

RESEARCH ARTICLE :

Performance of different role items as perceived by the agricultural extension personnel in the revitalized extension system in Assam

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SUMMARY : The present study was carried out in the 11 districts of Assam to access the level of role performance as perceived by the agricultural extension personnel in the revitalized extension system in Assam. A total of 112 agricultural extension personnel were interviewed who were working under the revitalized extension system in Assam with the help of the structured schedule during the period of 2015. A performance index was developed following standard procedures which consist of seven role dimensions each of which comprises of six role items totalling it upto 42 role items. The data analysis was done by using various statistical methods which were frequency, percentage, weighted mean score and rank. The majority (62.50%) of the respondents had medium level of role performance followed by 19.64 per cent respondents who had low level of role performance. The least number of respondents (17.85%) had high level of role performance.

KEY WORDS:

Level of role performance, Agriculture Technology and Management Agency (ATMA), Extension reform

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The public sector extension system in India on its own is not capable enough to meet the ever increasing and multi-faceted demands of the farming community due to agro-ecological and socio-economic variation of the country. It was realized that public extension system will have to be placed in new decentralized institutional arrangements which are demand driven, farmer-accountable, bottom-up and have farming system approach. To address the situation, the Government of India (GOI) and the World Bank pilot-tested

a new, decentralized, market-driven extension model under the National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP). The Key institution in implementing this new approach was the Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) which was responsible for facilitating and coordinating “farmer-led” extension activities within each district.

The Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) calls for integrated approach wherein different stakeholders come closer to plan, organise, and execute the activities to take full

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advantage of the technologies demonstrated in the operational area (Kumar *et al.*, 2011). In the midst of this change, extension system is grappling with the question of how best to harness 'extension reform' to improve farming community. The effective implementation of 'ATMA' largely depends on how effectively the extension functionaries perceive their roles and perform those. There has been very few studies related to performance appraisal of the extension functionaries working under this changing scenario. Performance deals with the outcomes, results and accomplishments achieved by a person, group or organization". The role performance in the study has been operationally defined as the accomplishment, execution, carrying out, working out of anything ordered or undertaken, the doing of any action or work to (Oxford English Dictionary, 2001). Hence, the present study was contemplated to measure the level of role performed as perceived by the agricultural extension personnel in the revitalized extension system in Assam.

RESOURCES AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Assam, one of the states of North-eastern India. At the time of the study, there were 27 districts in Assam. Out of these, 11 (eleven) districts were purposively selected for the study because Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) was first constituted in these districts under the World Bank aided Assam Agricultural Competitiveness Project (AACP). A total of 112 agricultural development officers were selected and interviewed in the 11 selected districts for the study. The role performance in the study has been operationally defined as the viewpoints or opinions of the respondents on the list of role items identified under each of the seven role dimensions, namely. 'Planning', 'Organizing', 'Staffing', 'Directing', 'Co-ordinating', 'Reporting' and 'Budgeting' in the study area as being performed or not performed with respect to their position

as an Agricultural Development Officer (ADO). A performance index was developed following standard procedures which consist of above seven role dimensions each of which comprises of six role items totalling it upto 42 role items. The primary data in the present study were collected directly from the respondents through personal interview method. The data analysis was done by using various statistical methods which were frequency, percentage, weighted mean score and rank.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The results obtained from the present study as well as discussions have been summarized under following heads:

Performance of different role items by the respondents under planning dimension:

The present study revealed (Table 1) that the highest rank was occupied by the role 'Identification and prioritization of needs and interest of the farmers' with a weighted mean score of 3.642. The role 'Preparation of Block Action Plan' stood second in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 3.625 followed by the role 'Developing module for capacity building programmes' with a weighted mean score of 3.258. The fourth rank was occupied by the role 'Helping district core team in up gradation of SREP' with a weighted mean score of 2.946. The role 'Exploring new area of farming having present and future prospects' stood fifth in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 2.767 followed by the role 'Carrying out socio-economic analysis for group formation' with a weighted mean score of 2.419.

Identifying farmer's need and interest makes the benchmark for designing the extension activities to be undertaken in a locality. The success of any extension programme depends on how best the farmers' 'felt' and 'unfelt' needs were shorted out and fulfilled considering the socio-economic and ecological condition of the locality.

Role No.	Role items	Weighted Mean score	Rank
1	Helping district core team in up gradation of SREP	2.946	IV
2	Preparation of Block Action Plan (BAP)	3.625	II
3	Carrying out socio-economic analysis for group formation	2.419	VI
4	Identification and prioritization of needs and interest of the farmers	3.642	I
5	Developing module for capacity building programmes	3.258	III
6	Exploring new area of farming having present and future prospects	2.767	V

The extension activities are generally based on the 'felt' and 'unfelt' needs of the farmers which are being prioritized before putting it into the action plan. These fairly justified the role number 4 and role number 2 being in the rank 1 and 2, respectively.

Performance of different role items by the respondents under organizing dimension:

The present study revealed that (Table 2) the highest rank was occupied by the role 'Organizing farmer's meeting in setting aims and objectives' with a weighted mean score of 3.312. The role 'Organizing exhibition, kissan mela, fruits/ vegetable show' stood second in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 3.062 followed by the role 'Operationalising SREP in each block' with a weighted mean score of 3.017. The fourth rank was occupied by the role 'Facilitating farmers' organization at block level' with a weighted mean score of 2.839. The role 'Establishing linkages for convergence with line department' stood fifth in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 2.821 followed by the role 'Organizing capacity building programmes for farmers and farmers' group' with a weighted mean score of 2.723.

Organizing farmer's meeting for collective decision making is very much essential in planning, implementation and evaluation of any extension programme. It helps to identify the key issues by consensus which are needed to be addressed in preparation of Block Action Plan (BAP) and in operationalizing the Strategic Research and Extension Plan (SREP). These issues are required

to be addressed under the provision of extension reform through capacity building programme in the forms of demonstration, exposure visit and exhibition show. These fairly justified the role 4 and role 5 being in the rank 1 and 2, respectively.

Performance of different role items by the respondents under staffing dimension:

The present study revealed that (Table 3) the highest rank was occupied by the role 'Helps in formation of Farm Information and Advisory Centre' with a weighted mean score of 3.535. The role 'Selection of beneficiaries in consultation with farmers' advisory committee and village panchayats' stood second in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 3.339 followed by the role 'Identification of farmers and farmers' group for rewards and incentives' with a weighted mean score of 3.125. The fourth rank was occupied by the role 'Helping farmer's group in selection of its members' with a weighted mean score of 3.071. The role 'Identification of resource persons for capacity building programmes' stood fifth in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 2.607 followed by the role 'Identification and development of leader for farmers group' with a weighted mean score of 2.500.

Collection of feedback and readdressing of feedback plays an important role in effective extension delivery system. It can only be possible if sufficient nos of feedback can be gathered and addressed in quick succession. Farm Information and Advisory Centre'

Role No.	Role items	Weighted Mean score	Rank
1	Operationalising SREP in each block	3.017	III
2	Facilitating farmers' organization at block level	2.839	IV
3	Organizing capacity building programmes for farmers and farmers' group	2.723	VI
4	Organizing farmer's meeting in setting aims and objectives	3.312	I
5	Organizing exhibition, kissan mela, fruits/ vegetable show	3.062	II
6	Establishing linkages for convergence with line department	2.821	V

Role No.	Role items	Weighted Mean score	Rank
1	Selection of beneficiaries in consultation with farmers' advisory committee and village panchayats	3.339	II
2	Helping farmers' group in selection of its members	3.071	IV
3	Identification and development of leader for farmers' group	2.500	VI
4	Identification of farmers and farmers' group for rewards and incentives	3.125	III
5	Helps in formation of Farm Information and Advisory Centre	3.535	I
6	Identification of resource persons for capacity building programmes	2.607	V

(FIAC) is a centre which is formed at block level with different farmer's representatives of different social strata. It acts as two way communication tools for information dissemination and generation. Most of the extension interventions under extension reform are done through the consent of FIAC. FIAC looks after the selection of beneficiaries in consultation with village panchayats which help the extension system in disseminating the information in a democratic manner. In the same time, it also helps in bringing out the feedback into the eye of the extension system. These fairly justified the role no 5 and 1 being in the rank 1 and 2, respectively.

Performance of different role items by the respondents under directing dimension:

The present study revealed that (Table 4) the highest rank was occupied by the role 'Providing timely and relevant information to farmers' with a weighted mean score of 3.571. The role 'Helping farmers groups in maintaining sustainability and leadership' stood second in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 3.187 followed by the role 'Facilitating farmer to farmer technology dissemination and learning' with a weighted mean score of 2.937. The fourth rank was occupied by the role 'Detailing the activities to be carried out by farmers advisory committee' with a weighted mean score of 2.866. The role 'Helping farmers in getting necessary inputs from the service centre' stood fifth in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 2.678 followed by

the role 'Intimating farmers and resource persons for the capacity building programmes' with a weighted mean score of 2.419.

Providing timely and relevant information to the farmers is very much essential for any extension programme to become successful. For effective extension delivery, need based information must be at the doorstep of the farmers when it is needed. Irrelevant information or improper timing of message delivery system reduces the credibility of the extension system. The sustainability criteria such as leadership styles, transparency in financial matter, record keeping, frequency of meeting, regularity in attendance and quantum of socio-economic activities undertaken are the factors which are considered as good predictors of longevity of a farmer's group. These justified the role no 6 and 4 being in the rank 1 and 2, respectively.

Performance of different role items by the respondents under co-ordinating dimension:

The present study revealed that (Table 5) the highest rank was occupied by the role 'Co-ordinating assessment, refinement, validation and adoption of front line technologies with local research centres' with a weighted mean score of 3.267. The role 'Co-ordinating block meeting to discuss the issues bought by farmer's advisory committee' stood second in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 3.098 followed by the role 'Helps in federation of farmers' group from block to district level'

Table 4 : Performance of different role items by the respondents under directing dimension

(n=112)

Role No.	Role items	Weighted Mean score	Rank
1	Intimating farmers and resource persons for the capacity building programmes	2.419	VI
2	Facilitating farmer to farmer technology dissemination and learning	2.937	III
3	Helping farmers in getting necessary inputs from the service centre	2.678	V
4	Helping farmers groups in maintaining sustainability and leadership	3.187	II
5	Detailing the activities to be carried out by Farmers advisory committee	2.866	IV
6	Providing timely and relevant information to farmers	3.571	I

Table 5 : Performance of different role items by the respondents under co-ordinating dimension

(n=112)

Role No.	Role items	Weighted Mean score	Rank
1	Co-ordinating the implementation of extension programmes detailed in BAP	2.892	IV
2	Co-ordinating block meeting to discuss the issues bought by farmer's advisory committee	3.098	II
3	Co-ordinating assessment, refinement, validation of front line technologies with local research centres	3.267	I
4	Monitoring the functioning of farmers' group on a regular basis	2.169	VI
5	Helps in federation of farmers' group from block to district level	3.044	III
6	Helps in establishing information portals for information sharing	2.821	V

with a weighted mean score of 3.044. The fourth rank was occupied by the role 'Co-ordinating the implementation of extension programmes detailed in BAP' with a weighted mean score of 2.892. The role 'Helps in establishing information portals for information sharing' stood fifth in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 2.821 followed by the role 'Monitoring the functioning of farmers' group on a regular basis' with a weighted mean score of 2.169.

Convergence with the line departments in planning and implementation of extension activities is one of the core issues of extension reform system. Agriculture and allied departments including financial institutions, state agricultural university, rural development departments, and non-governmental organizations need to be lined up in joint technology assessment, refinement and validation. Feedback retrieval and readdressing need to be strengthened to meet the need and interest of the farming community. For this, coordinating block meeting to discuss the issues brought by farmer's advisory committee is essential to include those in policy formulation. These fairly justified the role 3 and role 2 being in the rank 1 and 2, respectively.

Performance of different role items by the respondents under reporting dimension:

The present study revealed that (Table 6) the highest rank was occupied by the role 'Supporting ATMA management committee in discharging its function' with a weighted mean score of 3.169. The role 'Reporting farmer's feedback in block meeting' stood second in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 3.089 followed by the role 'Keeping inventory of all the beneficiary farmers and farm related activities' with a weighted mean score of 2.955. The fourth rank was occupied by the role 'Compiling report on reviewing of progress and reporting the same to ATMA Management Committee' with a weighted mean score of 2.928. The role 'Submission of work plans to State Level sanctioning Committee' stood fifth in the rank order with a mean score of 2.803 followed by the role 'Documentation and publication of success stories of farmers' with a weighted mean score of 2.589.

The importance of feedback retrieval and readdressing is highly felt in the extension reform system to make the extension system demand driven and farmer oriented. Feedback itself is a kind of evaluation which

Table 6 : Performance of different role items by the respondents under reporting dimension

(n =112)

Role No.	Role items	Weighted Mean score	Rank
1	Documentation and publication of success stories of farmers	2.589	VI
2	Reporting farmers' feed back in block meeting	3.089	II
3	Keeping inventory of all the beneficiary farmers and farm related activities	2.955	III
4	Supporting ATMA management committee in discharging its function	3.169	I
5	Compiling report on reviewing of progress and reporting the same to ATMA Management Committee	2.928	IV
6	Submission of work plans to State Level sanctioning Committee	2.803	V

Table 7 : Performance of different role items by the respondents under budgeting dimension

(n=112)

Role No.	Role items	Weighted mean score	Rank
1	Working on the credit appraisal and getting approval for the activities to be carried out	2.705	IV
2	Maintaining proper record and account for the activities carried out	3.205	I
3	Provisioning rewards and incentives for successful famer(s)/ groups	2.955	III
4	Provisioning seed money/revolving fund for functioning of farmers' group	2.669	V
5	Compiling report on utilization of fund and the physical progress of work	2.964	II
6	Mobilizing fund needed for documentation and publication of success stories	2.508	VI

Table 8 : Distribution of respondents according to their level of role performance

(n=112)

Category	Score range	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	S.D	C.V
Low level of role performance	84 to 119	22	19.64			
Medium level of role performance	120 to 200	70	62.50	160.37	39.81	24.82
High level of role performance	201 to 245	20	17.85			

helps the extension system to do the needful refinement and validation to its delivery mechanism. These justified the role 4 and role 2 being the rank 1 and 2, respectively.

Performance of different role items by the respondents under budgeting dimension:

The present study revealed that (Table 7) the highest rank was occupied by the role 'Maintaining proper record and account for the activities carried out' with a weighted mean score of 3.205. The role 'Compiling report on utilization of fund and the physical progress of work' stood second in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 2.964 followed by the role 'Provisioning rewards and incentives for successful farmer(s)/ groups' with a weighted mean score of 2.955. The fourth rank was occupied by the role 'Working on the credit appraisal and approval for the activities to be carried out' with a weighted mean score of 2.705. The role 'Provisioning seed money/revolving fund for functioning of farmers' group' stood fifth in the rank order with a weighted mean score of 2.669 followed by the role 'Mobilizing fund needed for documentation and publication of success stories' with a weighted mean score of 2.508.

Maintaining proper record and account not only enhance transparency but also increase the accountability in performing the activities. Compiling report on utilization of fund and the physical progress of work is one of the core activities under the extension reform system. It helps in keep track of fund and avoid unnecessary utilization. Both these activities help in determining the pattern of fund utilization and physical coverage made in a particular year. These justified the role 2 and role 5 being the rank 1 and 2, respectively.

Level of overall role performance as perceived by the respondents:

The present study revealed that (Table 8) the

majority (62.50%) of the respondents had medium level of role performance followed by 19.64 per cent respondents who had low level of role performance. The least number of respondents (17.85%) had high level of role performance. The value of co-efficient of variation (24.82) indicates that the respondents were homogenous with respect to their level of role performance.

Conclusion :

The findings on level of overall role performance revealed that more than 80.00 per cent of the respondents had low to medium level of performance. Only a small proportion of them (17.85%) were found with high level of role performance. An effective management strategy for organizational performance should seek to pin point the gaps in performance of their assigned roles and try to reduce them as far as practicable. Higher level of role performance is likely to impact positively on employees' and organization's well-being. Quite a good round of orientation and training is required for the extension personnel working under the revitalized extension system in Assam to make them well aware and familiar with the new set of roles to be performed.

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