

## Agricultural Extension in South Asia

**HANDBOOK OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION**

Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi  
(2020)

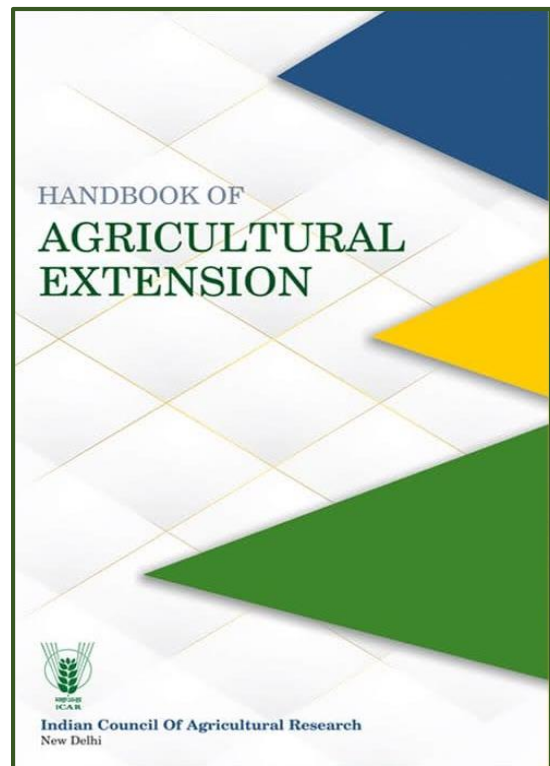
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Agricultural Extension, arguably the youngest of the agricultural sciences evolved through creation, re-creation, adaptation, and integration over years. Identified as social innovation, its purpose was to build the competency of various actors in agriculture and stimulate appropriate behavioural changes that can help them adjust to dynamic societal needs. Though the origin of the word 'extension' can be traced back to educational settings, gradually the concept found more acceptability in the developmental discourse in agriculture. Unlike the other agricultural sciences which have strict disciplinary borders and well-defined roots for their body of knowledge, agricultural extension has more flexible boundaries and borrows its content heavily from related social science subjects. Knowledge from a variety of scientific fields such as communication, psychology, management, sociology, development studies, entrepreneurship, journalism, etc., are being assimilated into its core in this effort. A thorough understanding in these areas is important for any agriculture professional, as they are fundamental to the practice of agricultural science in various settings. Moreover, it attempts to capacitate the learners to fit into various roles by building their functional competencies. For these reasons, the subject is always included in the academic programmes of agricultural sciences, across the world.



However, not many reading resources are visible that value this diversity, at least in the Indian context. Though there are good publications, most of them are limited in their scope, generally focused on only one of the specific dimensions of the discipline. Moreover, the demand is for contextualized books that integrate any specialized field of social science with agricultural science. The quality of the available resources is another major concern. Hence there is a long-felt need for such a comprehensive reference book for scholars, researchers and practitioners of

this discipline. The *Handbook of Agricultural Extension* can be identified as an attempt to address this need. It attempts to broaden the subject by illustrating its wider scope and applicability. Through my review I have tried to examine the unique contributions of this book as well as to critique some of the shortcomings that could have been addressed.

The book starts with an effort to trace the lineage of agricultural extension in various countries including India. Significant events that marked the genesis of extension practice, education and research are discussed in this attempt. Though extension had a humble beginning in India, by centering on rural development and community development programmes, its focus gradually shifted towards technology mediation, development of agriculture by facilitating behavioural change, and capacitating various stakeholders including farmers. Furthermore, the structural transformation of the discipline in response to changing dynamics extended its scope to new areas – application of information and communication technology in farming, participatory methods, sustainable farming and institutional innovations. These changes also played a crucial role in making extension more demand led than the supply-driven approaches practiced until then.

Various initiatives of the Government of India and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), which had commenced during this period and characterized this transition are narrated in the book. The book tries to build on the body of existing knowledge in order to add more content. For instance, it tries to highlight the emergence of some new approaches, such as Farmer Field Schools, NGO-based extension, and private extension in addition to the eight extension approaches propounded by Axinn (1988).

The book has chapters exclusively dedicated to throwing insights on extension research that researchers may find very useful. It goes into detail on research processes, critical assumptions and concepts, approaches, theory building, research designs and guiding principles. Various psychometric scaling techniques and psychological tests – grounded in behavioural theories and advanced methods – are also discussed. These chapters may be considerably useful for beginners in framing research studies systematically and scientifically. Similarly, two chapters focus exclusively on management, which has implications on the conduct of agricultural administration. Agriculture professionals tasked with running organizations may find some of the topics such as management theories, methods, organizational management, project management techniques and motivational and leadership theories, quite interesting. However, real life case examples would have made the chapter more relevant and useful.

Likewise, participatory methods and approaches, the most effective and tested tools in designing and delivering inclusive developmental interventions, would be useful to development practitioners. Monitoring & Evaluation and Assessment of Extension Programmes is separately dealt with as a chapter. The book also presents the conventional tools such as Kirk Patricks' model, Bennet's hierarchy and Logical framework approach as well as the recent ones like Propensity Score Matching for objectively appraising interventions. Chapter 6, 'Reaching farmer's through innovative extension models', needs special mention as it outlines the discipline's gradual evolution from an educational approach to development facilitation. Given the emerging

challenges in agriculture, the extension system has evolved novel mechanisms to address these. It includes models to strengthen technology outreach (National Demonstration, Operational Research Project, Krishi Vigyan Kendra), enhance better research extension connect (IVLP, Farmer First), and farmer-oriented participatory extension systems (ATMA). Further on, the chapter discusses the latest advances in this regard such as ARYA, a drive to attract youth to farming, *Mera Gaon Mera Gourav*, the ICAR-led village adoption scheme, the NICRA initiative to tackle challenges of climate change in agriculture, and VATICA, a programme to promote value addition and incubation training in agriculture. As a reader, I found these chapters quite informative. However, it may be mentioned that the book missed the chance to throw more light on some relevant topics such as the status and performance of ATMA, the much highlighted institutional innovation, or the recently launched National Mission on Agricultural Extension & Technology (NMEAT).

Some topics, such as extension communication for change management, extension teaching methods, agricultural journalism training and capacity building are dealt with in separate chapters. The book also has chapters dedicated to emerging areas of interest – gender and nutrition, entrepreneurship and agribusiness, intellectual property rights and knowledge management. This effort to present the many facets of extension must be appreciated.

Though the book is well-designed, repetition of content in some chapters can annoy the reader. For instance, theories of motivation are given in both the chapters dealing with agricultural extension management. Similarly, the birth of modern extension and advisory services is presented in the first chapter and then again in the sixth chapter. To continue, content in some chapters are limited to just the insights offered by seminal researchers in that topic. To specifically quote an example, in the chapter ‘Diffusion of Innovations’, content is confined to the arguments and postulates of Everett Rogers, though the discussion has progressed much further, moving beyond the linear transfer of technology paradigm. Given that the concepts of Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems (AKIS) and Agricultural Innovation System (AIS) came to the fore subsequently to explain technology innovation and diffusion systems, such advances are not mentioned in this chapter.

Likewise, the chapters dealing with research methodology could have offered more insights on the various research strategies. As a source book in extension, a more detailed coverage of qualitative and mixed research methods was expected along with its applicability in various contexts like consumer and marketing studies, media research, policy analysis, etc. Are we appreciating the content diversity of the discipline while making the research framework of extension is a question that needs to be addressed. A systematic focus in this regard would have enriched this book substantially. Finally, a more balanced presentation of the content by grounding it on the contemporary issues and challenges faced by the discipline would have been even more appreciated by readers rather than the overarching focus on past experiences and conventional pathways followed by the discipline.

In summary the book integrates knowledge from various disciplinary portfolios that form the building blocks of agricultural extension. The content encompasses knowledge from both

traditional fields and evolving areas of the discipline. Undoubtedly, the handbook is a first of its kind published in agricultural extension in India. The wealth of knowledge available in the book makes it a ready reference for extension students and faculty. It can also help students preparing for various competitive exams in the subject. But the same cannot be said for extension field practitioners who look for ways to enhance their capacities to solve field-level extension challenges.

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