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Role performance of farmers interest group members in agricultural technology management agency activities

¹Dipali Chougule, ²DD Suradkar and ³Jyoti M Deshmukh

¹M.Sc. Student, Department of Agricultural extension education, College of Agriculture, Latur, Maharashtra, India

^{2,3}Professor, Department of Agricultural extension education, College of Agriculture, Latur, Maharashtra, India

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Corresponding Author: Dipali Chougule

Abstract

The present study was carried out in the Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district of Maharashtra State. From Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district, two tehsils namely Phulambri and Khultabad were selected. From each selected tehsil four Farmers Interest Groups were selected. Thus, total eight Farmers Interest Groups were selected from two tehsils for the study. From each selected farmer interest group, fifteen respondents were selected. Thus, 120 respondents were selected for the study. The study was based on an ex-post facto research design. The study indicated that, the majority of the respondents had a medium level of role performance in Agricultural Technology Management Agency activities. Overall findings indicated that the majority of the respondents had a medium level of role performance (65.83%) in ATMA activities, followed by respondents with high level of role performance (18.34%), Whereas, 15.83 per cent of the respondents had low level of role performance.

The study identified several constraints faced by the respondents in participating in ATMA activities. The majority of respondents were reported delay in receiving funds and subsidies under ATMA programmes (95.00%), followed by the need for conducting meetings on farmer's fields (86.67%). Further, 83.33 per cent of the respondents reported that traditional farming practices were affected because of ATMA, while 81.67 per cent stated that engagement in farming practices was a constraint in participating in the programmes and activities of ATMA. The constraints indicate the need for timely distribution of funds and subsidies, and suitable timing for programmes for better role performance.

Keywords: Agricultural technology management agency, ATMA, farmers interest groups, role performance

Introduction

Agriculture is one of the most important sectors of the Indian economy, contributing substantially to food security, employment and the livelihoods of rural households. The adoption of improved agricultural technologies depends considerably on the effectiveness of extension services. Agricultural extension serves as a link between research institutions and farmers by facilitating the dissemination of scientific knowledge, improved technologies and innovative practices. Strengthening extension systems is therefore essential for enhancing farm productivity, profitability and sustainable agricultural development.

To make agricultural extension more decentralized, demand-driven and farmer-oriented, the Government of India introduced the Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) under the National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP) in 1998. ATMA is an autonomous district-level institution established to improve coordination among research institutions, extension agencies, farmers and other stakeholders. It promotes participatory planning and implementation of agricultural development programmes according to local needs. The ATMA approach was initially implemented on a pilot basis in 28 districts of seven states, including Maharashtra. In Maharashtra, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, Ahilyanagar, Ratnagiri and Amravati were among the districts selected for pilot

implementation. Following encouraging results, the approach was expanded nationwide and is now implemented in more than 700 districts, including all 34 districts of Maharashtra under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme, Support to State Extension Programs for Extension Reforms.

ATMA is the institutional structure operates at district, block and village levels. At the district level, the Governing Board and Management Committee provide guidance, planning, coordination and monitoring. At the block level, the Farm Information and Advisory Centre functions through the Block Technology Team and Farmers Advisory Committee. At the village level, Farmers Interest Groups (FIGs) provide an important platform for farmer participation in extension activities.

Farmers Interest Groups are voluntary groups of farmers having common interests in a particular crop, enterprise, farming system or agricultural activity. Under ATMA, FIGs facilitate collective learning, experience sharing, adoption of improved technologies and efficient utilization of resources. They also improve farmers' access to training, demonstrations, exposure visits, market information, institutional credit, government schemes and advisory services. Generally, FIGs comprise 11 to 25 farmers and may be facilitated by extension personnel, NGOs, para-extension workers and other agencies. Commodity-based FIGs can further be organized into Farmer Associations at the block

level and Farm Federations at the district level, strengthening collective decision-making, market linkages and bargaining power.

Objectives

1. To study the role performance of Farmers Interest Group members in ATMA activities.
2. To study the constraints faced by Farmers Interest Group members in ATMA and suggestions made by them.

Materials and Methods

The present study was carried out in the Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district of Maharashtra State. From Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district, two tehsils namely Phulambri and Khultabad were selected. From each selected tehsil four Farmers Interest Groups were selected. Thus, total eight Farmers Interest Groups were selected from two tehsils for the study. From each selected farmer interest group, fifteen respondents were selected. Thus, 120 respondents were selected for the study. The study was based on an ex-post facto research design. The collected data were analysed using frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean and standard deviation.

Role performance refers to the extent to which the Farmers

Interest Group (FIG) members perform the roles and responsibilities assigned to them in various ATMA activities. It indicates the degree of participation, involvement and contribution of FIG members in different activities undertaken under ATMA. Role performed by respondents was asked to give the response on three categories of structured schedule viz; strongly agree, agree and undecided and scores were assigned to 3,2 and 1 respectively.

Results and Discussion

Role performance refers to the extent to which the Farmers Interest Group (FIG) members perform the roles and responsibilities assigned to them in various ATMA activities. In the present investigation, role performance was assessed with respect to the involvement of FIG members in various ATMA activities, including participation in meetings, training programmes, demonstrations, dissemination of agricultural information, interaction with extension agencies and other group-based activities. The extent of performance of these roles reflects the active involvement of FIG members in ATMA activities. Thus, role performance of FIG members was considered as the dependent variable in the present study and was measured based on their performance in different ATMA-related activities.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents according to their role performance in ATMA activities

SL. No.	Statements	Degree of statement		
		SA Freq (%)	A Freq (%)	UD Freq (%)
1.	Preparing points to speak on issues.	36 (30.00)	72 (60.00)	12 (10.00)
2.	Discussing problems and solutions with scientists.	25 (20.83)	75 (62.50)	20 (16.67)
3.	Continuously sending feedback to the ATMA office.	30 (25.00)	79 (65.83)	11 (9.17)
4.	Giving feedback to the ATMA office about difficulties in adopting various technologies.	29 (24.16)	73 (60.83)	18 (15.00)
5.	Attending training program regularly.	29 (24.16)	68 (56.67)	23 (19.17)
6.	Coordinating the efforts of the entire group.	34 (28.33)	76 (63.33)	10 (8.33)
7.	Providing information about responsibilities and roles within the farmer group.	30 (25.00)	74 (61.67)	16 (13.33)
8.	Expressing recognition and consent for the group's work.	33 (27.50)	68 (56.67)	19 (15.83)
9.	Assisting in finding the difficulties of the farmer group according to local conditions.	21 (17.50)	85 (70.83)	14 (11.67)
10.	Meeting ATMA scheme officers from time to time.	38 (31.66)	63 (52.50)	19 (15.83)
11.	Participate in planning and decision making related to group activities.	35 (29.16)	72 (60.00)	13 (10.83)
12.	Encourage non-members to participate in ATMA programmes.	30 (25.00)	80 (66.67)	10 (8.33)
13.	Disseminate agricultural information among fellow farmers.	32 (26.66)	75 (62.50)	13 (10.83)
14.	Encourage collective purchase of agricultural inputs.	23 (19.16)	72 (60.00)	25 (20.83)
15.	Encourage farmers to use government agricultural schemes.	17 (14.16)	68 (56.67)	35 (29.17)

Note: SA – Strongly Agree, A- Agree, UD-Undecided

The data presented in the table 1 findings about role performance of FIG members indicated that, preparing points to speak on issues was with three-fifth (60.00%) was agreed.

Another 30.00 per cent reported that, it was strongly agreed, while 10.00 per cent indicated that, they were undecided. Regarding discussing problems and solutions with scientists,

a substantial majority (62.50%) reported that, it was agreed. In comparison, 20.83 per cent stated strongly agreed and 16.67 per cent indicated undecided. For continuously sending feedback to the ATMA office, majority (65.83%) reported that, it was agreed. Additionally, 25.00 per cent indicated strongly agreed, while 9.17 per cent stated undecided. With respect to giving feedback to the ATMA office about difficulties in adopting various technologies, majority (60.83%) indicated that, it was agreed. Furthermore, 24.16 per cent reported strongly agreed and 15.00 per cent indicated undecided. Similarly, attending training programme regularly was reported as agreed by more than half (56.67%) of the respondents. Another 24.16 per cent stated strongly agreed, 19.17 per cent indicated undecided. Regarding coordinating the efforts of the entire group, nearly two-third (63.33%) reported that, it was agreed. In addition, 28.33 per cent indicated strongly agreed, while 8.33 per cent were undecided.

Regarding providing information about responsibilities and roles within the farmer group, majority (61.67%) reported that, it was agreed. Another 25.00 per cent stated strongly agreed and 13.33 per cent indicated undecided. For expressing recognition and consent for the group's work, more than half (56.67%) reported that, it was agreed. Additionally, 27.50 per cent indicated strongly agreed, while 15.83 per cent stated undecided. With respect to assisting in finding the difficulties of the farmer group according to local conditions, majority (70.83%) indicated that, it was agreed. Furthermore, 17.50 per cent reported strongly agreed and 11.67 per cent indicated undecided. Regarding meeting ATMA scheme officers from time to time, more than half (52.50%) of the respondents reported that, it was agreed. Another 31.66 per cent stated strongly agreed, 15.83 per cent indicated undecided. Similarly, participating in planning and decision making related to group activities was reported as agreed by three-fifth (60.00%) of the respondents. In addition, 29.16 per cent indicated strongly agreed, while 10.83 per cent stated undecided. Regarding encouraging non-members to participate in ATMA programmes, more than two-third (66.67%) reported that, it was agreed. Another

25.00 per cent indicated strongly agreed and 8.33 per cent were undecided. For disseminating agricultural information among fellow farmers, nearly two-third (62.50%) reported that, it was agreed. Additionally, 26.66 per cent stated strongly agreed, while 10.83 per cent indicated undecided. Regarding encouraging collective purchase of agricultural inputs, three-fifth (60.00%) reported that, it was agreed. Furthermore, 19.16 per cent indicated strongly agreed and 20.83 per cent stated undecided. Finally, concerning encouraging farmers to use government agricultural schemes, more than half (56.67%) reported that, it was agreed. In addition, 14.16 per cent indicated strongly agreed, while 29.17 per cent were undecided.

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents according to their overall role performance in ATMA activities N = 120

SL. No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low (up to 26)	19	15.83
2.	Medium (27 to 36)	79	65.83
3.	High (above 36)	22	18.34
	Total	120	100.00

The data presented in the Table 2 indicated that, the majority (65.83%) of the respondents belonged to the medium level of role performance, followed by 18.34 per cent of the respondents who belonged to the high level of role performance. Whereas, 15.83 per cent of the respondents were found in the low level of role performance.

Constraints faced by Farmers Interest Group members in ATMA activities

Constraint refers as situation or circumstances which is responsible to restrict or limit the activity or a performance of an individual. In this study it operationalized as the items of difficulties experienced by the Farmers Interest Group members in ATMA activities. Agreements of each respondent against enumerated constraints were sum up separately and converted into percentage.

Table 3: Constraints faced by respondents in ATMA activities

SL. No.	Constraints	Yes	No	Rank
		Freq (%)	Freq (%)	
1.	The frequency of meeting should be increased instead of six months under NARP	93 (77.50)	27 (22.50)	V
2.	Meeting should be conducted on farmers field	104 (86.67)	16 (13.33)	II
3.	Engaged in farming practices was major constraints in participating the programme and activities of ATMA	98 (81.67)	22 (18.33)	IV
4.	The technology provided by ATMA is expensive.	87 (72.50)	33 (27.50)	VI
5.	The information provided by ATMA is not suitable to our local culture.	62 (51.67)	58 (48.33)	VIII
6.	There are differences in the information provided by government and non-government organizations.	79 (65.83)	41 (34.17)	VII
7.	Because of ATMA, our traditional farming practices are affected.	100 (83.33)	20 (16.67)	III
8.	Due to ATMA, the cost of farming practices increases unnecessarily.	57 (47.50)	63 (52.50)	IX
9.	Delay in receiving funds and subsidies under ATMA programmes	114 (95.00)	6 (5.00)	I

The data presented in the Table 3 revealed that, (95.00%) of the respondents reported delay in receiving funds and subsidies under ATMA programmes as a major constraint, (86.67) of the respondents indicated that meetings should be conducted on farmers' fields. Further, (83.33%) reported that traditional farming practices were affected because of ATMA, while (81.67%) stated that engagement in farming practices was a constraint in participating in the programmes and activities of ATMA. (77.50) of the respondents reported that the frequency of meetings should be increased instead of six months under NARP. In addition, (72.50%) indicated that the technology provided by ATMA was expensive. (65.83%) reported differences in the information provided by government and non-government organizations, while (51.67%) stated that the information provided by ATMA was not suitable to their local culture, Whereas only (47.50%) reported that the cost of farming practices increased unnecessarily due to ATMA.

Conclusion

The study concluded that the majority of the respondents had a medium level of role performance in ATMA activities, followed by those with high level and low level of role performance. Thus, overall role performance level among the respondents was predominantly medium.

The study further concluded that respondents encountered several constraints while performing ATMA activities, participating in ATMA activities were delay in receiving funds and subsidies under ATMA programmes. Many of them stated that engagement in farming practices was a constraint in participating in the programmes and activities of ATMA.

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