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An Assessment of challenges faced by farmers in receiving agro services from input dealers: A comprehensive study

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Abstract

The present study was carried out in Nagar Kurnool and Wanaparthy districts of Telangana state to find out the problems being faced by the farmers in receiving agro services from the input dealers. Garrett ranking was employed to study the problems which were categorised into technical, market related, financial and social problems. The findings of the study revealed that staff working in the input shops do not have proper knowledge of the products being sold ranked first among various technical problems faced by the farmers while purchasing the inputs (Garrett Mean Score - 68). Among market related problems, unavailability of the required inputs during offseason was the first and foremost problem faced by farmers while purchasing inputs from the input dealers (Garrett Mean Score - 66.71). Obtaining crop loans from banks was a tiresome process and input dealers are biased towards large farmers were ranked first among financial problems and social problems respectively. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to improve the knowledge and skills of input dealers, enhance supply chain management, simplify financial processes, and address social inequities in the provision of agro services.

Keywords: Farmers, input dealers, agro services, garet ranking

1. Introduction

Dominance of agriculture and allied sectors in Indian economy since ages needs no special mention (Kumar *et al.*, 2024; Chauhan *et al.*, 2022) ^[10, 5]. From traditional subsistence-oriented agriculture to a commercial one, Indian agriculture has gone through many gradual changes. In the rapidly evolving landscape of agriculture, the role of agro-advisory services has become increasingly vital. These services provide farmers with essential information and guidance on various aspects of farming, including crop management, pest control, irrigation, and market trends. According to Christoplos (2010) ^[6] agricultural extension is a system that facilitate the access of farmers, their organizations and other market actors to knowledge, information and technologies; facilitate their interaction with partner in research, education, agri-business and other relevant institution; and assist them to develop their own technical, organizational and management skills and practices". Agricultural extension service role in India is being played by several actors like public and private extension systems. Public extension services are managed by state agricultural departments and the Directorate of Extension at the national level. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and its institutes, along with Krishi Vigyan Kendra's (KVKs), as well as State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) through their research stations and KVKs, facilitate frontline extension at the district level. On the other hand, private extension services are primarily provided by companies that market agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and

farm machinery, often delivered through their dealers, marketing personnel, and contact farmers. Among private extension sources, input dealers play a crucial role in terms of credibility among farmers (Babu *et al.*, 2012; Khose, 2004) ^[3, 9]. The success of farming activities largely depends on the timely and efficient delivery of agro services, particularly those provided by input dealers (Manasa *et al.*, 2023) ^[11]. These services include the supply of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and other essential inputs that are crucial for crop production. Despite the importance of these services, farmers often encounter various challenges when dealing with input dealers, which can negatively impact their productivity and overall well-being. Input dealers serve as the primary link between farmers and the agricultural input market, making their role crucial in ensuring that farmers have access to quality products and relevant advice. However, several issues, such as lack of transparency, misinformation, high costs, and limited access to credit, have been reported by farmers, leading to dissatisfaction and reduced trust in the services provided by these dealers. These challenges not only hinder the adoption of modern farming practices but also exacerbate the difficulties faced by farmers in sustaining their agricultural activities. This study aims to explore the specific problems that farmers encounter when receiving agro services from input dealers.

Methodology

The Present study was conducted using Ex-Post facto research design during 2023 in Nagar Kurnool and Wanaparthy districts of Telangana state which were

randomly selected for the purpose of the study.

Under Nagar Kurnool district, Nagar Kurnool, Achampet and Kalwakurthy were randomly selected with 20 farmers from each mandal making a total of 60 farmers from the district. Similarly, under Wanaparthy district, Wanaparthy, Gopalpet and Pebbair were selected randomly with 20 farmers from each mandal making a total of 60 farmers again. Thus, the total sample size equals to 120. Data was collected with a specially designed interview schedule through personal interview method. The data collected was tabulated and analysed using Garrett ranking method.

Results and Discussion

Problems faced by the farmers in receiving Agro Services from Input dealers

The problems faced by the farmers in receiving agro services from the input dealers were studied under different heads like technical problems, market related problems, financial problems, social problems

Technical problems

Table 1: Technical problems faced by the farmers in purchasing agricultural inputs

S. No.	Technical related problems	Total Garrett	Garrett Mean Score	Rank
1.	Lack of business expertise in the input dealer	2425	40.41	IV
2.	Wide variety of inputs are not available in the shop	2435	40.58	III
3.	Staff lacks proper knowledge of the products	4080	68	I
4.	Input dealers doesn't give accurate information on crop queries	3525	58.75	II

Market related problems

An analysis of Table 2 unfolds that unavailability of the required inputs during offseason was the first and foremost problem faced by farmers while purchasing inputs from the input dealers. This might be because during off season, farmers might be engaged in non- agricultural activities and there won't be enough business activity for the dealers.

The findings from Table 1 reveal that, staff working in the input shops do not have proper knowledge of the products being sold ranked first among various technical problems faced by the farmers while purchasing the inputs. It might be due to the reason that these workers end up working for low wages in these shops usually comes from low education background.

Second most expressed problem was that input dealers doesn't give accurate information on crop queries followed by the third problem wide variety of inputs are not available in the shop. This emphasizes the need for training the input dealers in various crop related aspects to help update them with necessary information and upgrade their skills. Similar findings were given by Agashe *et al.*, 2023 ^[1]; Bamigboye, & Adeniji, 2022 ^[2]. Least complained problem was that the business dealers do not have enough business expertise. This is in agreement with the findings of Agashe *et al.*, 2023 ^[1] that the input dealers had a medium level of business expertise

Lack of promised on time delivery of inputs and dealers do not provide satisfactory after support to the farmers were ranked 2nd and 3rd. The concern for quality inputs was ranked 4th and that shop is not easily accessible to all ranked 5th among other market related problems. Similar findings were reported by Deepa *et al.*, 2021 ^[7].

Table 2: Market related problems faced by the farmers in purchasing agricultural inputs

S. No.	Market related problems	Total Garrett	Garrett Mean Score	Rank
1.	Quality of the inputs is a concern	3216	52.76	IV
2.	Shop is not easily accessible to all	2438	41.30	V
3.	Dealers do not provide satisfactory after support to the farmers	2664	46.73	III
4.	Promised on time delivery of products is lacking	2570	42.56	II
5.	Required inputs are not available during offseason	4001	66.61	I

Financial problems

The results obtained from Table 3 depicts that obtaining crop loans from banks as a tiresome process was ranked as the first problem concerning the farmers. Second most problem expressed was that heavy prices are charged for the inputs and third was that input dealers don't sell products on credit. Input dealers expressed that they get a very low margin for the agricultural inputs and hence they can't give sell them at heavy discounts to the farmers. They also mentioned that late repayment by the farmers is a very

serious problem being faced by them and hence they discontinued selling the inputs on credit basis (Reddy *et al.*, 2020) ^[12]. Lastly, input dealers not hiring machinery/ implements was complained as the 4th problem of all. The possible reason for this might be that there were custom hiring centres in the state that offer farm implements on hire at nominal costs to the farmers. So, the input dealers might not be renting the implements because of low demand from the farmers (Kadaraiah *et al.*, 2022) ^[8].

Table 3: Financial problems faced by the farmers in purchasing agricultural inputs

S. No.	Financial problems	Total Garrett	Garrett Mean Score	Rank
1.	Input dealers don't sell products on credit.	2852	47.53	III
2.	Obtaining crop loans from banks is a tiresome process	3702	61.7	I
3.	Heavy prices are charged for the inputs	3293	54.88	II
4.	Input dealers don't hire machinery/ implements	2153	35.88	IV

Social problems

Table 4 gives a glimpse of the social problems faced by the farmers while purchasing the agricultural inputs. Among all input dealers are biased towards large farmers received the first rank with highest Total Garrett score (3781) and the highest Garrett Mean Score (63.02), which suggests that farmers perceive bias towards large farmers as the most severe or important social problem.

Table 4: Financial problems faced by the farmers in purchasing agricultural inputs

S. No.	Social problems	Total Garrett	Garrett Mean Score	Rank
1.	Input dealers are not friendly with the farmers.	1952	32.60	IV
2.	Input dealers are biased towards large farmers	3731	61.02	I
3.	Input dealers are not empathetic towards the farmers	2544	42.13	III
4.	Input dealers discriminate farmers based on the caste	3218	54.23	II

Conclusion

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the various challenges faced by farmers in receiving agro services from input dealers, categorized under technical, market-related, financial, and social problems. The most significant technical issue identified is the lack of proper knowledge among the staff working in input shops along with farmers concern over the inaccuracy of information provided by input dealers. Market-related challenges are led by the unavailability of required inputs during the offseason, indicating a gap in the supply chain during critical periods. Concerns over the quality of inputs and the accessibility of shops to all farmers were also highlighted, underscoring the need for improvements in market dynamics and infrastructure. The financial hurdles encountered by farmers are dominated by the cumbersome process of obtaining crop loans from banks. High input prices and the reluctance of input dealers to sell products on credit further strain the financial resources of farmers. Social challenges reveal a troubling bias among input dealers towards large farmers, with caste-based discrimination also being a significant issue. The lack of empathy and friendliness from input dealers towards farmers further exacerbates the social divide, creating an environment of distrust and inequality in the provision of agro services. Addressing these technical, market, financial, and social issues, is very important to make the agricultural input delivery system more efficient, equitable, and farmer-friendly which ultimately leads to better agricultural outcomes and improved livelihoods for farmers. Hence, an attempt was made to provide some suggestions based on the study which were mentioned below.

- 1. Capacity building for input dealers:** Training programs should be developed to enhance the knowledge and technical skills of input dealers and their staff. These programs should cover crop-related aspects, product knowledge, and customer service skills to ensure that farmers receive accurate and helpful advice.
- 2. Supply chain improvements:** To address the unavailability of inputs during the offseason, efforts should be made to strengthen supply chain management. Input dealers could be encouraged to maintain a more consistent stock of inputs throughout the year, possibly through incentives or support from the government or agricultural organizations.

Second most complained was that Input dealers discriminate farmers based on caste which indicates prevalence of caste-based discrimination in the study area. Input dealers are not empathetic towards the farmers ranked III and Input dealers are not friendly with the farmers is ranked IV indicating that while this issue is still important, it was perceived as less severe compared to the others.

- 3. Financial support reforms:** Simplifying the process of obtaining crop loans and offering more flexible financial products could alleviate the financial strain on farmers. Additionally, input dealers could be encouraged or incentivized to offer credit options to farmers, especially small-scale ones, to ensure they can access necessary inputs without immediate financial pressure.
- 4. Addressing social inequities:** Policymakers and agricultural bodies should work together to ensure fair treatment of all farmers, regardless of their size or caste. This could involve implementing stricter regulations against discriminatory practices and promoting awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of equitable treatment.
- 5. Enhanced market access:** Improving the physical accessibility of input shops and ensuring that they are evenly distributed across different regions could help address market-related issues. Furthermore, encouraging input dealers to offer reliable after-sales support and timely delivery of products would significantly improve the overall experience for farmers.

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