
Role of Village Level Entrepreneurs in promoting Agricultural Services to Farmers in Common Service Centers

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ABSTRACT

Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) play a critical role in facilitating agricultural services through Common Service Centers (CSCs) in rural India. These digital access points bridge the gap between farmers and essential government schemes, agricultural advisory services and financial services. This study examines the role of VLEs in delivering agricultural services, their impact on farmers' decision-making, and the challenges they face. Using data from Siddipet and Suryapet districts in Telangana, the paper highlights the effectiveness of VLEs in improving digital literacy, providing timely information, and enhancing market access. However, gaps in training, infrastructure, and service awareness persist. The recommendations include strengthening VLE training, expanding service offerings, and improving CSC infrastructure to maximize their impact on rural agricultural communities.

Keywords: Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLE), Common Service Centers (CSC), Agricultural Services, Digital Agriculture, Village Knowledge Centers (VKCs)

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1. Introduction

Agriculture remains a dominant sector in India, employing a significant portion of the rural workforce. However, challenges such as limited access to agricultural advisory services, fluctuating market prices, and financial constraints hinder productivity and growth. To address these issues, the Government of India has established Common Service Centers (CSCs) under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP). CSCs serve as digital access hubs that provide essential citizen services, including agricultural advisory support, e-governance, and financial inclusion programs. It is reported that over 5,96,247 CSCs are functional across India as on January 2024 and 4,73,3700 CSCs were established at gram panchayat level in rural villages. The CSCs offering web-enabled e-governance services in rural areas, including application forms, certificates, and utility payments such as electricity, telephone and water bills, rural banking, health service, education and training, DTP, printing and Internet browsing.

In addition to above citizen services, the CSC guidelines also envisage that a wide variety of content and services will be offered in the area of Agriculture and allied sectors. The products and services offered by CSCs in Agriculture and allied sectors are CSC e-Agri, Agri Tele-Consultation & E -Pashu Chikitsa, Nursery and Seed Production, Kisan E- Mart, Soil Testing, Protected Cultivation, Organic Farming and Drone Pilot Training Facility.

At the core of CSC operations are Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs), who act as facilitators and service providers at the grassroots level. VLEs enable farmers to access real-time government schemes, market prices, weather updates and thereby empowering them with the necessary information to make informed agricultural decisions. Despite their crucial role, VLEs face several challenges, such as inadequate training, lack of digital literacy among farmers, and infrastructure constraints.

2. Background

The Common Service Centers were established as part of the Digital India initiative to deliver digital services to rural areas. The CSCs operationalised almost at each village gram panchayat across the country to serve as multipurpose centers, offering services in education, healthcare, financial inclusion, and agriculture. To enhance the reach of citizen services to farmers at village level, VLEs are appointed to manage these centers and ensure the effective delivery of services to farmers.

VLEs are local entrepreneurs trained to facilitate digital transactions, agricultural consultations, and access to government schemes. By acting as intermediaries between farmers and technology-driven solutions, VLEs have significantly

contributed to the adoption of digital tools in agriculture. However, their success depends on their level of training of agricultural knowledge, the accessibility of services, and the overall infrastructure of CSCs.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Objectives of the study

1. To study the satisfaction level of farmers on agricultural services available through CSCs.
2. To study the effectiveness of I.T. enabled Agricultural and allied Services (ITeAS) that delivered through CSC to cater the needs of farmers at village level.
3. To study the training needs of Village Level Entrepreneur (VLE) to operate the agricultural services through CSCs.

3.2. Methodology

This study was conducted in the districts of Siddipet and Suryapet of Telangana state, where CSCs have been actively providing agricultural services. For the purpose of sample selection, two mandals selected viz. Bejjanki, Chinakoduru from Siddipet district and two mandals from Suryapet district viz. Nadigudem and Munagala were selected. All the CSCs of these mandals were considered as sample i.e. 38 VLEs were selected for the study. Data was collected through structured questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions with VLEs.

Table 1: Details of the Sample size selected from Telangana districts

S.No	District/Block	No. of VLEs selected	Sample size
1	Suryapet/Nadgudem	10	10
2	Suryapet /Munagala	12	12
3	Siddipet/Bejjanki	03	03
4	Siddipet/Chinnakodur	13	13
	Total	38	38

Secondary data sources such as government reports, CSC publications, and prior research studies were also analysed to provide context and validate the findings.

4. Findings of the study

4.1 Demographic data analysis of CSC operators

The demographic data of CSC operators on Gender, Age group, Level of education, Annual income is analysed and presented in the following table.

Table 2: Socio-Economic profile of CSC Operators (VLEs)

N = 38

	Category	No. of Farmers	Percentage
Gender	Male	34	89.5
	Female	4	10.5
Age (in Years)	18-25	3	7.9
	26-45	33	86.8
	46-60	2	5.3
	Above 60	0	0
Level of Education	Illiterate	0	0
	Primary Education (up to 7 th)	0	0
	Secondary Education (8-10 th)	2	5.3
	Intermediate/diploma	8	21.1
	Degree and above	28	73.7
Annual Income from CSCs	< 3 lakhs	36	94.7
	3-5 lakhs	1	2.6
	5-8 lakhs	0	0
	8-10 lakhs	0	0
	Above 10 lakhs	1	2.6

The results of the demographic data on gender distribution revealed that the majority of the respondents (89.5%) were male, while a smaller portion (10.5%) were female. The data on age distribution shows that most of the respondents (86.8%) belonged to the age group of 26-45 years, followed by 7.9 per cent of operators in the 18-25 years category. A smaller percentage (5.3%) were aged

between 46-60 years. In terms of education, the majority of the respondents (73.7%) were highly educated, possessing a degree or higher qualification. A smaller proportion (21.1%) had an intermediate or diploma-level education, while only 5.3 per cent had secondary-level education. The income data shows that a vast majority (94.7%) of respondents reported an annual income of less than ₹3 lakhs from CSCs, with only 2.6 per cent earning between ₹3-5 lakhs and another 2.6 per cent earning above ₹10 lakhs. There were no respondents with annual incomes between ₹5-10 lakhs, indicating a generally low-income range for most participants.

The above data indicates that a clear male domination in operationalising CSCs at village level and the age group of 26-45 years. The CSC operators are highly educated possessing a degree or higher qualification, which will ensure the good performance of CSC operations. However, the income data shows that the CSCs operators getting annual income less than ₹3 lakhs.

4.2 Ranking of agricultural services based on Ease of implementation, Acceptability and Ease of Use as perceived by the farmers and offered by the VLEs

The satisfaction of agricultural service-wise in terms of ease of implementation, acceptability and use by farmers ranking by VLEs on scale 1-5 was asked to know the classification of satisfaction level by VLEs on agricultural service-wise. The responses are presented in the following table.

Table 3: Agricultural service-wise Ease of Implementation, Acceptability and Usefulness as perceived by the farmers provided by CSCs

Type of Service	Ease of Implementation			Acceptability			Ease of Use		
	Score	Mean	Rank	Score	Mean	Rank	Score	Mean	Rank
Agricultural Tele Consultation and e-Pashu Chikista	100	2.63	8	95	2.50	10	103	2.71	8
Soil Testing Center/ Soil Health Card	101	2.66	7	100	2.63	6	102	2.68	9
CSC e-AGRI	101	2.66	7	96	2.53	9	104	2.74	7
Kisan e-Mart	104	2.74	5	94	2.47	12	106	2.79	5
Information on Nursery and Seed Production	100	2.63	8	100	2.63	6	101	2.66	10
Farm Machinery on Rent (MOVR)	103	2.71	6	97	2.55	8	112	2.95	3

Protected Cultivation & Organic Farming	103	2.71	6	98	2.58	7	105	2.76	6
Kisan Credit Card (KCC)	109	2.87	4	108	2.84	3	109	2.87	4
Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)	114	3.00	2	116	3.05	1	118	3.11	1
Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maandhan Yojana (PMKMY)	111	2.92	3	111	2.92	2	116	3.05	2
Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)	115	3.03	1	103	2.71	5	116	3.05	2
Banking Services	114	3.00	2	107	2.82	4	118	3.11	1
Market price information	109	2.87	4	100	2.63		112	2.95	3
Weather forecast	108	2.84	5	108	2.84	3	108	2.84	5

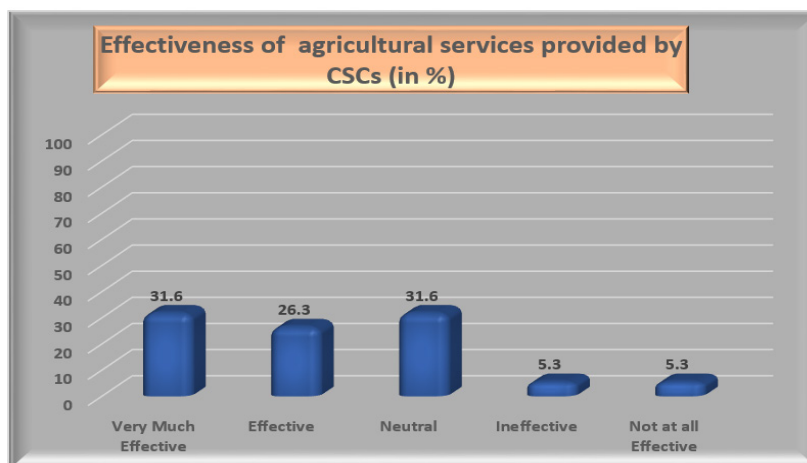
The data in above table presents the ease of implementation, acceptability, and ease of use of various agricultural services provided by Common Service Centers (CSCs), as perceived by farmers. ‘Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)’ ranks highest in ease of implementation with a mean score of 3.03, followed closely by ‘Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)’ (3.00) and ‘Banking Services’ (3.00). In terms of ‘acceptability’, ‘Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)’ leads with a score of 3.05, followed by ‘Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maandhan Yojana (PMKMY)’ (2.92) and ‘Kisan Credit Card (KCC)’ (2.84).

For ‘ease of use’, ‘Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)’ and ‘Banking Services’ both scored the highest at 3.11, indicating they are considered most user-friendly by farmers. ‘Farm Machinery on Rent (MOVR)’ follows closely with a score of 2.95. Other services, such as ‘CSC e-AGRI’, ‘Soil Testing Center/Soil Health Card’, and ‘Agricultural Tele Consultation and e-Pashu Chikista’, show moderate performance across all three categories, while ‘Weather Forecast’ and ‘Market Price Information’ score moderately in ease of use and acceptability but slightly lower in ease of implementation.

The above table results shows that the ease of implementation, acceptability and ease of use of agricultural services at CSCs are PM-KISAN, PMFY, PMKMY, PMFBY and Banking Services. It indicates the services related to various Government schemes and banking services are utilising by farmers very well. And, the other farm related agricultural services are not much utilised and needs to be improved.

4.3 Effectiveness of agricultural services provided through CSCs

The effectiveness of agricultural services provided by CSCs to farmers was asked to know the classification of effectiveness of farmers on agricultural services. The responses are presented in the following graph.



The results show that the highest percentage of respondents, 31.6 per cent, rated the agricultural services provided by CSCs as both “Very Much Effective” and “Neutral”. Following this, 26.3 per cent found the services “Effective”. A smaller percentage (5.3 per cent) rated the services as both “Ineffective” and “Not at all effective”.

This study results indicates that the majority of farmers expressed that the services provided at CSCs are very much effective and helpful in their day-to-day agricultural operations.

4.4 Training received by CSC Operators (VLEs)

Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) serve as the backbone of CSC operations, ensuring that agricultural services reach rural farmers effectively. They provide critical support by assisting farmers in applying for government schemes, accessing financial services, and obtaining agricultural advisory inputs. VLEs also facilitate digital literacy among farmers, enabling them to utilize online platforms for weather updates, market information, and best farming practices. Their role extends to bridging the gap between technology and traditional farming methods, thus promoting the adoption of digital tools in agriculture. Additionally, VLEs assist farmers in obtaining essential documents, such as land records and soil health cards, which are necessary for availing agricultural subsidies. However, despite their pivotal role, many VLEs face obstacles such as limited technical training, inadequate internet connectivity, and insufficient awareness among farmers about CSC services.

Table 4: Training received by CSCs operators (VLEs) on agricultural services

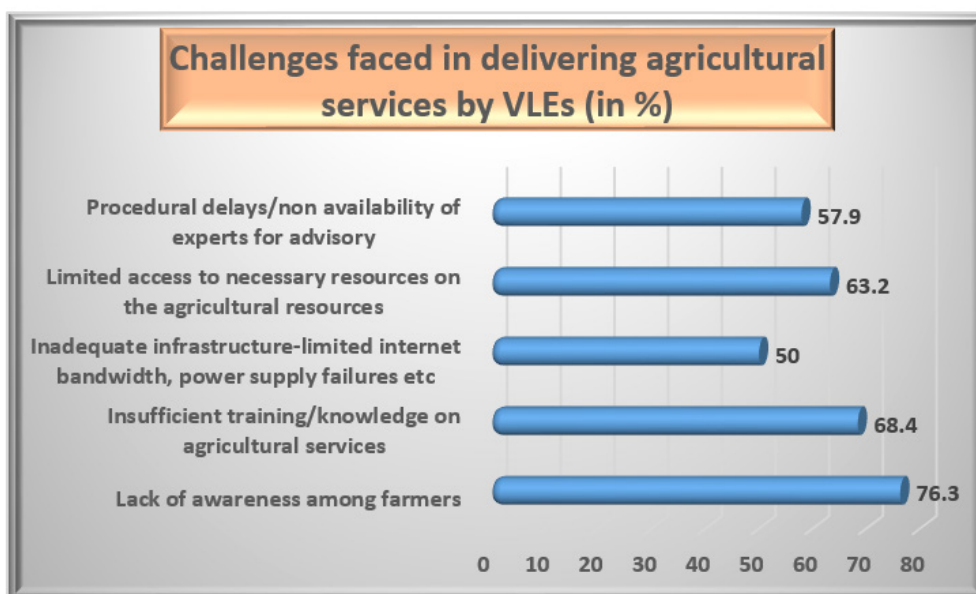
	Yes	No	Total
Training received by CSCs operators on agricultural services	14	24	38
Total percentage	36.8	63.2	100

The training received by VLEs shown in the above table reveals that only 36.8 per cent of CSC operators (VLEs) have received training on agricultural services, while majority (63.2 per cent) of them have not received any such training. This indicates a considerable gap in the provision of training, which could affect the operators' ability to effectively deliver agricultural services to farmers. The VLEs expressed that they need for intensive training on agricultural services for 1-2 weeks at the district level.

Strengthening VLE capacity through structured training programs, financial incentives, and improved infrastructure can significantly enhance their efficiency in delivering agricultural services. By addressing these training needs, VLEs can become powerful enablers of rural development and ensure that farmers fully benefit from digital interventions in agriculture.

4.5 Challenges Faced by VLEs

The various challenges faced in delivering agricultural services by VLEs at CSCs presented in the following graph.



The data highlights the challenges faced by Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) in delivering agricultural services. The most frequently cited challenge is the lack of awareness among farmers, reported by 76.3 per cent of respondents. Insufficient training or knowledge on agricultural services is another significant issue, affecting 68.4 per cent of VLEs. Inadequate infrastructure, such as limited internet bandwidth and power supply failures, was mentioned by 50.0 per cent of respondents. Additionally, limited access to necessary agricultural resources was a challenge for 63.2 per cent of VLEs, while procedural delays or unavailability of experts for advisory impacted 57.9 per cent. These challenges reflect various barriers that hinder the effective delivery of agricultural services.

The results shows that the major challenges faced by VLEs was knowledge upgradation on agricultural services, availability of experts for supporting advisory services, limited bandwidth and power breakdowns effecting the services at CSCs. It is also observed that many farmers do not aware of the availability of agricultural services at CSCs. These deficiencies can be addressed by the capacity building of VLEs on agricultural services, linking VLEs with experts of KVKs and conducting village level campaigns of agricultural services of CSCs.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

VLEs offer a variety of services, with high engagement in government programs such as PM-KISAN and PMFBY. However, there is notably less involvement in operational services like advisory services, farm machinery rentals, indicating possible gaps in addressing farmers' specific needs. This variation in service delivery suggests that although VLEs are willing to provide assistance, they may lack the necessary resources or specialized knowledge to effectively deliver certain types of services. The preference expressed by VLEs for short, focused training sessions indicates a practical approach to improve their service delivery capabilities. Regular, accessible training sessions could help bridge existing knowledge gaps and equip VLEs to better serve the farming communities. VLEs often lack specific agricultural expertise, affecting service quality. Only few VLEs reported receiving agricultural training, which indicates a considerable gap in the knowledge needed to effectively assist farmers. Regular, practical training for VLEs, focusing on agriculture-specific topics and digital tools, could significantly enhance their ability to meet farmer's needs.

Sector-specific analysis reveals that VLEs recognize the importance of CSCs evolving into Village Knowledge Centers (VKCs) to address diverse agricultural needs. There is strong demand for expanded advisory services, high-quality inputs, accessible machinery, and support in areas such as insurance and credit access. Services for horticulture and animal husbandry also emerge as priorities,

with particular emphasis on veterinary support, animal feed provision, and access to horticultural information. These insights demonstrate that VLEs are aware of the varied and complex needs of farmers and understand the potential impact of a more comprehensive suite of services.

To enhance the effectiveness of VLEs, the following recommendations are proposed based on the information collected from VLEs:

1. **Enhanced Training Programs:** Conducting regular, specialized training programs for VLEs focusing on agricultural best practices, digital literacy, and financial management.
2. **Strengthen Partnerships with Agricultural Institutions:** Collaborate with State Agricultural Universities (SAUs), Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and departmental officials to offer expert advice and specialized knowledge through CSCs, enhancing their role as knowledge centers for rural communities.
3. **Diversify Agricultural Services:** Expand CSC services to cover a broader range of agricultural needs, including support for horticulture, livestock management, and fisheries to address the diverse needs of rural farmers.
4. **Align CSCs to FPOs:** The CSCs should be made aligned with FPOs, so that the services needed by the farmers in that FPOs will be effectively met. It is a win-win situation for CSCs, FPOs, and Farmers as this kind of networking facilitates effective knowledge sharing.
5. **Improved Infrastructure:** Strengthening digital connectivity and ensuring CSCs are equipped with modern tools for better service delivery.
6. **Awareness Campaigns:** Conducting farmer awareness programs to promote the benefits of CSC agricultural services and encourage digital adoption.

By addressing these gaps, CSCs can evolve into fully functional Village Knowledge Centers (VKCs), empowering farmers and promoting sustainable agricultural development in rural India.

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