

## Credibility Crisis among Agriculture Extension Functionaries in Jammu and Kashmir

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on the factors, which have led to the loss of credibility of the extension workers in Jammu and Kashmir and explore the ways and means to strengthen the credibility of the extension workers so that they would efficiently work at grass-root levels. To achieve the objectives of the study, 120 Junior Agriculture Assistants (JAAs) of Department of Agricultural Production rendering their services at different locations of the state were interviewed, and responses taken of a specially designed instrument. It was found that the main factors, which have led to the loss of credibility among the extension functionaries, are improper technologies fed to the extension delivery system, involvement of extension workers in irrelevant administrative works, improper training imparted to the field extension functionaries in technology transfer methodologies, improper methods of presenting information, little cooperation from subject matter specialists, concept of salesman ship among the private sector representatives to achieve their targets *etc.* The representatives of different seeds and pesticide companies are misleading farmers for a short time to achieve their targets by providing them hollow promises of high yields. In short run, they managed to mislead farmers but in long run the credibility of other extension worker gets eroded as farmers recall their past bitter experiences with the extension workers. Besides, illiteracy among farmers, lack of trailability among the farmers, preponderance of below-standard products in the market, involvement of extension workers in many financial and credit schemes, promotion of the professionally less qualified personnel to the rank of extension professionals who do not have the required skills of dealing with the farmers also found to affect the credibility of the field extension functionaries. It was found that maintaining trust among the farming community requires induction of professionally qualified personnel and their regular trainings. We have to see that the credibility of the extension worker is maintained and the crisis through which the extension functionary of the day is passing is overcome. It was concluded that to overcome the credibility crisis among the extension functionaries, the factors mentioned above must be taken seriously and work should be planned and implemented to address these crucial issues if the extension is to deliver goods in the days to come.

### INTRODUCTION

Extension workers have always assisted the farmers in a number of ways: in taking sound decisions on their farms; in getting the credit for farm activities sanctioned, in providing them market related information, in bringing more productive agriculture technologies and often in establishing linkages with the line departments and agencies. Several studies revealed that farmers even seek assistance from the extension functionaries in making their personal/household decisions. The extension worker acts as a source of information and advice for problems relevant to his/her farm, vocation, family and society. In this entire process, extension functionary acts as source of information and farmers as receiver. In the present paper, credibility can be conceptualized as the degree to which as extension the farmer perceives the functionary as trustworthy and competent. The matter of deep concern to the extension agencies in India is that over the time the credibility of the extension functionaries has been reduced. This gradual erosion of credibility has been the issue for discussion at many platforms. The extension functionaries working at grass-root levels are the worst suffer of this problem of credibility loss. This crisis has

social and psychological implications and may affect the long-term goal of the extension agencies/ organizations. An extension functionary wins the trust and confidence of the farmers with a very hard work. The field extension functionary achieves the credible status with the dent of work. While working with the farmers, many constraints come in between; as it is not very easy to work with the humans and that too, of variable attributes of education, social status, economic status *etc.* Farmers trust the extension workers so long as he perceives his/her message credible in terms of what they say and what actually helps in respect of technologies they diffuse (Paul, 2006)

In the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the well-organized and efficient management system in extension was introduced in 1983 under the banner of National Agricultural Extension Project (NAEP). Since then, Junior Agriculture Assistants (JAA) / the basic grass-root level functionaries, engaged in the transfer of technology in agriculture and bringing about socio-economic transformation in the rural areas. In the present paper, the term extension functionary has been operationalised as Junior Agriculture Assistants (JAA) of Department of

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Agriculture Production, Jammu and Kashmir state. The job profile of JAA primarily envisages two-way flow of information from the Subject Matter Specialists (SMSs) to the farmers and vice-versa. The flow of information from the SMSs to the farmers is called transmission of message whereas the backward flow of information is called feedback. For quite a long time, agriculture extension functionaries have been performing the dual role of trainee and visitor and helping the farming community of the state learn innovative and more productive methods of farming. The ultimate goal of extension efforts is to enhance the existing fragile economy of the farmers working under the constrained production system.

The workable/operational unit for agriculture extension work is named as circle, which is the operational area of an extension functionary, i.e. Junior Agriculture Assistant. A circle comprises 600-800 farm families and generally 5-8 villages and even more. An extension functionary has to conduct his/her extension activities within the circle allotted to him/her and at the same time has to establish linkages with other departments, credit agencies, input agencies, marketing agencies so as to provide all kind of support and assistance, facilitation and information needed for farm activities. He has to convince individual farmers to take significant decisions relating to farm, inputs, technology, credit, marketing etc. Many times, he has to convince the group of farmers to take collective decisions. Thus, in addition to technological competence, his general trustworthiness among the farming community, society, in general and operational area in particular holds unique importance, also the successful and efficient conduct of agriculture extension work. In executing his work, the personality, ability, social status and above all credibility of the extension functionary plays a crucial role besides his social relations.

Experience with the field extension work revealed that extension functionaries are facing a great degree of credibility crisis today (Paul, 2006). This has led to the reduction in overall impact of extension work in the state. This becomes more apparent when farmers begin to make arguments pertaining to every new information given to them by the extension agencies. How and why such situations have arisen, the present investigation was carried out among the field extension, functionaries of the Department of Agriculture Production Jammu and Kashmir state of India with the, following specific objectives: to seek perception of credibility crisis among the extension functionaries of the state, study the factors leading to problem of credibility decline among agriculture extension functionaries and explore the ways and means to strengthen the credibility of agriculture

extension functionaries for effective extension work.

## METHODOLOGY

The present investigation was carried out in Jammu and Kashmir state of India. Jammu and Kashmir state comprises Jammu and Kashmir divisions. Jammu division consists of six districts out of which the districts namely Jammu, Kathua, Rajouri and Doda were selected for the purpose of conducting present study. From the districts selected, two belongs to hilly region and two to plains. From among each selected district three agricultural sub-divisions were selected. Thus, a total of 12 sub-divisions were selected viz., Marh, Dansal, Akhnoor, Hiranagar, Basholi, Billawar, Darhal, Budhal, Rajouri, Pranoo, Thathri and Ramban. From each selected sub-division, 10-extension functionaries were selected at random thereby constituting study sample of 120 extension functionaries. Data on comprehensively designed questionnaires were collected by distributing the questionnaires among the selected respondents individually. They were instructed to record their responses as per the requirement of the study. The data were analysed using percentage, mean percent score and ranking. mean percent score (MPS) was calculated as:

$$\text{MPS} = \frac{\text{Total score obtained for a statement by all the respondents}}{\text{Maximum obtainable score}}$$

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are presented here in the following heads:

### **Distribution of extension functionaries on the basis of their perception regarding credibility crisis among cadre**

Extension functionaries own perception regarding loss of credibility among the cadre was assessed by recording their responses on three point stimuli; whether during their fieldwork and extension activities in the field conditions, they come across any problem of credibility or loss of credibility. They recorded their responses on three statements of high credibility crisis, some degree of credibility crisis and no problem of credibility crisis. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Distribution of the extension functionaries on the basis of their perception regarding credibility crisis among cadre**

Sl No.	Category	Number of functionaries	Percent
1.	High degree of credibility crisis	28	23.34
2.	Some degree of credibility crisis	79	65.83
3.	No problem of credibility crisis	13	10.33
Total		120	100.00

Majority of the extension functionaries (65.83%) faced the problem of some degree of credibility crisis during the conduct of extension work. Nearly one-fourth of the extension functionaries (23.34 %) faced the problem of severe credibility crisis during their field extension work. Besides, it is quite satisfactory that 10.83 per cent of the extension functionaries did not observe any loss in credibility with them during the execution of extension work by them. Thus, nearly 89 per cent of the extension functionaries faced the problem of credibility loss among the cadre.

**Factors leading to credibility crisis among the agriculture extension functionaries in the state**

**Improper official communication:** The prime factor as perceived by the extension functionaries leading to the crisis among cadre was untimely and improper official communication which was by 76.92 per cent Table 2. It was found that many times, the place, time, duration funding etc. of various developmental programmes were not communicated properly and timely to the field extension functionaries, which led them to the helpless condition. Besides, many a times, the extension functionaries were communicated by the higher authorities regarding organization and conduct of many programmes at the eleventh hour, giving them little or no proper time for preparation/planning. This leaves many shortcomings in the execution of such activities and programmes finally leading to the credibility loss among the extension functionaries.

**Lack of coordination with other departments:** Lack of proper coordination with other agencies or departments was the second most severe factor leading to credibility loss among the extension functionaries as has been reported by the (72.18 per cent) respondents. Extension workers have to depend upon the information and assistance of many line departments involved in developmental works, e.g. revenue department, banks, input agencies, irrigation department etc. He plans the programmes as per the information/data provided to him by the associated departments. In case of little cooperation by these agencies, the extension functionaries encounter great difficulties. Recently, the Indian Government has introduced Kissan Credit Card (KCC) scheme in all its states to provide short-term loans to the farmers at minimized rates of interest. Extension functionaries working at the grass-roots have been assigned the task to identify the farmers willing to avail the loans. The extension functionaries after identifying the farmers assist him in filling the application forms for getting the said loan and after fulfilling all the required formalities, sends the applications through the Sub Divisional Agricultural

Officer to the Tehsildar (Executive Officer) of the revenue and land Department for verification of the land records. Ironically, the work at revenue offices gets delayed. If the extension worker gets the work of the land records verified then comes next step, i.e. sending of applications to the banks for the grant of loans and issuance of credit cards in favour of applicant farmers. But delay or poor response of the banks puts all efforts of extension workers in vain. Generally, it has been seen that hundreds of Kissan Credit Card applications are dumping either in the office of revenue departments or in banks. Farmers frequently ask the extension functionaries as to when the cards to them will be issued as he is in the forefront so they perceive him responsible for the delay in the sanction of loans. In all this process, the credibility of the extension worker was put at stake and farmers think him as incredible. Likewise, there are many instances where due to poor cooperation from other departments/agencies, the credibility of extension functionaries gets eroded.

**Table 2: Factors leading to credibility crisis among the agriculture extension functionaries in the state**

Sl No.	Major Factor	MPS	Rank
1.	Bureaucratic hindrances	67.15	IV
2.	Undue political intervention	69.92	III
3.	Improper official communication	76.92	I
4.	Lack of response from subject matter specialists	59.42	VIII
5.	Lack of coordination with other departments	72.18	II
6.	Lack of standardized transfer of technology policies	45.25	X
7.	Poor infrastructural facilities	62.34	V
8.	Less number of beneficial schemes for the farmers	52.22	IX
9.	Poor delegation of authority to the cadre	35.00	XI
10.	Technological hindrances	61.12	VII
11.	In credible extension work of private sector workers	61.79	VI

MPS, Mean Percent Score : in given. Sample size

**Undue political intervention:** The third most severe factor leading to credibility loss among extension functionaries was undue political intervention in his work (MPS 69.72). As a result of democratic decentralization in India, panchayats (local bodies) have been established in the villages. Many call it a good step for rural reconstruction but other face of the coin is that it has given rise to a number of factions/rival groups within the villages having their affiliation with different political parties. This has given rise to a number of problems in extension work. Being a public employee, extension worker has to work neutrally without involving himself in the rural politics, so he has to work in collaboration with the local bodies, he has to organize the activities taking all the groups/factions together. Therefore, he has to make tireless efforts to make all the groups agree to proceed together. He gets deviated from his basic work and is unnecessarily involved in the reconciliation activities for smooth execution of extension work. Instead of doing agriculture extension work to solve farmers' problems, his work gets confined to other irrelevant activities. This might not be a problem in the eyes of planners but when one has to execute works at village level such problems are a routine. Many times higher and middle level

political authorities direct the extension workers to give undue advantage to the farmers belonging to their parties. This all leads to an imbalance in the planned extension approaches and frustrates the extension functionaries.

**Bureaucratic hindrances:** The bureaucratic hindrances were also perceived as an important factor by 67.15 per cent of the respondents. The decision taken by the extension functionaries gets delayed in the wait of approval from the higher authorities, which in turn affects the trustworthiness of the extension functionaries among the farmers. Many times, the seed samples, programmes, funds reaches late when its utility is over. Some of the functionaries informally responded that upgradation of professionally less qualified personnel (Gardeners, storekeepers *etc.*) from the department to the rank of extension professional sends an insignificant message among the farmers regarding the incompetencies of the extension workers.

**Poor infrastructural facilities:** One of the important factors affecting the credibility of the extension functionaries came to be the poor infrastructural facilities provided to the agriculture production department. 62.34 per cent of the extension functionaries opined a total for the lack of requisite infrastructures as the major contributory factor of credible loss.

**Incredible extension work of private sector workers:** The misleading work conducted by some of the private sector representatives of different pesticides, fertilizers and seed companies many a times make wrong/difficult to accomplish promises with the farmers so as to promote the sale of their products and achieve the targets assigned to them by their respective companies. In the short run, they manage to fool the farmers but in the long run the credibility of other extension workers gets eroded as farmers recall their past bitter experiences with the extension workers. This factor has been agreed upon by 61.79 per cent of the extension functionaries as the factor leading to credibility loss.

**Technological hindrances:** The most common factor, which has been discussed by many extension functionaries formally or informally, is the incompatible/incompetent/improper technologies fed to the extension delivery system (Paul, 2006). In the present study, 61.12 per cent of the extension workers revealed the incompetent and incompatible agricultural technologies as the crucial factor leading to credibility loss among the cadre. The personal experiences of the farmers with the technologies give rise to technology contradiction, i.e., if a particular crop variety is said to have produced 10 quintals/kanal and farmer's experiences prove the yield to

about 6 quintals. It gives rise to technological contradiction. Educated farmers can understand the reasons behind the yield gaps, but in case of illiterate farmers, it becomes very difficult to realize them the reasons behind the yield gaps. Next time when the extension functionary takes a new technology to the farmers' field, quoting the past experiences they start casting doubt on its potential. This disintegrates the credibility of the extension functionaries working at grass roots. Many-times spurious chemicals fail to control the pests/diseases/weeds but the extension functionaries had recommended them on the basis of his technological knowledge. Under such circumstances, finally extension workers get ruined.

**Lack of response from subject matter specialists:** Lack of requisite response from the Subject Matter Specialists (SMS) was also found to affect the credibility of the extension functionaries and was rated as the eight important factors (59.42%) affecting the credibility of the extension functionaries. When the extension functionaries are not updated properly with the latest technological developments, when they are not trained well in the efficient methods of farmers' teaching, of presenting information and SMSs give little response to the feedback provided by the grass-root level workers, the entire cadres of extension functionaries are left in the lurch (Paul, 2006).

**Less number of beneficial schemes for the farmers:** Fewer number of beneficial schemes to beneficial schemes to attract the farmers was the next important factor (MPS 52.22) leading to ineffective extension work and credibility loss among the cadre. Generally, few samples/demonstration plots are being given by the state government through the field extension functionaries. The extension functionaries feel a great degree of problem in selecting the person/farmer for laying such demonstrations due to political reasons or some other. On the onset of every crop season it has been reported by majority of the extension functionaries that a number of farmers approach them for laying these demonstrations on their farms. Many times they provide recommendations of higher authorities and even political personalities. Sometimes higher authorities without taking cognizance of the ground realities don't delay in taking actions against the officials. This puts the extension workers in problems. All this totally vitiates the rural atmosphere and it has direct impact on the credibility of the extension functionaries.

**Lack of standardized transfer of technology policies:** The absence of standardized transfer of technology policies being adopted by the state pays heavily to the

credibility and trustworthiness of the extension functionaries (MPS 45.25). The number and frequencies of refresher and short-duration courses have been reduced to none. To keep them updated with the recent developments in the fields of technology transfer, human relation and management skills, extension workers have to depend on the departmental sources only and they have to manage it themselves. Thus, non-existent of a standardized transfer of technology policies leads to many shortcomings in the work being conducted by the extension professionals, which ultimately leads to credibility erosion among the cadre.

**Poor delegation of authority to the cadre:** The least contributing factor in the rank hierarchy affecting the credibility of the extension functionaries came to be the poor delegation of authority to the cadre (MPS) 35.00. For even small decisions relating to extension activities to be conducted, he has to seek permission from the higher authorities. Many times he has to either postpone or prepone many important extension programmes to be conducted in villages on the direction of higher authorities that had already been planned in cooperation with the farmers. This communicates a wrong message to the farming community about authority of the extension functionaries and it finally affects his credibility.

#### **Suggestions offered by extension functionaries to strengthen credibility for effective extension work**

Open-ended suggestions were invited from the sampled extension functionaries to strengthen the credibility of extension workers so as to achieve effective results from the extension work.

**Improvement in fortnightly trainings:** All the sampled extension functionaries impressed upon to improve the quality of fortnightly trainings being provided to them at Sub-Divisional agricultural headquarters. Besides special need-based trainings need to be designed and conducted for them. This will surely help them to regain their eroding credible status.

**Introducing practically appropriate technologies:** It was been found that inappropriate technologies fed into the public extension delivery system is one of the major factors affecting the trustworthiness of the extension functionaries. Through Front Line Demonstrations, adaptive research and Multi-locational Trials have been conducted by the Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), to determine the location specificity and production potentialities of the newly released/pre-released agricultural technologies for a particular area various lacunae in the proper conduct of these trials/

demonstrations leads to somewhat flawed results. So, only practically appropriate technologies duly tested are fed for extension delivery.

**Framing and implementing a standardized and uniform extension policy:** The state in the real sense needs to adopt a comprehensibly designed extension policy.

**Ensuring accountability of the associated/concerned departments:** Majority of the extension functionaries held responsible for the un-accountability on part of line/associated departments for affecting their credibility. So, the authorities must see it that accountability and responsibility of all the stakeholders to the extension work are ensured and checked up regularly on propriety basis.

**Restructuring the department of agriculture production:** Almost all the respondents suggested for restructuring of the agriculture production department with a clear-cut distinction between extension and input activities. Improvements in the infrastructural facilities including buildings, audio-visuals and other related instructional aids were also suggested in this regard.

**Assigning requisite authority to the extension personnel:** The extension functionaries upon providing the needed authority and independence for making many decisions at his own. Generally, those programmes which are decided on top and percolated down leads to ineffective extension impact. They suggested bottom-up approach for training, demonstration planning, tours etc. rather than top down being followed. Besides, ways and means to reduce political interventions, need to be devised.

**Improving literacy among the farmers:** This is abroad suggestion which would have long-term effects on the overall condition of the farmers and empower them in making sound and firm decisions and understand the problems of the extension functionaries as well as policies and programmes of the department.

**Check on private sector companies and their products:** A proper check should be kept on the activities of private sector representatives and the products of these companies. Though rules have been framed for all these, it is now time to make it sure that these rules and regulations are implemented as per the requirements.

## **CONCLUSION**

It can be concluded from above findings that nearly 89 percent of the extension functionaries reported to have

faced varying degrees of credibility problem while carrying out extension work. Only one-tenth of them responded having not confronted with credibility erosion related problem. The factors responsible for credibility erosion among extension functionaries in the descending order of their magnitude were improper official communication, lack of coordination with other departments, undue political intervention, bureaucratic hindrances, poor infrastructural facilities, incredible extension work of private sector workers, technological hindrances, lack of response from subject matter specialists, less number of beneficial schemes for the farmers, lack of standardized transfer of technology policies and poor delegation of authority to the cadre. Amongst all; the most severe factor as perceived by the respondents leading to credibility loss was improper official communication. The reported suggestions were; adoption of a uniform and standardized extension policy by the state, ensuring accountability of associated departments/organizations. Almost all the respondents suggested for restructuring the agriculture production

department with a clear-cut distinction between extension and input activities. Improvements in the infrastructural facilities including buildings, audio-visuals and other related instructional aids were also a suggestion in this regard, assigning requisite authority to the extension personnel, improving literacy among the farmers and keeping a proper check on private sector companies and their products. In addition to it, more number of researches on the theme need to be conducted by the experts in other states of the country to draw a common conclusion from the experiences of extension functionaries across the country.

### REFERENCES

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