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Utility of Agri Clinic and Agricultural Business Center Training contents for Agripreneurs in Uttar Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare in India, aims to empower rural youth with agricultural backgrounds to establish their own agricultural enterprises and support farmers. The research, conducted from March to September 2021, focused on assessing the effectiveness of training courses offered by the nodal institute, Shree-Maa-Guru Gramodhyog Sansthan in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. A total of 100 respondents were selected for this study and data were collected through a pre-tested structured interview schedule. It was found high utility indices in the entrepreneurial development phase for characteristics and presentation skills (52.0), entrepreneurial management phase for case studies (65.2), and enterprise planning phase for exposure visits and type of organization was perceived high utility (66.2). Animal husbandry comprised 46 per cent of established enterprises, while crop production and nursery activities constituted 20 per cent. Most agripreneurs had little to no work experience (55%). Major challenges included social stigma (60%), market fluctuations (59%), price factors (40%), and unpredictable climatic conditions (33%). The study suggests a holistic approach to refining the ACABC program, ensuring it aligns with the dynamic requirements of agripreneurs in Uttar Pradesh. This approach involves content enrichment, digital literacy promotion, strategic management emphasis, experiential learning, local opportunities exploration, resource mobilization enhancement, customization, and continuous evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

The Agri-clinics and Agribusiness Centres (ACABC) program, initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoA & FW), plays a crucial role in rural agricultural development (Afroz 2019 & Afroz et al., 2020). This program's roots trace back to the formation of a steering group on agriculture and related industries, led by Prof. M.S. Swaminathan, appointed by the Indian government. This committee recommended the establishment of agriclinics and agribusiness centers operated by agricultural graduates to offer consultancy services to rural farming communities (Karjagi et al., 2009). Since April 2002, Agri-Clinics & Agri-Business Centres (AC & ABC) have been actively supporting public extension efforts, advancing agricultural development, and providing valuable training to unemployed youth, including women, in agriculture and related fields for self-employment (Chahal & Ponnusamy, 2014; Maheswari et al., 2022; Bairwa et al., 2015). In the current economic landscape, academic knowledge alone is insufficient for new graduates. Students must now possess a broader skill set to enhance their employability. These skills encompass information retrieval, communication, presentation,

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problem-solving, and social development. Entrepreneurial education and training are indispensable, equipping individuals to recognize business opportunities, boost self-esteem, and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to seize those opportunities. To address these needs, the Government of India introduced the Agri-clinics and Agribusiness Centres (ACABC) initiative, facilitating qualified agricultural graduates in establishing "agriventures." This credit-linked subsidy-based program aims to enhance strengthen the public extension system, technology transfer, and rural employment opportunities (Dumpala and Thomas, 2019). Agriculture is evolving into agribusiness, with agripreneurs playing a pivotal role in shaping its success (Gupta et al., 2022). The program offers a credit-linked back-ended upfront composite subsidy on bank loans accessed by trained applicants, with a 44 per cent subsidy for women, SC/ST community members, candidates from North-Eastern and Hill States, and 36 per cent for others (Nidhi et al., 2017). The provision of 45 days residential training within the ACABC scheme aims to instill entrepreneurial characteristics among trainees, increasing their chances of becoming successful entrepreneurs (Afros et al., 2021; Deshmukh et al., 2023). Thetraining curriculum, prepared by MANAGE in Hyderabad, serves as a fundamental tool for imparting entrepreneurial learning experiences to trainees. This curriculum is followed by all Nodal Training Institutes (NTIs) (Bairwa et al., 2014; Durga, 2016). While these training curriculums are periodically revised by MANAGE, there is a pressing need to evaluate training programs based on trainees' perceptions to improve the program's success rate (Pal & Sharma, 2021). The efficiency of the scheme at present is 42.7 per cent (Source: http://www.agriclinics.net/OtherDocuments/state-wise.pdf). To further improve the efficiency of the scheme it is important to evaluate the training curriculum of the scheme in detail. As evaluation can lead to find the benefits and shortcomings of the training and thus can pave the path for new approach and strategies required in training for improving the success rate of the scheme.

METHODOLOGY

Sree Maa Guru Gramodhyog Sansthan, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, an NGO was considered for the study during the year 2021. A total of 5500 graduates were trained, out of which a total of 3800 trained agripreneures established Agri venture (https://smggs.org/) a total 100 agripreneurs were selected randomly and ex- post-facto research design was used for the study in 2021. Thus, all the selected agripreneurs as respondents of the study were those who got training under the nodal training institute, i.e. Sree Maa Guru Gramodhyog Sansthan, Varanasi, Uttar- Pradesh and had started their own venture after training.

Perceived utility of the training content

Training has a vital role in inspiring respondents to work efficiently in accordance with the present situation and requirement, as well as to keep up with new scientific and technological advances and inventions. The utility of the training contents as perceived by the trainees was analyzed using the utility index developed by the Parimaladevi (2006) with some modifications. Here, the perception of trainees regarding the utility of the content was measured in a five-point continuum as extremely useful, very useful, useful, somewhat useful and not useful with scores of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The respondents had given their level of agreement and disagreement on 33 curriculum topics. The scores obtained by each respondent on all the items of training contents were pooled and total obtained score was computed. The maximum possible score was 165 (It's because of the maximum score of each topic is 5 and total number of topics are 33). For entrepreneurial development phase the minimum utility index was 41.8 for the topic 'Networking: Farmers and Farmers Groups' and maximum utility index was 52 for the topic 'Entrepreneurial Characteristics of an agripreneurs'. In Entrepreneurial management phase the minimum utility index was 37.4 for both the statement 'Basic computer skills and Internet practical' and the maximum utility index was 65.2 for the topic 'Related Case studies. In enterprise Planning and resourcing phase, the minimum utility index was 37.6 for the topic 'Mobilization of Resources Banking Norms' and maximum utility index was 66.2 for the topic 'Experience sharing by successful agripreneurs'. In entrepreneurial planning phase the minimum utility index was 22.8 for the topic 'Project Identification presentation and counseling' and maximum utility index was 48.8 for the topic 'Exposure visits. The utility index was measured using the formula as given below:

$$\text{Utility index} = \frac{\text{Total score obtained}}{\text{Maximum possible score}} \times 100$$

RESULTS

Sree Maa Guru Gramodhyog Sansthan, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh has organized 165 training programs and has provided training to 5,500 unemployed agricultural graduates. Among these graduates, 3,800 have successfully launched agricultural ventures in various districts of Uttar Pradesh, resulting in a commendable success rate of 65.00 per cent for the institute. From 3800 agripreneures 100 were selected for the study (https://smggs.org/). Among them 46.00 per cent of the established enterprises are associated with the animal husbandry sector, encompassing activities such as dairy, fisheries, poultry, and goat farming. Following closely behind is crop production and nursery, accounting for 20 per cent of the enterprises. Approximately 55 per cent of agripreneurs had no prior work experience, while 19 per cent had 1-2 years of work experience, 13 per cent had less than 1-year experience and 12 per cent had more than two years of experiences. The primary challenges they encountered included social stigma associated with self-employment (60%), market fluctuations (59%), price-related concerns (40%), and unpredictable climatic factors (33%).

Training utility

The success of a training program greatly hinges on the utility of its course content to the trainees. In this study, we sought to evaluate the training curriculum's effectiveness by collecting feedback from agripreneurs who had undergone training at Agri-clinics and Agribusiness Centres (ACABC) Varanasi. The curriculum was structured into four distinct phases, each addressing specific aspects of entrepreneurship and agribusiness. The resulting Utility Index provided valuable insights into which topics were perceived as most beneficial and useful by the agripreneurs.

Utility of training content at entrepreneurial development phase

From the Table 1 in Entrepreneurial Development Phase 'Entrepreneurial characteristics of an agripreneurs' had highest Utility Index 52 per cent followed by 'Presentation Skills' of 50.4 and 'Networking with farmers and farmers'groups' had lowest Utility Index of 41.8 per cent. The agripreneurs considered training on entrepreneurial characteristics instrumental in cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset. Such a mindset encompasses a set of skills crucial for innovation, problem-solving, generating solutions, and seizing opportunities. Presentation skills were seen as essential, as agripreneurs often needed to create projects for loan approval. Effective presentation not only instilled confidence but also played a role in good management, a critical factor for securing bank loans.

Table 1. Utility Index obtained for training content at entrepreneurial development phase

Items	Utility index (%)
Personality enhancement	47
Communication skills	46.2
Presentation skills	50.4
Farmer relationship management	48.2
Networking with farmers and farmers'groups	41.8
Problem solving	48.8
Entrepreneurial characteristics of an agripreneurs	52

Utility of training content at entrepreneurial management phase

In the entrepreneurial management phase, 'Case studies' posses the highest Utility Index of 65.2 whereas 'Basic computer skills' and 'Internet practical' possess lowest Utility Index of 37.4 each.

Table 2. Utility Index obtained for training content at Entrepreneurial management phase

Items	Utility index (%)
General Management: Principle and practices	50.6
Human resource development	40.4
Project management	55.8
Agri-business management	47.4
Book keeping	40.6
Cash / fund flow	44.2
Basic computer skills	37.4
Internet practical	37.4
Legal Aspects –Agri Acts and Orders	50.8
Farm Management	49.2
Case studies	65.2

Utility of training content at enterprise planning and resourcing phase

Among the agripreneurs, experience sharing by successful agripreneurs was rated as the most useful aspect of the enterprise planning and resourcing phase. This was followed by enterprise planning and guidance on running small agri-enterprises.

Table 3. Utility index obtained for training content at enterprise Planning and resourcing phase

Items	Utility index (%)
Enterprise Planning	58.2
Small Enterprise Management: SWOT Analysis	50.2
How to run a small Agri Enterprise	51.4
Mobilization of Resources Banking Norms	37.6
Experience sharing by successful agripreneurs	66.2
Agribusiness: opportunities, technologies, Schemes and value chain	44.8

Mobilization of resources was perceived as less valuable, consistent with the relevancy index.

Utility of training content at entrepreneurial planning phase

In the entrepreneurial planning phase, exposure visits and understanding different types of organizations were perceived as valuable by the agripreneurs. Conversely, resource counseling and market surveys were considered less useful.

Table 4. Utility index obtained for training content at entrepreneurial planning phase

Items	Utility index (%)
Type of Organization	45.2
Source of information: Enterprise specific	25.4
Environment scanning-Market Survey	26.6
Resource Analysis and counseling	23.6
Exposure visits	48.8
Project Identification by trainees & preparation	25.6
Project Identification presentation and counseling	22.8
Market survey: Tools and techniques	26
Market survey: report and analysis	24.8

DISCUSSION

The contents of training such as 'Communication skills' had utility index of 46.2 and similar findings were reported by Deshmukh et al., (2023) in his study entitled 'Impact of Agripreneurial initiatives of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare, Government of India on Employment generation. The 'Communication skills (oral and writing skills)' exhibited almost similar utility index of 44.17. The contents like 'Networking with others' had a higher utility index score of 80.42 and contrasting results were observed in the case of 'Networking with Farmers and Farmers Groups' possessed a lower utility index (41.8). The findings reveal that the stakeholders are in search of new partners rather than their own ecosystem. Given the prevalence of youth unemployment in the Eastern region of Uttar Pradesh, small-scale income-generating enterprises were on the rise as an alternative solution. Consequently, the agripreneurs found general management principles and legal knowledge to be highly relevant and useful. The results were in line with Burman et al., (2020) as they observed majority of the agri-entrepreneurs in Uttar Pradesh had high manageability behaviour (66.67%). Contrasting result was found by Chandrashekar (2010) in his study, "Effectiveness of

agriclinics in improving paid agricultural extension services" in Uttar Pradesh, which revealed that 'Management in practice' had a lower utility of 22.50 and 'Cash flow' had a higher utility of 69.87 whereas utility index of 'Farm management' and 'Cash/Fund flow' had 49.2 and 44.2 respectively in the present study. However, computer and internet skills (37%) were considered less valuable the finding revealed the need for creating awareness regarding digital applications with special reference to agriculture and allied sciences. The enhanced utilization of digital applications covers majority of areas of agriculture realization of which may lead to profit maximization. Successful agripreneurs' experiences served as tangible proof of success, motivating trainees to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills in real-life situations. Enterprise planning was regarded as beneficial since it provided trainees with insights into various parameters involved in running small enterprises. Enterprise planning emerges as a crucial aspect with a utility index of 58.2 per cent. This aligns with the widely acknowledged significance of effective planning in entrepreneurial success (Timmons & Spinelli, 2009). Through enterprise planning, trainees gain valuable insights into the multifaceted parameters involved in running small agri-enterprises. This knowledge equips them to make informed decisions and navigate the complexities of the agricultural business landscape. The utility indices for Small Enterprise Management (50.2%) and guidance on running small agri-enterprises (51.4%) indicate the perceived value of strategic planning and management skills. This resonates with the entrepreneurial literature emphasizing the importance of SWOT analysis and practical guidance in managing small enterprises effectively (Hitt et al., 2020).

The findings were in contrast to the findings of Deshmukh, et al., (2023) whereas it was observed that exposure visits/ field tour/ study tour had utility index of 100. Exposure visits provided trainees with practical exposure to various agricultural enterprises, enriching their understanding of different environmental settings and strengthening their comprehension of diverse enterprises. Knowledge about various types of organizations assisted agripreneurs in making informed decisions about their enterprise choices. Resource counseling, while having potential, was seen as requiring additional effort for more effective utilization of available resources. The result were similar to the findings of Afroz (2019); Afroz et al., (2022) which revealed that improvement of the success rate of the Agriclinics & Agribusiness Centres (ACABC) scheme, speed up in starting the agribusiness after the completion of the training and efficient use of resource. Further, these findings suggest that the training curriculum was thoughtfully designed and effective in motivating agricultural graduates to establish Agri Clinics and Agri-Business Centres in rural areas, serving the farming community with confidence. These results were consistent with previous studies conducted by Chandrashekhar (2010), where motivation for entrepreneurs had higher utility of 75.62. The insights gained from this research can be invaluable in shaping future training programs to better align with the specific needs and expectations of agripreneurs.

CONCLUSION

The significant impact of the Agri-Clinics & Agribusiness Centres (ACABC) training program in empowering rural youth, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, India was recorded. The research, sheds light on the high utility indices perceived by agripreneurs across different phases of the training curriculum emphasizing the importance of entrepreneurial characteristics, presentation skills, case studies, exposure visits, and enterprise planning. Animal husbandry emerged as a dominant sector among established enterprises, and the study identified key challenges faced by agripreneurs, including social stigma and market fluctuations. The research recommends a holistic approach to refine the ACABC program, incorporating content enrichment, digital literacy promotion, strategic management emphasis, experiential learning, local opportunities exploration, resource mobilization enhancement, customization, and continuous evaluation. These recommendations aim to ensure that the training program aligns dynamically with the evolving requirements of agripreneurs in Uttar Pradesh, fostering their success and contributing to rural agricultural development

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