

Study on access to change agents by the farm women engaged in paddy cultivation in West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines farm women's access to change agents for obtaining useful information which include market prices, local weather conditions, pest alerts and medical advice. Farm women's access to change agents for the information related to paddy crop was low in the study area. Farm women distinguished salesman and input dealers as the most credible extension personnel. The study also noted that the contact between the farm women and the line department is very weak.

Keywords: Farm women, change agents, socio-personal attributes

Introduction

The exchange of information is vital to the existence of societies, organizations, and other social groups. Given its importance, it is hardly surprising that this topic has received considerable research attention. It is of particular importance in agriculture, given the large numbers of people involved in this activity and its importance to society and national economics.

A *change agent* is a person or member of any organisation who develops and delivers relevant programmes to assist farmers in issues related to agriculture practices. Over the last several decades considerable effort has been made throughout the world to provide efficient, effective, and appropriate technology, training, and information to the women farmers and women on the farm by the help of change agents. Alene *et al.* (2008) found that while education and extension contact had significant effects on overall supply and input demand, only extension contact had significant effects among women farmers. Premavathi and Seetharaman (2006) have suggested that extension agents should take

efforts to organise training programmes in their village level itself for updating the knowledge and skill of rural women in various farm and home activities. It was noted by Sadaf *et al.* (2006) that the majority of the rural women strongly agreed about the essentiality of agricultural extension services. They also noted that the majority of the respondents have preferred female extension agents to guide and equip them with latest agricultural technology. Doss (2001) found that female farmers, especially female-headed households, were often not contacted by extension services. As suggested by Jiggins *et al.* (1997) that women farmers' access to extension services must lead to concrete improvements for rural women themselves, as well as to enhance the productivity of the agricultural sector and national food security through increasing marketed output. Although encouraging effects have been made but these successes still fall far short of what is considered necessary at this time (FAO, 1997). In view of the above, the present study was undertaken to study the extent of contact of the women paddy cultivators with change agents.

Methodology

The present study was undertaken in randomly selected two blocks; i.e. Bolpur-Sriniketan Block and Illambazar Block of Bolpur sub-division of Birbhum District, West Bengal. Since the kharif paddy is the most important major crop (in terms of area and employment of farm labour) in the study area, hence the present study was confined to kharif paddy cultivation. For the study 250 farm women were selected by employing the simple random sampling technique. In the next stage, five villages were selected randomly from the selected two blocks. Finally, twenty five farm women of each village were selected for the ultimate sample unit of the study. Personal interview method was applied to collect the data with the help of pre-tested structured interview schedule.

Results

Network research has shown that the degree of structural closure in a network, defined as the extent to which an actor's network contacts are connected to one another, has important implications for generating novel ideas and exercising social influence. A high degree of structural closure creates a cohesive network of tightly linked social actors, and a low degree of structural closure creates a network with "structural holes" and brokerage potential (Burt, 2005; Coleman, 1988). As per the extent/frequency of contact of respondents with change agents in paddy cultivation, it has been observed that respondents had interaction with input dealers, and they had the highest rank. Second rank was obtained by KPS followed by RRB/Co-operatives, KVK's, various NGOs, ADO and scientist (Table 1).

Table 1. Extent/frequency of contact of respondents with change agents

n=250

Change agents	Extent of contact				Total score	Rank
	Regularly	Often	Sometimes	Never		
Input Dealers	209	14	27	0	682	I
Krishi Prajukti Sahayak (KPS)	34	10	34	172	156	II
Regional Rural Banks/Co-Operatives	8	25	55	162	129	III
Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK)/Palli Siksha Bhavana (PSB) Personnel	11	17	22	200	89	IV
Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)	5	4	54	187	72	V
Agricultural Development Officers (ADOs)	4	8	34	204	62	VI
Scientists	3	10	6	0	35	VII

Note: Regularly (3), Often (2), Sometimes (1), Never (0)

Correlation coefficient between extent of contact with change agents and various socio-economic attributes of the respondents in paddy cultivation is presented in Table 2. The results showed that contact with input agencies correlates significantly but negatively with socio-economic trait like education and husband's education, which indicated that respondents and their husbands with low level of education have contacted more with input dealers or vice-versa. Further, respondents with low family income found to be significantly and negatively correlated with the extent of contact with input dealers. So, it can be concluded that farm women with a high level of family income had less contact with input dealers. Socio-economic variable like owner of the tree plant correlates significantly and negatively with this extension contact.

The correlation coefficient between extent of contact with KPS personnel and level of education of the respondents and their husbands has elucidated strong and positive association. It implies that educated farm women and the women who have educated husbands have contacted more with extension personnel. Number of children correlates negatively but significantly with this variable indicating the fact that respondents with fewer children have contacted more with KPS and vice versa.

Table 2. Association between the extent of change agents contact and socio-economic attributes of the farm women

Socio-economic attributes	Extent of contact with extension personnel (*r* Values)							
	Input dealer	KPS personnel	PSB/KVK staff	NGO	SMS/ADO/Govt. official	RRBs	Agricultural scientists	
Age	0.029	-0.123	0.028	00.001	-0.072	-0.141*	0.043	
Caste	-0.108	0.058	-0.079	0.086	-0.008	-00.111	-0.093	
Education	-0.138*	0.160*	0.35	0.141*	00.024	0.071	-0.130*	
Husband's education	-0.143*	0.138*	0.050	0.065	0.000	0.139*	-0.130*	
Marital status	-0.008	0.099	-0.047	-0.074	0.026	0.135*	-0.001	
No. of children	-0.021	-0.218**	-0.109	-0.102	-0.076	-0.007	0.018	
Occupation	0.042	0.102	0.015	0.093	-0.008	0.005	0.037	
Type of family	0.031	0.027	-0.059	0.062	-0.083	0.008	0.021	
Size of family	0.052	-0.042	0.025	-0.045	-0.008	0.097	0.050	
House type	-0.090	-0.028	0.035	0.050	-0.041	0.030	-0.041	
Family income	-0.171**	-0.001	0.101	0.019	0.017	0.185**	0.148*	
Farm power	0.024	0.001	0.014	0.019	0.034	0.110	0.037	
Milch animal	0.016	0.047	-0.039	0.165**	0.014	0.069	0.017	
Agril. implements	-0.067	0.028	0.029	-0.023	0.091	0.204**	-0.048	
Domestic items	-0.108	0.085	0.012	0.003	-0.011	0.132*	-0.080	
Transportation and communication means	-0.106	0.105	0.115	0.005	-0.021	0.148*	-0.074	
Social participation	-0.015	0.052	0.066	0.114	-0.037	0.222**	0.753	
Size of land holding	-0.077	0.033	0.006	-0.032	-0.011	0.214**	-0.057	
Tree plant owned	-0.202**	-0.068	-0.004	0.036	0.051	0.077	0.202**	
Poultry owned	-0.066	0.026	0.050	-0.011	-0.047	0.112	-0.063	
Small animal owned	0.068	0.085	0.104	-0.063	-0.046	0.211**	0.063	
Fishery owned	-0.026	0.073	0.040	0.001	-0.022	0.190**	-0.003	
Irrigation status	0.003	0.078	0.021	-0.039	0.085	0.202**	0.007	
Cropping pattern	-0.115	0.016	-0.009	0.031	-0.025	0.095	-0.103	

Note: *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

It was noticed from the results that there was no significant correlation between the contact with PSB/KVK personnel and any of the socio-economic attributes of the respondents. Among various socio-economic traits of the respondents, the level of education had positive and significant correlation with the NGOs. The socio-economic variable like possession of milch animal significantly and positively correlated with this extension contact. It is found that SMS/ADO/government official had no association with any of the socio-economic traits of the respondents.

Contact with the extension personnel/officials of RRBs is correlated significantly and negatively with age of the respondents indicating that young respondents had more contact with RRBs. Husband's education had positive and significant relationship with RRBs. Again this variable has exhibited a positive and significant relationship with family income. Respondents with higher family income have got in touch more often with these banks. Significant and positive correlation is found between contact with RRBs personnel and possession of agricultural implement and domestic items by the farm women. Means of transportation and communication also had positive and significant correlation with contacting regional rural banks personnel. It implies that farm women who had more of these means regularly contacted RRBs. Social participation has also shown a positive and significant relationship with the RRBs. It has indicated that farm women who are a member of any one or more than one organisation have contacted more with these personnel. Land holding is also correlated significantly and positively with contacting RRBs. The socio-economic variables like owner of a small animal and fishery had significantly and positively correlated with the extent of contact with RRBs personnel. Irrigation status is also correlated significantly and positively indicating that respondents who have better irrigation facilities tended to contact more with this extension agency.

It was found that there is a positive and significant correlation between the education level of farm women and their husbands and their extent of contact with scientists. It indicates that farm women with a higher level of education were often contacted by agricultural scientists. Family income of the respondents also correlates positively and significantly that means farm women with high income had more contact with scientists. Social participation also correlates significantly and positively which explains that farm women being associated with one or more groups have often contacted the agricultural scientists. Another socio-

economic factor i.e. owner of the tree plant had significant and positive correlation with contacting the scientists.

Conclusion

Findings of the study indicate that access of the farm women to extension service in paddy cultivation was low in the study area. Farm women have perceived salesman and input dealers as the most credible extension personnel.

It has been found that the majority of the respondents have no contact with KPS in the study area which implies that the linkage between the farm women and the line department is very weak. Therefore, the scope for acquiring technical assistance from the KPS with respect to crop cultivation is very limited. Therefore, it is recommended to recruit and train more female KPS to update the technical knowledge on farming of the women farmers or to orient and sensitise male extension workers towards the need of the women farmers in order to make them more responsive.

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