

ROLE EXPECTATIONS AND ROLE PERFORMANCE OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION OFFICERS

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Introduction

Agricultural Extension Officer (AEO) is the front line worker for extension and key functionary in agricultural development at cutting edge level in the State of Andhra Pradesh. Originally conceived as multipurpose functionary and designated as village level worker, he was to act as a friend, philosopher and guide to the villagers. With the introduction of Training and Visit (T & V) System of extension in seventies, an attempt was made to redefine his role so as to focus exclusively more specifically on extension itself. In the light of the experience of T & V system and in the context of the importance of participatory and farming situation based extension, there were attempts to delineate the role again. An AEO was expected to diagnose farming situations and identify farmers' problems. He should not focus only on technical message to be transferred but need to learn more about the farmers, their farming system, the ecological characteristics of the areas, particularly about the farmers' behaviour and reasons for doing things the way they do. While the role as defined under T & V system by and large remained, changes were effected to meet specific requirements and on-going initiatives. Now the issue is, as to what extent the new roles and responsibilities are performed.

In the light of experiences under T & V system and the need to induct participatory approaches in extension, there is a need to assess the performance of frontline functionaries like AEOs vis-à-vis various roles assigned from time to time. The specific objectives of study were :

- i) To understand the existing roles of AEOs;
- ii) To examine the extent of gap between the expectations and performance of AEOs
- iii) To determine the relationship between role expectations and role performance of AEOs.

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Methodology

The study was conducted in Ranga Reddy district of Andhra Pradesh. The data were collected through the questionnaire specifically prepared for the study. This was followed by personal interviews of the respondents. In all 80 AEOs were randomly selected and studied. This was supplemented by secondary sources of information such as records, reports etc. Twenty four role items were identified based on the revised charts available with the department. These were grouped under eleven heads of major roles as under: Field visits, Education, Training, Farmers clubs, Inputs position, Planning, Schemes / programmes, Crop cutting experiments, Natural calamities , Records and Other duties. The expectations were assessed in terms of the importance attached by the respondents. The list of roles and activities as given in the job chart were given and the importance as perceived by the AEOs was rated on Likert's scale on a five point continuum. The respondents were asked to rate the performance of each of the items with maximum score of 'five' for performance rated as "Excellent", with minimum score of 'one' for the items considered as 'poor'.

Findings

1. Existing Roles of AEOs

The roles of AEOs in Andhra Pradesh was by and large patterned the lines of the T&V system. This system attempted to organize extension on professional lines and attempted to reorient the roles of extension personnel exclusively extension specific. The focus was on field visits, transfer of production practices to farmers, feedback from farmers on the recommendations, farm trials and own development through fortnightly training. While continuing these responsibilities, changes have been affected in the job chart of AEOs in the State from time to time to reflect the local needs and realities. As the group approach and human resource development have emerged as important components of extension strategy and approach, the same-formed important items of work of an AEO. While educational role consisting of teaching and motivating farmers on technical messages was the mainstay of extension, other activities facilitating and reinforcing the key role were included. Thus soil testing and use of appropriate quantum of fertilizers, plant protection campaigns, IPM etc. emerged as important components of the job of AEO. These apart, writing of latest messages on a black board and pasting educational materials on the walls in a place in the village where these could attract farmers' attention were added. The work relating to preparation of mandal action plan formed important aspect of the job. While the role relating to inputs remained in the list but not in the old sense of being responsible for their procurement and distribution as happened during

pre T&V system period. What was contemplated was that of information role of assessing the requirements to help concerned agencies like Marketing Cooperatives to be ready with the same. The activities envisaged were grouped under 11 heads of major roles as given in Table 1.

Table 1. Existing Roles of AEOs

S.No.	Major roles	Activities
1.	Visits	1.1 Observing crops 1.2 Suggesting solutions 1.3 Bringing problems to ADA/AO's notice
2.	Education	2.1 Writing messages 2.2 Posting materials 2.3 Soil test and advice 2.4 Plant protection campaigns 2.5 On-farm demonstrations 2.6 Field days 2.7 Adoption of villages
3.	Training	3.1 Mobilizing farmers for training 3.2 Kisan melas
4.	Farmer's clubs	4.1 Organizing farmers' clubs 4.2 Conducting meetings of club
5.	Inputs	5.1 Input Assessment 5.2 Input Reporting
6.	Planning	6.1 Agricultural statistics 6.2 Action Plan
7	Schemes	
8	Crop cutting experiments	
9	Natural calamities	
10.	Records	10.1 Maintaining personal diary 10.2 Maintaining Registers
11	Other duties	

2. Gaps in Role Expectations and Role Performance

The mean scores of role expectations and performance are given in Table 2. Variations in the mean score values were examined using 't' test. Significant differences were observed between expectations and performance as per the 't' values indicated. A high degree of gap ($t=18.15$) was found in regard to the role 'Adoption of a village' while it was not significant in respect of the role 'other duties'. Organizing 'field days' was another area wherein the gap was discernable ($t=11.86$). Gaps were found in the score values of two roles for which there existed a higher level of expectations. These included 'suggestions to farmers' ($t=14.49$) and 'feedback to superiors on field problems' (11.54). 'Organizing kisan melas' was another function for which the gap was to the extent of 0.86 points ($t=10.18$) in the given scores. Discrepancies were also noticed in the two areas of importance in extension namely plant protection and on-farm-demonstrations. There were gaps in the performance levels of roles such as 'observing field conditions', 'conducting meetings of farmers' clubs' and 'assessment of input requirements'.

Table 2. Gap between Expectations and Performance of AEOs as perceived by AEOs

Item No.	Activity	AEOs			
		Expectation	Performance	Gap	't'
1.1	Observing crops	4.99	4.30	0.69	8.89**
1.2	Suggesting Solutions	4.66	3.78	0.88	14.49**
1.3	Bringing problems to ADA/ AO's notice	4.60	3.79	0.81	11.54**
2.1	Writing messages	4.05	3.78	0.27	2.99**
2.2	Posting materials	3.99	3.56	0.43	4.92**
2.3	Soil testing	4.60	4.01	0.59	7.52**
2.4	Plant protection campaign	4.29	3.53	0.76	10.39**
2.5	On-farm demonstrations	4.21	3.44	0.77	8.74**
2.6	Field days	3.98	2.99	0.99	11.86**
2.7	Adoption of villages	3.79	2.28	1.51	18.15**
3.1	Mobilizing farmers for training	4.24	3.65	0.59	6.75**

3.2	Mobilizing for Kisan Melas	4.15	3.29	0.86	10.18**
4.1	Organizing farmer's clubs	4.21	3.76	0.45	5.24**
4.2	Conducting meetings	4.29	3.63	0.66	8.75**
5.1	Input requirements assessment	4.08	3.29	0.79	8.97**
5.2	Reporting on input requirement	3.98	3.41	0.57	6.39**
6.1	Agricultural Statistics	4.45	3.96	0.49	5.99**
6.2	Village Action Plan	4.24	3.61	0.63	7.55**
7	Assisting in Schemes	4.26	3.65	0.61	7.93**
8	Conducting Crop Cutting Experiments	3.90	3.48	0.42	3.36**
9	Assessing crop losses	4.05	3.28	0.77	7.52**
10.1	Maintaining Diary	4.26	3.76	0.50	6.79**
10.2	Maintaining all records and registers	4.21	3.75	0.46	5.60**
11	All other duties as instructed	3.38	3.26	0.12	0.81NS
	Total	100.53	85.24	15.82	
	Average	4.20	3.55	0.65	

** Significant at 0.01 per cent level.

* Significant at 0.05 per cent level.

Correlation Coefficient (r) is 0.72/significant at 0.1% level

The reasons attributed to gaps, among other things, were organizational as well as lack of training. The respondents have expressed that activities such as demonstrations and field days could not be implemented as desired for want of support in the form of inputs and financial resources. Besides, lack of regular training opportunities was cited as one of the main constraints, especially among newly recruited field staff who have not yet undergone full-fledged job training. They were found wanting in performance in many of the role areas.

Performance was found wanting in planning area (item No.6.2). Participatory planning with micro perspective was emerging as an important component of extension management. It was envisaged that the extension functionaries have to reorient themselves to the ground realities and become more and more customer or client driven in their endeavours in the field. Extension approaches had to be modified to reflect the emerging realities.

The gap was significant in roles such as assessing and reporting on input requirements (items 5.1. & 5.2). The superiors had expectations for greater involvement in planning for input supply. As nodal officers for extension at sub-divisional and mandal levels, they were required to play an important role in helping the concerned input supply agencies to ready the stocks as required by the farmers. Therefore, the performance of field staff was crucial to have an assessment of the demand.

Formation of farmers' groups / clubs was one area wherein the performance of AEOs was not on par with expectations. Again, this was another area, which has come to occupy the central place in current strategies and approaches of extension. The field workers who were accustomed to traditional methods of extension were not involving in this work to the extent desired. There existed a gap in relation to expectations and performance in two of the traditional activities / roles namely, 'observing field conditions' and 'suggesting solutions'. The main reason attributed to this tendency was absence of continuous training similar on the lines provided in the T & V system.

The study also revealed that the role items, which were lower in the order of ranking of expectations got more or less similar ranking with regard to performance. These included roles such as 'other duties' 'adoption of villages', 'crop cutting experiments' 'assessing and reporting on input requirements'. Interestingly, there were instances where performance was more than one's own expectations as in the case of work relating to writing of agricultural messages (item No.2.1). The AEOs felt that this role was not that important as compared to other roles. This view was based on their experience in performing the work. Though they have written the messages whenever they visited the villages, the same were not properly maintained and utilized by the villagers. However, they have performed the role relatively better as demanded by their superiors. Thus the role was a case of effect of superior's expectations on performance of subordinates.

Thus the above analysis highlighted the role of AEOs in different areas of extension. Though the performance levels were above average on the 5-point scale, there were significant gaps when the same was analyzed in relation to the given expectations. Organizational and other factors were attributed to the variations.

3. Relationship between Role Expectations And Performance

The study revealed that there was a significant relationship between own expectations and performance of AEOs as indicated by the test on correlation coefficient which was positively correlated ($r=0.721$). By and large, the roles considered as more important have a higher rating of performance. The study also revealed that in some instances no such relationship could be inferred due to influence of other factors on performance. Thus it was found in the case of role relating to "suggesting solutions to farmers and providing feedback to superiors on farmers' reactions", though the expectations scores were high, the performance scores were relatively less. This tendency noticed in respect of other roles like organizing plant protection campaigns and conducting meeting of farmers' clubs was attributed to lack of training.

Conclusion

Suitable measures need to be initiated to improve the performance of some of the roles. The curricula of training programs have to be revised to reflect the expectations of AEOs. Instances of influence of organizational factors on relationship between expectation and performance was notice in respect of some roles. It may be useful to have studies exploring these factors so as to have more clarity on the relationship.

Reference

Reddy V.K., 2003. Role Expectations and Role Performance of Village Level Workers: A Sociological Study of Agricultural Extension Officers. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis.