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COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AMONG CONTACT FARMERS IN KERALA*

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In Kerala, the Training and Visit System of Agricultural Extension was first introduced in 1981 in Trivandrum, Quilon and Alleppey districts and was subsequently extended to the remaining districts of the State. A notable feature of the Training and Visit System is the efforts made to materialise the 'multiplier effect' in communication of innovations by selecting representatives from identified groups to serve as contact farmers. The various technologies generating from the research system are conveyed to the contact farmers through the extension system in the form of meaningful messages (Benor and Harison, 1976). But, a contact farmer needs to know not only about the technical messages necessary for improving agricultural production, but should also possess the much desired 'communication skills' to give effect to the transfer of technologies thus known. As Chesterfield and Ruddle (1976) pointed out well-chosen intermediaries, such as the contact farmers, enhance the effectiveness of interpersonal communication in the diffusion of agricultural innovation in the rural communities. Since the success of the Training and Visit System depends, to a great extent, on the efficiency of the communication behaviour of contact farmers, it was felt desirable to explore into the communication patterns that exist among the contact farmers.

Materials and Methods

Of the three districts in which Training and Visit System was first introduced in Kerala, Trivandrum district was randomly selected as the locale for the study. All the three agricultural sub-division under the Training and Visit System in the district viz., Attingal, Neyyattinkara and Nedumangad were selected for the study. One hundred contact farmers were selected using a three-stage random sampling procedure. The data were collected by interviewing the respondents individually with the help of pre-tested schedule developed for the purpose of this study.

To find communication patterns among contact farmers, four specific activities viz., information receipt or input, information processing consisting of information decoding and information encoding, information communication or output and information feedback were taken into consideration. These four aspects were measured in terms of improved cultivation practices for coconut since coconut is an important crop in the study area.

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Information input was operationally defined as the "oftenness" of receipt of information about improved cultivation practices for coconut from different inter-personal communication sources by the contact farmers.

Information decoding was operationalised as the "oftenness" of difficulty felt by the contact farmers in understanding the technical message related to coconut cultivation.

Information encoding was operationalised as the "oftenness" of difficulty felt by the contact farmers in processing technical information connected with coconut cultivation into meaningful messages of simple words.

Information output was operationalised as the "oftenness" of utilization of different interpersonal communication methods by the contact farmers for dissemination of technical information related to coconut cultivation to fellow farmers.

Information feedback was operationalised as the "oftenness" of receipt of opinion, feeling, doubts, ideas, thoughts, etc., from fellow farmers through different interpersonal communication methods as a result of information given by contact farmers on technical, managerial and input supply aspects related to coconut cultivation.

Results and Discussion

1, Information input

The extent of receipt of technical information from interpersonal communication sources (information input) by contact farmers is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Extent of receipt of technical information from interpersonal communication sources information input) by contact farmers (n = 100)

Sl. no.	Interpersonal information sources	Score	Rank
1	Agricultural Demonstrators	170	1
2	Junior Agricultural Officers	45	2
3	Friends	30	3
4	Neighbours	28	4
5	Relative	26	5
6	Fellow contact farmers	18	6
7	Non-contact farmers of the area	8	7
8	Commercial agents	7	8
9	Personnel of the research stations	5	9
10	Personnel of the village institutions (Co-operatives and Panchayat)	3	10
11	Local leaders	1	11

It could be observed from the data furnished in Table 1 that contact farmers received most of the information on coconut cultivation from Agricultural Demonstrators of the Department of Agriculture. Easy accessibility to Agricultural Demonstrators, ready advice given by them and periodical contacts between the Agricultural Demonstrators and contact farmers could be attributed as the reasons for this phenomenon.

2, *Information processing*

The results relating to the information processing patterns of contact farmers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Information processing patterns of contact farmers (n=100)

Sl. No,	Processing aspects (messages)	Decoding		Encoding	
		Score	Rank	Score	Rank
1	M_1	198	1	193	1
2	M_7	193	2	175	2
3	M_8	189	3	168	4
4	M_4	186	4	167	3
5	M_6	172	5	151	5
6	M_9	169	6	127	6
7	M_5	138	7	111	7
8	M_2	132	8	94	9
9	M_3	131	9	100	8

M_1 = Improved varieties of coconut may be planted

M_2 = For the control of rhinoceros beetle, 35 g of 50% BHC or carbaryl for every 0.3m³ of breeding material may be used

M_3 : For the control of red palm weevits, attacked palms may be injected with carbaryl (20 g in 1 litre) or 1% DDVP or aluminium phosphide may be used

M_4 = For the control of red palm weevils, when green leaves are cut from the palms, stumps of not less than 120 cm may be left on the trees

M_5 = For the control of blackheaded caterpillar, the application of insecticide may be followed up by liberation of parasites from 21 st day

M_6 : To the extent possible, only straight fertilizers may be applied

M. : Fertilizer may not be applied when there is heavy rainfall

M_8 : Fertilizer may be applied only after irrigation

M_9 : Seedling upto two years from planting may be irrigated at the rate of about 4.5 litres of water/seedling once in four days.

With the increase in the complexity of technical content of the messages, both encoding and decoding became difficult. This is evident from the ranks obtained for the messages M1 and M2 tor both encoding and decoding. The results also pointed out that there was a latent relationship between decoding-encoding difficulty and the cost aspects of the messages. The result that message M4, which is a no cost technology having obtained fourth rank for encoding difficulty and third rank for decoding difficulty testifies this relationship.

3. Communication pattern of technical information (information output) on coconut cultivation by contact farmers

The data pertaining to the frequency of communication of contact farmers with different categories of farmers are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequency of communication of contact farmers with different category of farmers (n = 100)

Sl. No.	Categories of farmers of communication	Score	Rank
1	Non-contact farmers of the area	88	1
2	Friends	56	2
3	Neighbours	55	3
4	Fellow contact farmers	37	4
5	Non-contact farmers of other areas	28	5
6	Local leaders	17	6

It is evident from the data (Table 3) that contact farmers communicated technical information to non-contact farmers of their own area more frequently, It could also be observed that only little time was spent for communication of information to peers.

4. Information feedback

Data pertaining to different types of information feedback are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Types of information feedback received by contact farmers (n = 100)

Sl. No.	Types of information feedback	Score	Rank
1	Communication of feedback information related to technical aspects	42	1
2	Communication of feedback information regarding sanction of loans	20	2
3	Communication of feedback information regarding supply of inputs	6	3

(Maximum score obtainable for each type of information feedback = 300)

Out of the three types of information feedback, communication of information related to technical aspects was the most important form of feedback. Since the messages relate to complex technical aspects, feedback will also be more with regard to technical aspects.

However, the extent of feedback, in general, was poor since the score obtained compared to the maximum score obtainable for each type of information feedback was very iow. The felfow farmers may not be considering the contact farmers as competent for clarifying their doubts. It will be more so in the initial stages since the Training and Visit System was quite new to the area. The results of the study emphasise that if effective communication is to take place in the Training and Visit System the selection of contact farmers should be based on choice pattern of fellow farmers.

The research study conducted among selected contact farmers in Trivandrum district of Kerala revealed that the performance of the contact farmers with respect to information input, processing, output and feedback was found to be poor. This points out that the contact farmers already selected may not be meeting the qualifications prescribed for selecting contact farmers under the Training and Visit System. To overcome this flaw, selection of contact farmers should be based on sociometric choice of other farmers. Besides, they should be given training in communication skills and concepts.

Summary

The research study conducted among selected contact farmers in Trivandrum district of Kerala revealed that majority of the respondents received most of the information, on coconut cultivation from Agricultural Demonstrators of the Department of Agriculture and 'local leaders' were the least consulted source of agro-information. The study brought to light the increasing difficulty the contact farmers experienced in decoding and encoding as the complexity of the message increased. The respondents communicated technical information to 'non-contact farmers of their own area' more frequently. Out of the three types of information feedback, communication of information related to technical aspects was the most important form of feedback.

സംഗ്രഹം

കേരളത്തിൽ തിരുവനന്തപുരം ജില്ലയിലെ തെരഞ്ഞെടുക്കപ്പെട്ട, സമ്പർക്ക കർഷകരുടെ ആശയവിനിമയ രീതി പഠനവിധേയമാക്കിയതിൽനിന്നും കൃഷിവകുപ്പിലെ ഡെമോൺസ്ട്രേറ്റർമാരിൽനിന്നുമാണ് ഭൂരിപക്ഷം സമ്പർക്കകർഷകർക്കും തെങ്ങുകൃഷിയെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള സാങ്കേതിക അറിവ് കൂടുതലായും ലഭിക്കുന്നതെന്ന് മനസ്സിലായി. സന്ദേശങ്ങളിലെ സാങ്കേതികത്വം വർദ്ധിക്കുന്തോറും അവ മനസ്സിലാക്കുന്നതിന് സമ്പർക്ക കർഷകർക്ക് കൂടു

തൽ ബുദ്ധിമുട്ട് അനുഭവപ്പെടുന്നതായി കണ്ടു. സമ്പർക്ക കർഷകർ അവർക്ക് ലഭിക്കുന്ന അറിവ് മറ്റൊരാളേക്കാളും കൂടുതലായി ചുറ്റുമുള്ള സമ്പർക്കേതര കർഷകർക്കാണ് നൽകുന്നത് എന്നു, തെളിഞ്ഞു. സമ്പർക്ക കർഷകർക്ക് മറ്റുള്ളവരിൽനിന്നുമുള്ള പ്രതികരണം പ്രധാനമായും ലഭിക്കുന്നത് സാങ്കേതികപരമായ കാര്യങ്ങളെക്കുറിച്ചാണെന്നും മനസ്സിലായി.

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