

Harnessing Telecommunications for Public Agricultural Extension: An analysis

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This dissertation focuses on the use of telecommunication networks in the extension systems especially in the government sector. Due to large number of small and marginal farmers in India, reaching out to the farmers has always been a challenge in India. To make good of the technical progress the country has made, these technologies need to reach the farmers. This issue is very important now as climate changes are affecting the agriculture sector and we need to scale up our production to eradicate hunger from our country. The increasing number of mobile phones in the country has provided an alternative to reach out to the farmers. Effective utilization of this network is therefore very critical in increasing the agricultural production of the country.

The two important projects of government of India in this regard are mKisan and Kisan Call Centre. The study analysed the interstate differences in implementing these projects. The study has found that there is a huge difference among the states in utilising these platforms. The study has also found that involvement of district officials also varies widely which in turn results in huge number of non localised messages which may not be useful to the farmers. While the SMS policy issued by the department is sufficient to tackle some of the issues, many states are not following the policy in letter and spirit.

The opinions expressed by the farmers have also been analysed. While many farmers are satisfied by the content of the messages received by them, there is widespread feeling that the SMSs were reduced considerably during recent times. There are very less number of messages sent in the allied sectors like horticulture and animal husbandry. There is also a lack of awareness about such services among the farmers

which needs to be tackled urgently. International experiences in similar type of projects suggests that information sharing alone may not sufficient to solve the issues. Other factors like farmer aggregation and involvement of other stakeholders in the system has been found to increase the bargaining power of the farmers. Therefore more comprehensive systems which builds on these type of information sharing projects are necessary to fully exploit the benefit of the reach of telecommunication network in the country.