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A STUDY ON PERFORMANCE OF KISSAN CALL CENTRES

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy and food security is the major concern. India needs a second green revolution and it is possible only through the transfer of technologies from lap to land. Knowledge transfer to the agriculture sector with necessary inputs is most important. The country has a widespread telecom network which could be put to effective use for delivering knowledge and information to the farming community. The Indian agriculture extension system is the largest extension system in the world facing acute shortage of manpower and one extension working is taking care of one thousands farmers which is impossible task to each the ach and every farmer. The department of Agriculture and cooperation(DAC) launched Kissan call centres as centrally sponsored scheme under the Union Ministry of Agriculture in January 21,2004 across the country to deliver extension service to the farming community. The purpose of these call centres is to respond to issues raised by farmers, instantly, in the local language. There are call centres for every state which are expected to handle the queries from any part of country. Queries related to Agriculture and allied sectors are being addressed through these call centres.

Earlier (prior to Kisan Call Centre) the issues related to agriculture were handled by the Extension department of Central Goverment and of State Departments of Agriculture, State Agricultural Universities (SAUs), KVKs, NGOs, Private Extension Services through various extension approaches in transfer of technology. A limitation in Transfer of Technology (TOT) model continues to remain a challenge for the public and private extension systems. With the availability of telephone and Internet, it is now possible to bridge this gap to quite a large extent by using an appropriate mix of technologies. After the introduction of Kisan Call Centre, Indian farmers are now able to get the solution of their problem in faster pace than ever, and that too in their own language.

Kisan Call Centres (KCCs) have been established at 14 locations in the country to provide extension support on telephone to farmers in all States and Union Territories using a nation-wide toll free number 1800 180 1551. This number is accessible through all mobile numbers of all telecom networks as well as land lines from 6.00 AM to 10.00 PM on all 7 days a week.

The Government has identified IFFCO Kissan Sanchar Limited (IKSL) as Service Provider of Kissan Call Centre Scheme. IKSL has deployed 376 Farm Tele Advisors (FTAs) to respond to thefarmers'calls.

The Kissan Call Centres are equipped with the state of the art technology having a number of new features viz. Internet Protocol Private Branch Exchange (IPPBX), redundant Internet bandwidth, 100% call recording/ call replay, call barging, voice mail service during call waiting or when KCC is not working and SMS to caller farmers giving a gist of reply given by KCC.

Apart from responding to farmers queries the KCCs also facilitate their registration for availing the SMS services in agriculture and allied areas. Farmer can give up to 8 choices for his preferred crops/activities. This also includes activities under Animal Husbandry, Fisheries & Dairying in addition to Agriculture & Horticulture. Language choice of the farmer is also being taken regarding

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SMS advisories. Preference of the farmers for receiving market price of selected markets all over the country at desired periodicity with respect to the crops preferred by him is also registered at the KCCs.

The existing 14 Kisan Call Centers are serving the needs of farmers in the entire country. However, the State-wise call flow is being closely monitored at these KCCs. As and when calls increase beyond a threshold in a particular State, decision regarding setting up of a new Kisan Call Center in that State will be taken.

BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

Agriculture extension services along with facilitation to farmers are the mandate of Agriculture Department everywhere in the country. Continuing fragmentation of land holdings and the increasing number of small holdings are creating challenges for the extension function from the viewpoint of input supply, transfer of technology, ensuring general awareness, etc. One-onone contact via extension services is now becoming practically difficult, and a shift towards the group approach is becoming inevitable.

For speedy transmission of technology and latest technical updates to farmers, for resolving their diverse problems , an innovative means, namely, the KISAN CALL CENTRE, was established in Madhya Pradesh under Rashtriya Kisan Vikas Yojna (RKVY) during 2008-09.

After fulfilling all necessary formalities, the Govt of Madhya Pradesh, Department of Farmer Welfare & Agriculture Development, in coordination with SIAET, chose Indian Society of Agriculture Business Professionals (ISAP), as a partner. The responsibility of ensuring smooth functioning of the KCC was been entrusted to ISAP. KCC in the state started to function in Bhopal in September 2008.

- To facilitate farmers of the state to get information/solutions
- To their problems through use of the Toll Free Number 1800-233-4433. To provide technical inputs to farmers.
- To serve as a feedback mechanism for the policy makers.
- To forge strong Research Extension Farmer Linkages.

INTERVENTION

The Kisan Call Center established in the state functions from 7am to 7pm every day. It comprises a 15-seater computerized answering system working in two shifts, i.e., 7am to 1pm and 1pm to 7pm. The major topics handled by KCC experts are as follows:-

- Disease and pest control for different crops grown in the region,
- Good agricultural practices, livestock management, fishery, etc.
- Best practices in agriculture in the state as well as of other states
- Crop related information in agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry aromatic plants, spices, plantation crops, cash crops, etc.
- Vermi-compost, organic farming, including organic plant protection, etc.
- Information on HYV seeds and nutrient management for different crops
- Market related information for different crops in the state.
- Farmer support programmes which are being implemented by the government of Madhya Pradesh and Agriculture related information that impacts farmers, farming practices, etc

The Kisan Call Centre works on two levels. At the first level, replies/solutions are provided to farmers' queries instantaneously by experts. At the next level, the queries are analysed so that area-specific analysis can be done based on which timely information could be disseminated to farmers through TV, radio etc., to caution or overcome possible damage to agricultural crops or livestock. It is important to mention here KCC served as an early warning system, for example during the crisis

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of drought during 2009 kharif and untimely floods in October 2009. It was transformed into a control room to provide solutions to the emergence and contingent needs of the farmers on area specific basis across the state.

Queries related to agriculture and allied sectors are being addressed through the Kisan Call Centre, instantly, in the local language, by experts in Agriculture / Horticulture Departments, State Agricultural Universities, ICAR institutions etc. Subject Matter Specialists (SMSs) interact with the farmers via telephone and computer to understand their agriculture-related problems and answer the queries through the Call Centre. The infrastructure is provided at three locations namely - a Professionally Managed Call Centrer (Level-I), a Response Center in each organization, where SMSs are made available (Level-II) and the Nodal Cell (Level-III). Queries related to agriculture and allied sectors are being addressed through these call centres to deliver extension services to the farming community.

KCC provides answers to farmers on queries related to agriculture, horticulture, plant pathology, soil sciences, and animal husbandry and so on. The information dissemination to the farmers is mainly categorised into three types, namely, information on Pre-cultivation, Cultivation and Post Cultivation. Information under the category of Pre-cultivation that is provided to the farmers through the KCC includes information related to field preparation, time and place of availability of HYV seeds, availability of fertilizers, training and orientation for the farmers for usage of best seeds, balanced use of pesticides and fertilizers, required amount of water for the specific crop, etc.

Under the category of Cultivation phase, KCC provides information related to pest and disease control, irrigation, government schemes, loans, etc. In the post cultivation phase, it provides information on the market, storage facilities, transportation, value addition, etc.

KCC experts use backend data support systems, which are inbuilt in the MIS system. Kisan Call Centre Software is an MIS tool covering the complete milieu of advisory services provided through the Call Centre providing backend data support to the 4 knowledge worker, while processing queries from farmers from 7 am to 7 pm, all seven days of the week. The software captures callers' details and the query. The information is processed into an MIS output which helps area-wise, crop-wise and problem wise analyses within the time-space framework and provides preventive and advance action solutions from both qualitative and quantitative aspects. It also helps to identify pest attacks in any particular geographical area and the information collected is provided to the State Agriculture Department for taking suitable timely action through broadcasting on Kisan call centre itself. It addresses not only agricultural practices, but also livestock, policy issues, government interventions, etc.

The Kisan Call Centre is a fusion of two separate technologies, namely, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Agricultural Technology. Both have their specialized domains and work cultures. The Kisan Call Centre staff are organized into three levels, namely Level-I (the basic Call Center interface, with high quality bandwidth and local language proficient Agriculture Graduate), Level-II (Subject Matter Specialists on concerned important crops and enterprises, connected through good bandwidth telecom and computer connectivity) and Level-III (the Management Group to ensure ultimate answering and resolution of all the farmers' queries which are not resolved at Level-II, connected on off line mode).

The total cost of the KCC project is Rs 2.25 crores per year (as per the information provided by the ICT Provider), funded by the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Farmer Welfare and Agriculture Development, Government of Madhya Pradesh, and covers the software, hardware and other operational costs of the initiative.

The KCC provides timely information to the rural farmers who are benefited through this project. The farmers get accurate answers to their queries, thus facilitating them to better manage their crops.

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVE

MISSION OF THE DEPARTMENT ON KISAN CALL CENTRES

The DAC aims to have an efficient, effective and a Kisan Call Centre Service based on a dynamic database and regularly updated knowledge (through experts in research and extension system) for each National Agriculture Research Project (NARP) Zone to rapidly enhance successful call inflow by the end of 12th Five Year Plan to such an extent that at least one out of every 2 cultivators calls KCCs once in a year on an average. This will necessitate about 3633 seats in the KCCs and corresponding augmentation of IT infrastructure of KCCs.

MANPOWER TO BE DEPLOYED IN KISAN CALL CENTRES

The Call Centre Agent with the prescribed minimum academic qualification in the field of Agriculture and excellent communication skills in respective local language shall attend these calls. These Call Centre Agents are considered as Level 1 (L1) support of Kisan Call Centres.

LOCATION OF CALL CENTERS

The service provider will select location for various KCCs in a commercial /non residential area as per its bid in consultation with DAC. DAC may also provide space to the KCC Service Provider in a SAU or a State Agriculture Department establishment or any other Institution . In such a situation, differential in rent (if any) charged by SAU or State Agriculture Department shall be suitably adjusted after comparing the estimated monthly rental for such a location as indicated in the price bid with the rent actually charged. For this purpose, every bidder shall provide the detail of estimated monthly rent at each location .

CALL CENTER TIMINGS

The Kisan Call Centres will be accessible by the farmers on toll free Telephone Number (1800-180-1551). The calls initiated from a State/ UT shall land in the Kisan Call Centre of that State/ UT. Besides referring to books and other resources (to be provided by State Government concerned) to answer the queries of Farmers, the Kisan Call Centre Agents will access the Kisan Knowledge Management System (KKMS) developed by DAC.

Call Centre Agents (CCAs) will act as a first level of support and it is envisaged that majority of queries will be replied by them. If a Call Centre Agent is unable to answer any query during office hours an attempt will be made to refer the caller to higher level experts in a conference call along with the information collected by the Call Centre Agent. If such a conference call does not take place or leads to no satisfactory answer, the query will then be automatically escalated to Block level officer (or District level where block level escalation has not been enabled by the States) of the Development .

Department concerned and thereafter to higher levels as per The working hours for the KCCs would be 6:00 AM to 10:00 PM, and the KCCs would operate on all days including

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Sundays and Holidays. During 10:00 PM to 6:00 AM in the night and when the lines are busy, appropriate IVRS prompt in local language will be played informing the caller about the working hours of the KCC. The English script (to be translated in vernacular) for this message will be provided by DAC. When a call is in queue, an appropriate pre-recorded message should be played intermittently and season specific standard advisories will need to be played to educate the farmer while he is holding on. Such advisories shall be provided by the local State Government in text form which will need to be recorded by the Service Provider. A Voice mail System(VMS) should also be provided to ensure that a farmer who cannot get across to a CCA due to all lines being busy, gets a periodic prompt on IVRS that in case the farmer does not want to wait, he can record a voice mail leaving his number and brief message of upto 2 minutes. Requisite hardware/software for structured recording of such voice mail may also be provided on the server. Various MIS data/ reports generated from the call data recorded by the Kisan Call Centres are required to be provided to DAC on pre-defined regular intervals so as to optimize the operations of the Kisan Call Centres.

KISAN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (KKMS)

DAC has also put in place a web based portal "Kisan Knowledge Management System (KKMS)", an application software to maintain the database of state wise Agricultural Package of Practices supported by the database built up using the Frequently Asked Questions, other queries and their answers being provided by the Call Centre Agents and DAC identified experts. Presently, the database is available for most of the States for agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry and fisheries, duly updated and validated by the State Agricultural Universities of the respective States from time to time. The KKMS also has links to various schemes of the DAC, Ministry of Agriculture as well as weather related databases. The CCAs shall access KKMS over the Internet, to find instant answer to queries from farmers. Every call would be entered with details of farmers, query of the farmer and answer provided to him. **Escalation of calls to next higher level will happen automatically after pre-set time limits without CCAs intervention. Besides KKMS, Call Centre Agents are required to go through standard books/publications of SAUs/ State Governments, browse Farmers' Portal & various Scheme Guidelines of DAC and material provided by the DAC for answering farmers' queries.** The Service provider would ensure regular training/orientation of the CCAs in use of KKMS application and availability of latest information/ literature on agriculture related issues pertaining to various NARP Zones in the State.

The Procedure for handling the Call is as given below:

The Kisan Call Centre shall receive the queries of farmers through the toll free number 18001801551.**DAC shall bear the call charges of the Toll Free Numbers and the outgoing telephones used for contacting experts / farmers designated by DAC for call escalation.** It is essential that the EPABX system in the Kisan Call Centre is capable of handling the calls from all the telecom service providers and route the same to an available operator. The system should also have the capability of Call Holding and Call Conferencing/ Forwarding facilities within and outside

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KCC. Wherever essential, PRI facilities will need to be created additionally to enable routing of more number of incoming telephone lines, for which extra funds will be provided.

The Call Centre Agents shall record the name, address, sex, contact details, queries in detail, type/ subject of the query, answer given, status of the calls, etc in the KKMS or in any other suitable format approved by DAC. If KKMS is down due to non-availability of internet connection at any point of time or due to any other technical reason, the CCA shall record the details of every call as above in a structured spread sheet. The data so entered shall be exported to KKMS database once it comes live. The information recorded in the database shall be used for the purpose of preparing MIS reports and sent to DAC on regular basis at predefined intervals and also accessible online. Further details in this respect will be worked out with the successful bidder.

CONCLUSION:

The Nodal institution is responsible for documentation and reporting. All the proceedings of the call centre will be documented by each of the Nodal institution and shared with other kissan call centres for preparing a database on crop/enterprise /wise and also to prepare frequently asked question (FAQs). The Indian Agricultural extension system is the largest extension system in the world facing acute shortage of manpower and one extension worker is taking care of one thousand famers which is impossible task to reach the each and every farmer.

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