), Mobile Telephones, Vernacular Press and other Print Media is the way forward for reaching the last mile with the pooling and effective use of Information and Communication resources.**

It is expected that the deliberations of the Seminar would encourage all the stakeholders like State Departments, Private Agribusiness firms, NGOs, Farmers Organizations, Agripreneurs, Marketing Agencies and Farmers to build a consensus on the future course of action to have in place a strong extension system which is farmer driven and has involvement of and space for all stakeholders without duplication of their efforts and resources.