

ROLE OF OPINION LEADERS IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY ADVANCEMENT

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India lives in villages, which observe enormous cultural diversity and has a deeper reflection on their occupational and agricultural practices. The rigid and regimented belief system that the illiterate rural folk possesses hardly undergo material change so as to cope and mobilize with the emerging changes in agricultural processes and rural upliftment as a consequence of modernization and technological advancement in agriculture. The change in attitude & perception, motivation & learning abilities requires a great deal of persuasion. To bring about a desirable change in the attitude & perception, motivation & behavior of the low motivated and fewer need oriented farmers with lower need satisfaction level, challenges the existing drive for adoption of modern technology. The new varieties of agricultural practices and process as well as incorporation of norms and values of modern social order in to their social system and religious observance is called for in all these activities need to be adopted and incorporated for the total upliftment and transformation of rural social system and their occupational dynamics in agricultural process. The role of opinion leaders cannot be under-estimated. However, with the emergence of Panchayat Raj in Madhya Pradesh, as constitutional provision, the role of opinion leaders have been delegated to the elected! nominated members i.e. Panch and Sarpanch. Though it appears that elected members of Panchayati Raj may be substituted in place of opinion leaders, but in reality this hardly happens, as the opinion leaders with their power of domination, expertization, initiation and high order interpersonal attraction may retain and undertake the village leadership with them in various matters of agricultural advancement, community development and rural upliftment. Potentiality that makes an individual to undertake and discharge the leadership responsibilities in any

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socio-political setting and in all probability, even in the changed situation of Panchayati Raj being in operation in villages, the roles and significance of opinion leaders cannot be minimized.

The present study was carried out in six villages of Dharsewa block of Raipur district of Chhattisgarh region of M.P. to assess the role of opinion leaders in rural development & community advancement. Although this study is microscopic in nature, the selected villages represent in general the agro-climatic and socio-economic condition of the Chhattisgarh region. Dharsewa block has been selected purposively. It consists of 119 villages. 6 villages located within the radius of 10 kms were selected randomly. Atleast 8 farmers from each of the big, middle and small categories were randomly selected from a village. The 25 farmers who constituted the sample farmers in each of the 6 villages were asked to identify their opinion leaders, whose opinion in villages on various issues of rural development matters was important. On the basis of a socio-metric technique, those sample farmers identified 30 opinion leaders from the six villages who functioned as one of the change agents in disseminating knowledge and information to the farmers to their respective villages. The relative roles played by other change e.g. Govt. Officials, Agricultural University, Gram Sewak etc. were also evaluated. In addition to these change agents, the effectiveness of mass media in communication and dissemination of agricultural information and knowledge of farmers through various agricultural programme was also evaluated. The data was collected through personal interview method, processed in accordance to statistical requirements. On the basis of results of the study the following inferences can be made.

Application and adoption of modern agricultural technology

Adoption and application of traditional system of agricultural practices by common farmers reveal that they have not been enlightened and awakened to the adoption of modern agricultural technology to the extent they ought to be. The strong hold of the traditional belief system in the application and adoption of traditional agricultural system together with a high order confidence and trust are so deeply rooted, rigidly practiced and regimentally

operated that the efforts made by Govt. and other change agent have hardly penetrated into the strong belief system and actualized them to change and adopt the modern agricultural technology. On the contrary, the relative role effectiveness among the enlightened farmers was so strong and stimulating that they were able to change their traditional belief system about agricultural practices, developed confidence and credibility in the adoption and application of modern agricultural technology through gradual feed back system based on agricultural returns.

In the light of the interpretation, it is evident that constant and continuous efforts and persuasion on the part of various change agents be made so as to make the common farmers awakened to the application and adoption of the modern agricultural technology through gradual change in their traditional belief system and elevation of their level of confidence packages and practices.

Relative role effectiveness of various public and private agencies as change agents

Results reveal that the emergence of Agricultural Department of Govt. of M.P. ranked I as the most potential source of change agents in the application and adoption of modern agricultural technology followed by R.A.E.O. (Ag. Supervisor) at rank II. The role of Agricultural university in the adoption of agricultural technology has been found to be at rank III whereas the role effectiveness of opinion leaders has been placed at rank IV, Such relative role effectiveness in their sequential order of efforts made and effectiveness acknowledged, indicates that agricultural personnel engaged in Agriculture department have extended their effective and efficient services in the dissemination of extension education among the farmers of the sample villages. The R.A.E.O., who were placed at rank II for their role effectiveness among the farmers were also Govt. servants. The cumulative effect and efforts made by Govt. personnel, thus significantly out-weigh the roles played by other change agents, particularly the agriculture university and opinion leaders. The role effectiveness of agriculture university has been found relatively less efficient and ineffective. On relative assessment, the role effectiveness of even opinion leaders, which figured at IV, is not very effective. As such, the OLs

are the real transmitters of agricultural information to farmers, which acquire from various primary change agents like Govt. agencies and Agriculture University. The secondary sources of acquisition of extension education in agricultural practices and their dissemination among the farmers are bound to be inferior and lesser effective unless and until they are supported and backed by initiation, confidence and involvement of opinion leaders themselves. One of the primary reasons of the OLs. Being relatively less effective and lesser efficient is that they may not be in possession of requisite amount of leadership potentiality by virtue of which they would be able to generate general awareness in the dissemination of agricultural education among the farmers. Similarly the inefficiency on part of the agricultural personnel of the university may be attributed not only to the in effective university administration but also to lack of service oriented attitude, functional involvement and duty-bound temperament unlike the agricultural personnel of the Govt. of M.P.

It is essential that general awareness among the agriculture personnel regardless of their being gainfully placed in private or public organization, service orientation and faithful observance of their duties has to be inculcated for being effective and efficient to their clients and customers. Similarly, effective training programmes need to be organized for inculcation, transmission and acquisition of effective leadership qualities among the opinion leaders. The motivation and morale that the Govt. personnel have shown in the application and adoption of agriculture technology in the sample villages provides an example and lead for the role adoption among the opinion leaders and agriculture university personnel.

Role effectiveness of Audio-Visual Change agents

Among all the A.V. change agents, TV has emerged as the most potential source of change among the farmers, followed by Radio as the second source. Printed materials occupied the third place as source of change, whereas Krishi-patrika placed at rank IV. These relative role effectiveness of various A.V. change agents account primarily the coverage of the media and channel through which the message is transmitted among the farmers. As such, TV is most potential and powerful media of communication on the grounds that it covers two i.e. the visual and the auditory, and the joint effect of these

two obviously out-weighs the effectiveness of any one as an independent source of communication. It is further observed that auditory media is less effective than the visual one. Consequently TV is the most potential transmitter of communication followed by radio which transmits the message only through auditory media. Printed materials or krishi patrika are relatively less effective. As such, level of illiteracy among the farmers also functions as an inhibitory function in the dissemination of education through printed materials or Krishi patrika. The printed materials when distributed and handed over to, the farmers obviously exercise more effectiveness than the krishi patrika because of their relatively more frequent of operations, personal involvement of the change agents and verbal presentation of the strength and weakness of various agricultural practices and packages. Krishi patrika. On the contrary is not so frequent and easily available to all the farmers. It is a source of transmission of knowledge and information about agricultural advancement only among the enlightened and literate farmers.

The strength and weakness inherent in each of these A.V. change agent provides sufficient strength for their acceptance. The role effectiveness of TV followed by radio, thus function as widely acceptable sources of change among the farmers.

The consistent role effectiveness of TV and radio in their relative order of effectiveness in the dissemination of extension education among the farmers need further reinforcement by all those who are in some way or other associated with agricultural advancement and rural reconstruction in India. The literacy mission launched by G.O.I. and publication of a large number of printed materials and krishi patrika may further accelerate and krishi patrika may further accelerate and improve the general awareness among the farmers for the application and adoption of modern agricultural technology.

Effectiveness of opinion leaders in rural development and community advancement

The results on the role effectiveness of the opinion leaders (OLs) in disseminating various rural development schemes and community advancement programmes have not been found effectively mobilized, so as to materially affect the rural

reconstruction and their material prosperity. As such, they were successful in generating general awareness to a certain extent particularly in recreational programmes and general health improvement packages of the live stock that they have, but they have miserably failed in generating the additional financial resources by helping them to set up supportive agro-industrial organization. The OLs were also ineffective in mobilizing and bringing a social distance that exists between the Govt. officials, the farmers and the OLs themselves.

The social distance that exists between the farmers and the Govt. Officials and the inability of OLs to bridge the social distance between them have a deeper impact on the implementation of various rural development programmes and community advancement projects. They function as inhibitory factors in generating and promoting interpersonal relationship which is rather a key to accelerate all development. The social distance that exists between the farmers and the Govt. officials provides reflections upon the inherent traits of personality in them. The feeling of dominance and superiority complex on the part of Govt. officials promoted a feeling of fear and inferiority complex among the farmers thereby widening then social distance between them and obstructing the successful operation and execution of the developmental task on one hand, whereas it has generated inhibitory effects on the part of the farmers in cultivating and promoting self confidence, initiation, interpersonal cooperation and human relation. These inherent traits of personality interact together yielding a bond of social distance, which gradually appears to widen rather than being bridged. In this prespective, the role of OLS in bridging the social distance between Govt. officials and the farmers becomes a vital problems of rural reconstruction and so long as the social distance between them continuous and inhibitory factors interact, there can hardly be any real advancement in rural India. The whole hearted participation and deep involvement in various development programmes invite the attention of all concerned in rural reconstruction programme to bridge the social distance between the Govt. officials, the farmers and the village leaders.

The Govt. officials have to change their mode and methods of interacting with farmers and OLs by a way of transforming their attitudes and behavior. The dominant, tough minded behavioral approach to rural people of the Govt. officials

needs to be transformed into a tender touch approach accompanied with a feeling of love, affection, sympathy and belongings to rural setting and rural folk. As such, it is not only the material and concession given to the villagers by the Govt. that may bring rural prosperity but it is the psychological interaction and socio-cultural affinity among the Govt. Officials, the OLs and the villagers that may help the villagers in attaining real rural development for welfare and well-being of the rural folk in India.

The success story of rural reconstruction in India, therefore, depends upon the extent reconstruction in India, upon the extent to which a bond of harmonious human relation is promoted and developed among the Govt. Officials, the farmers and village leaders. The real task is to generate a feeling of trust and confidence among the farmers for their participation and involvement in various developmental tasks launched by Govt. and non-Govt. agencies. It is rather more important for the Govt. officials and OLs to bring about a significant departure from their traditional belief system and help them to catch up and hold new belief in modern agricultural technology and a new way of perceiving the world around them. Perhaps harmonization of the village folk with externals who have prevented them to transform their material status and quality of life through rural reconstruction in India. The externals have to see, translate and transform their attitude, belief system, perceptual process and action tendencies from the point of rural people with certain specific socio-cultural peculiarities and not otherwise. As such, the Govt. Officials involved in rural reconstruction need to widen their understanding of rural India and rural folk with a view to promoting a mutual bond of interpersonal trust, confidence and adjustment for the well being and welfare of rural community.