

Chapter 5 Kisan Call Centre

Agricultural Extension through conventional methods like training and visit has limited success in India as the manpower required to reach all of the marginal farmers in India is very high. The farmer to farmer extension methods while successful in implementation, has been dependent on the progressive farmer's or farmer's friend's dedication and enthusiasm. Reaching out to India's small and marginal farmers posed enormous challenges like shortage in trained manpower and cost involved for the same. Government of India has thought about the alternative methods for the dissemination at the start of this century. During 2004 government came out with the concept of Kisan call Centre which will be accessible to all citizens free of cost. Initially the number 1551 was allotted which will be routed to the call centre where agriculture experts are located who in turn answer these calls. At this time the fixed phone services were the main form of communication and the access provided by BSNL through 1551 was sufficient to cater the needs. But as customer base of mobile services increased, the rural population in large numbers started subscribing to the mobile pre-paid services and there arised requirement of providing access to mobile customers also. The call centre number has been changed to 1800-180-1551 which is accessible from any telecom service provider and charges for the call is paid by the Government of India.

Kisan Call Centre (KCC) (Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and farmer Welfare, 2017c) answers queries related to agriculture and allied sectors. During initial phase three levels were introduced in answering the calls. The three levels of KCC are level I which is the basic call centre interface with high quality band width and local language proficient agriculture graduate, level II with Subject Matter Specialists

on concerned field such as agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry and level III which is the management group to monitor level I and II and ensure the smooth progress in work. During 6AM to 10 PM, KCC will provide immediate response. During first phase one call centre each was commissioned for each major states and smaller states were routed to the nearest call centre. The calls are received at twenty five call centres wherein 232 agricultural graduates respond to the query of the farmer in local language, 182 experts located in different parts of the country at State Agricultural Universities, ICAR institutes, State Department of Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, and other developments are answering the calls at level-II centres. Initial response to the facility was not encouraging. During 2004-05 the calls received by the call centre was only 647743. This was increased to 716088 during calls during 2009 (Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmer welfare, 2017b) which also was very small compared to the 12.6 crores farmers in this country.

5.1 Restructuring of KCC

Realising that the calls were not increasing due to the systemic issues inherent in system, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and farmer welfare has embarked upon a rejuvenating plan for KCC during 2011 and 2012. KCCs have been revamped by consolidation and introducing state of the art features such as voice mail, call recording, call barging, SMS to caller farmers and call conference / call escalation for advice at higher levels. A Kisan Knowledge Management System (KKMS) has also been developed to capture the details of farmers calling the KCC and their queries and also a searchable database on State wise package of practices to retrieve correct, consistent and quick reply to the queries of farmers. The Kisan Call Centre currently is located in fourteen places. Each Location is having multiple desks where calls of each language is answered. For example the KCC Bangalore will take care of two states namely Karnataka and Kerala. The calls from Karnataka land in desks with Kannada speaking experts while calls from Kerala land in desks with Malayalam speaking experts.

The restructured KCCs are now more professional with the following technological innovations:

- a) Voice/Media Gateways (IPPBX based decentralized system).
- b) Dedicated MPLS leased line network with dedicated bandwidth.
- c) Call barging.
- d) SMS to caller farmers providing a gist of advisories given to them on phone.
- e) Voice mail system for recording farmer's queries after working time of KCC or during call lines busy, with provision for call back to the caller.
- f) Soft phones in every personal computer with caller ID facility.
- g) Up -scaling the knowledge of CCAs by way of providing latest versions of guide books and booklets issued by the State Agricultural Department or the Agricultural Universities. Facility of video conferencing of each KCC for interaction of KCC agents with the Divisional/Zonal Level Officers of the State Agriculture and allied departments as well as on line monitoring for the working of KCCs.

5.2 Importance of State Governments in KCC

DAC also emphasised the importance of State Governments in augmenting the performance of KCC. As per DAC, states were advised to provide following support.

- To proactively involve in KCCs for supervising the quality of extension services provided by the KCC agents and ensuring the revised escalation matrix under KKMS is put in place and higher level officers keep a track of the answers given at lower level.
- To create awareness amongst farmers by launching greater publicity and advertisement campaign amongst farmers through both electronic and print media.
- Keep the KCC agents apprised about new scheme/programmes/contingency plans taken by GOI and State Governments.

- Provide the KCC agents with latest versions of guide books and booklets brought out by the State Government and the local Agricultural Universities.
- Organize monthly video conference on pre-announced dates in the university campus or through State Information Centre for interaction of KCC agents with the Divisional/Zonal level officers of the State Agriculture and allied departments.
- The KCCs to give a weekly feedback to the State Department of Agriculture and allied departments regarding the nature of call including area specific prevalence of crop diseases, pest infestation etc.

The call escalation pattern also was modified as given below to include KVKs and Block level officers

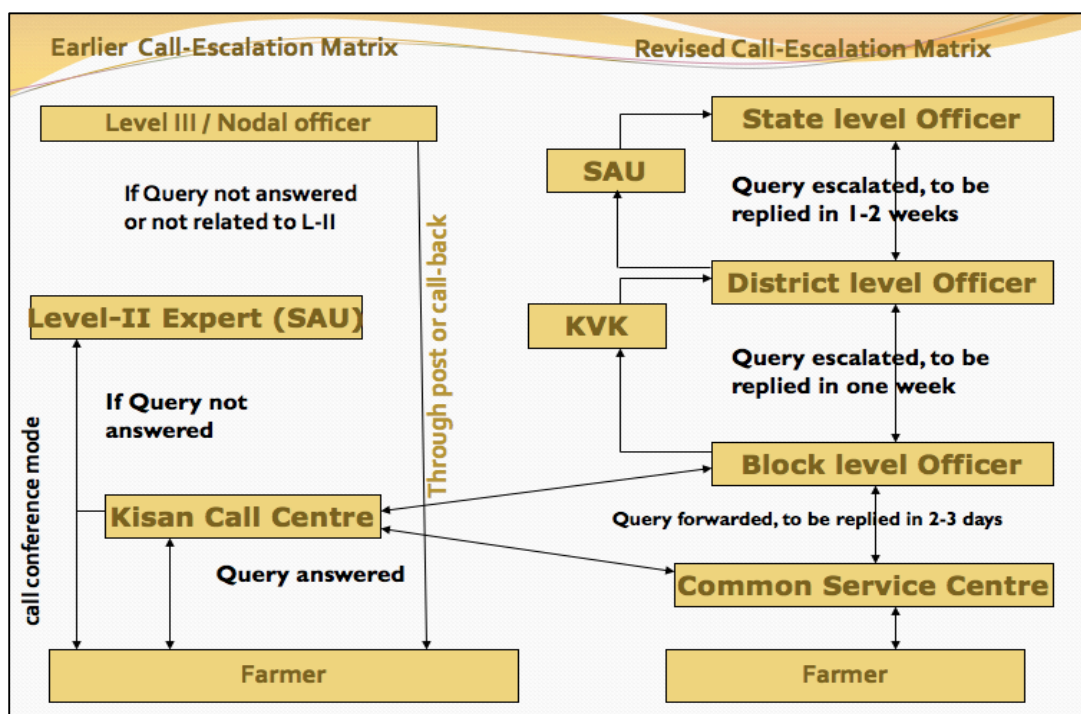


Figure 5-1 Call Escalation Matrix of KCC (Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and farmer Welfare, 2017c)

The joint efforts of Department of Agriculture and State governments has resulted in the increase of calls manifold.

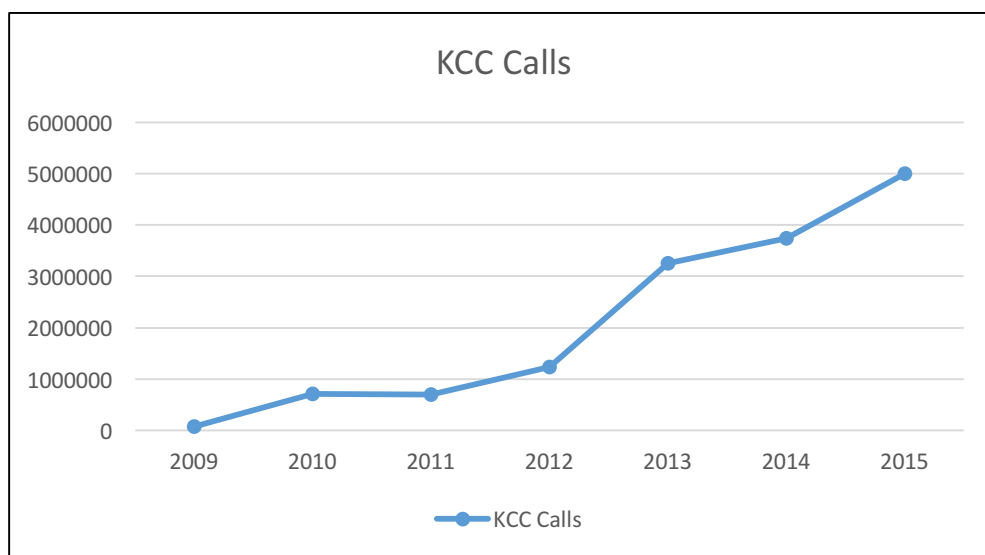


Figure 5-2 Calls Received in KCC (year wise) (Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmer welfare, 2017b)

5.3 Integration of Common Service Centres with KCC

To fully utilise the Kisan Knowledge Management system (which is back end web system) which came up along with the KCC, Common Service Centre of Department of IT was roped in by DAC. The Common Service Centres were given access to the KKMS so that farmer can approach these CSCs with their queries and these queries is posted in the portal for the experts advice. CSC is able to post any images relevant to the query along with the query which will help the expert in identifying the issue better.

Besides the KCC agents and CSC agents, farmers and other stake holders can also have direct access to the knowledge database search on package of practices in the KKMS web site by simply clicking on the 'Kisan Login' displayed on the front page of web- site to search for desired information available on the web-site for their own use. A detailed escalation matrix is given below

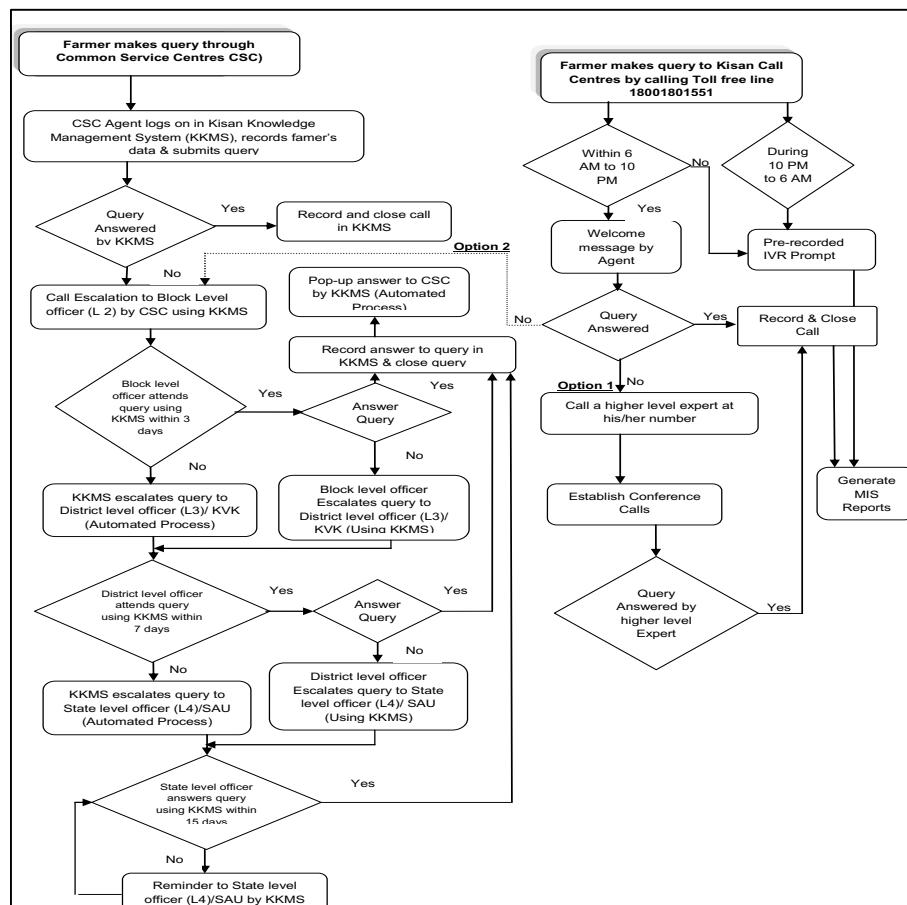


Figure 5-3 Escalation Matrix KCC With CSC Agents (Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and farmer Welfare, 2017c)

While there is more penetration of smartphones in rural India, voice communication remain the important form of communication. Since illiteracy is prevailing at significant levels in rural India, even reading an SMS in local language also poses severe challenges. Therefore KCC, which is primarily based on voice communication, is still one of the most important intervention of Government of India in last twenty five years. While there is a sharp increase in the number of calls a detailed analysis of calls from each state may reveal any regional disparity among the calls. Such detailed analysis is included in the later part of the document.