

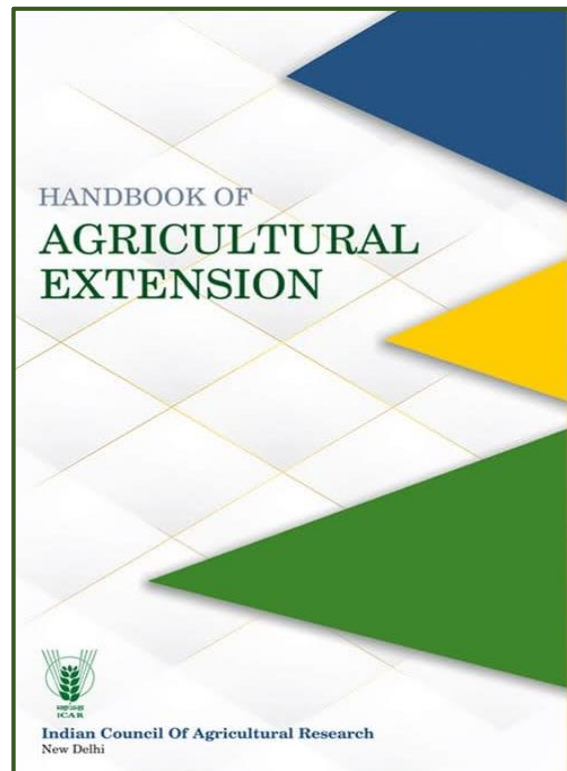
Agricultural Extension in South Asia

HANDBOOK OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION
Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi (2020)
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Agricultural Extension is a domain in the Social Sciences concerned with the application of science to educate and influence the behavior of people. The subject of Agriculture Extension is vast, cutting across the disciplines of agriculture, communication, psychology, behavioral sciences, organizational sciences, and journalism to name a few, and a comprehensive resource on the subject was scarce. Most of the available sources on wider disciplines of extension were either limited in scope or not comprehensive enough to be a complete guide for practitioners. In this backdrop, it is heartening that the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has released a handbook on Agricultural Extension with 22 chapters that attempts to cover the pluralistic nature of agricultural extension as a discipline.

The book provides a foundation – encompassing the basic concepts, approaches and conceptual differences in extension – that is vital for all beginners. At the same time, the book also provides a historical perspective on important extension efforts along with a brief overview of emerging extension approaches such as FPOs, electronic National Agriculture Markets, Para professionalism, programme for input dealers (DAESI), climate smart extension, and other developments in the field of agriculture. The book also explicitly highlights the imminent need to revise the curriculum so as to align with the demands of present day agriculture (pages 30-31). It also refers to a few courses offered by universities abroad on subjects such as governance, livelihoods and resources, facilitating interactive processes and cutting edge issues in rural development and innovations, etc. It would have been even more useful if a few chapters were dedicated to these niche areas in extension that could also have acted as a blueprint for future changes in curricula.



The best part of the book, which fascinated me, is the way it highlights the different roles that an extensionist can perform. Topics such as management, communication, journalism,

sociology, psychology, innovations, capacity building, adult education, ICT, media management are all taught as independent degree programmes in the traditional education system, but we, the students of agricultural extension, get to study all of them and the book provides good information on these topics succinctly, including the basic concepts, theories, and models. For an early-career researcher like me, if the chapters had been offered with specific topics together with case studies on the application of these theories and models under different conditions, it would have been more engaging while also giving a flavour of ground reality.

The book also discusses different approaches and innovative extension models used in different organizations – public, private, civil society – in different areas viz., educational, farming system, public private partnership (PPP), privatization approach, etc. In later editions of the book I would love to see the addition of more topics such as Agricultural Innovations Systems (AIS)/environmental extension/systems approach in extension/partnership approaches other than PPP, or learning modules developed by global organizations like FAO/GFRAS/ADB/CGIAR, recent updates to theories that examine farmers' adoption behaviour (like theory of planned behaviour, theory of reasoned action, Technology Adoption Model), or use of behavioural experiments to understand farmers' adoption process (biases, heuristics, etc.). These theories are frequently used in extension research across the globe and a comprehensive coverage of these could be of great help to both students and scholars to keep them abreast of recent developments.

Another very useful part of the book is the brief information given on tools and techniques, which is handy for extension researchers. The book covers a range of topics: project planning and management, participatory approaches and technology development, research designs and methods, psychometric methods, monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment methods. Proper methods in scientific research are absolutely essential for evidence-based policy formulation and the book introduces many methods and statistical tools for generating scientific evidence. The techniques presented are quite useful, especially for beginners who can then understand the context and provide an analytical and scientific outlook for the research/project work they want to plan and present.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a trendsetting domain in the present era, as it has proven its potential to reach these technologies/information to large numbers of farmers – a verified method, especially during the pandemic. With advancement of technology, crop advisories, crop planning, weather, yield monitoring and predictions can be made available at your fingertips, which needs to be exploited by extension professionals. The book has dedicated a considerable part to dealing with ICT tools such as radio, TV, mobile phones. However, more emphasis on recent advances like internet of things (IoT), machine learning and artificial intelligence for faster transfer of technologies along with successful case studies (maybe from Krishi Vigyan Kendras [KVKs], State Agricultural Universities [SAUs], Agricultural Departments or any other development organizations) would have added greater value.

E-journalism is another section that I liked in the book and it will have a greater role to play in the days to come. The book highlights different techniques of editing and proofreading. This is the age of social media, and writing for social media platforms and newspapers is an

important skill for an extension agent, but such information is very limited here. Expanding on these aspects, in addition to content development for broadcasting media, would have been helpful. The insights on entrepreneurship, gender and nutrition, agricultural laws, intellectual property rights, commercialization of technologies are the need of the hour and is well covered in this *Handbook*.

The lack of a comprehensive ready reckoner for the discipline of extension for students and teachers is bridged with this timely publication. Bringing out such a handbook is a Herculean task and the efforts of editors and authors are commendable. It will be very useful to all those who take an interest in agricultural extension. I hope to see constant revision and updated editions of the book incorporating latest advances in the science of Agricultural Extension. As it is said, change is the only constant – the science grows very fast and keeping pace with it is crucial to remain relevant.

Bhuvana N



Dr Bhuvana N is a Consultant, Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP), Hyderabad, India. She earned her PhD in Agricultural Extension from the Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University, Hyderabad. She holds double masters; Masters in Agricultural Extension from University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru, India and Masters in Rural Development from University of Ghent, Belgium. She has research experience from Wageningen University, Netherlands. Her area of expertise is in the field of qualitative methods for social science research. You can reach her at bhuvana.rao7@gmail.com

**AESA Secretariat: Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP),
Road No 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India
www.aesanetwork.org Email: aesanetwork@gmail.com**