

MASS MEDIA AND AGRICULTURE

by

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I. PREVIEW

It is generally believed that about 70% of the population in Pakistan is directly or indirectly involved in farming. It is also believed that these farmers live in rural areas in small villages numbering more than 46,000.

Even the agricultural sector has always been receiving high priority in the national development plan because of its significant role and share in GDP, exports, foreign exchange earning and consuming a very high percentage of national labourer force.

On the production side, for the last many years, total as well as per acre yield of many crops has increased. Yet, it was noted that this yield per acre was far below the production potential of individual farms. A wide production gap of 50 to 80 percent has been reported in yield per acre recorded on progressive farms as compared with average farm (Muhammad, 1982). Some farmers have also been reported to be achieving double of the national average wheat yield. Various research station have also recorded four times the national average for various crops in Pakistan (Saleem, etal 1982).

This low yield on the average farm creates many socio-economic problems. McNamara (1973) while guiding attention in this direction, pointed out that,

"Within the rural areas the poverty problem revolves primarily around the low production

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of the millions of subsistence farms..."

McNamara closely related the poverty in developing countries with low production, which in turn was associated with small holdings. It is also well documented that small farmers are neglected throughout the developing world. The neglect has its origin in the psychological bias that the new farm technology is beyond their scope and resources. Therefore, to maximize the yield in the least possible time, emphasis has been focussed on large farmers with higher socio-economic status.

II. NEED FOR FARMERS EDUCATION

Almighty Allah has bestowed Pakistan with vast agricultural resources. Hardly one fourth of the total land available is under cultivation. Remaining three fourth is still awaiting exploitation for the benefit of millions. High yielding varieties of various crops have been developed (and imported also), and a very hard working farming community is available also.

However, literacy rate in Pakistan, especially in rural farming community is alarmingly low. The predominance of small holdings combined with a large rural population and low literacy rate makes the situation highly grave.

Although many institutions including universities, colleges and other Government and Non Government Agencies (NOG's) are working for the last many years to educate the farmers to raise the yield per acre. But their approach in most of the cases, has been academic rather than pragmatic. Literacy was considered an essential step before imparting professional education to the farmers.

Our agricultural field staff, which gets a chance to extend agricultural know-how to the farmers is really in a difficult situation to effectively disseminate the agricultural information to millions of farmers spread all over the country in more than 46,000 villages (the number of Agriculture Field Assistants in the country is

less than two thousands). The large number of field staff needed to meet the situation can be easily assessed.

Under the existing situation one can easily estimate the time needed for training an adequate number of Agricultural Officers and field staff. For the orientation and inservice training of present field staff at least a decade is required. Keeping in view the constant addition to the existing class of illiterate farmers (more than 3% per year), it is apprehended that by the time the present group of farmers is enlightened through the conventional system of education, a much more bigger group will come up with the same problem.

III. WHAT MASS MEDIA CAN DO IN THIS RESPECT?

We as a nation, cannot afford this loss of time nor the present trends of our population growth allow us to wait for such a long period. The only possible way left at our disposal, to educate/train our field staff as well as our farmer is the proper and effective use of mass media. By mass media we mean correspondence material, radio, TV and a variety of audiovisual aids, i.e. films, film strip, recorded cassettes, photographs, diagrams sketches and demonstrations.

It is now well established that mass media play an enormous role in communicating agricultural information. Its effects at the knowledge and awareness stage are more evident, but its importance at other stages of adoption of innovations is also very high (Rogers & Shoemaker 1971 and Lingamneni, 1981). Due to low literacy rate, less exposure and lack of relevance of the message its effect in the developing countries is not so evident but its impact and role even in these countries has been found effective and cannot be ignored (Rogers & Shoemaker 1971, Lingamneni 1981).

Mass media, especially radio has been reported as the major source of initial and/or additional farm information in many countries (Coombs & Ahmed 1978). Another important role of the mass media is its indirect effect that is, it can feed information through interper-

sonal channels (Schramm 1964, Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971, Sundarajan et al 1978). This role of the mass media is very important for less developed countries, where there is greater likelihood that the information could be picked up and repeated to others thus reinforcing the media effect through interpersonal channels.

In general, mass media having the ability of transmitting sound and sight simultaneously, can provide clear visual and verbal presentation of the improved farm practices and techniques. This could easily be understood by the farmers within the comforts of their homes.

Studies in Brazil have shown that mass media exposure was associated with the adoption of farm practices (Fett, 1971). In India farm broadcast, radio forums and farm schools on-the-air, have been reported to be effective in awareness as well as changing the adoption behaviour of farmers positively (Sundarajan et al, 1978; Vijayaragan and Subramanyan, 1980). With the introduction of low cost transistor sets, farmers have been reported listening to the radio while ploughing their fields. Coombs and Ahmed (1978) have also reported the effective use of mass media in conjunction with other means, in the adoption of improved farm practices. Examples include the Ghana Cocoa Campaign in 1953-56, and Accion Cultural popular (ACPO) campaign in Columbia. In the former case Cocoa blight, was controlled successfully, whereas in the Columbian case, thousands of houses, bridges and latrines were constructed, animals vaccinated and trees planted as a result of these multi media campaigns. Coombs and Ahmed have also mentioned the success of the Office of the Rural Development (ORD) in South Korea, the Puebla Project in Mexico, coordinated farmers training programme in India and multi media education programme in the Philippines. Likewise, higher exposure to mass media, along with other factors, was found significantly associated with the adoption of dairy innovations in India (Sohi and Kherde (1980). Khan (1994) has reported "Karkeela" (Farm programme) of Radio Pakistan Peshawar as having played an unforgettable role in bringing awareness about agriculture and allied subjects. He further explained that of all the methods

and channels used so far by the extension wing of NWFP Department of Agriculture, this programme was known to be the most successful method in reaching rural masses with information on important agricultural topics.

Khan (1994) has also discussed such models/programmes from various other countries like Philippine, Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia and Malaysia and many others developed and launched successfully for the uplift of farmers communities.

IV SOME PRE-REQUISITS FOR EFFECTIVE USE OF MASS MEDIA

The major element for the communication process to be effective is understanding. Proper understanding and consequent action of the audience or farmer, his economic conditions, past experience, knowledge, status, habits, beliefs and values, and his communication channels and patterns, his social networks, and finally understanding of his problems and the means to solve them are vital elements in the process on the part of the communicator. This will help him design and deliver the message more effectively (Woods 1981, Shirazi, 1984). Also the message, its formate, channel and especially the broadcast time suitable for audience i.e. farmers and the credibility of the source helps to make the communication a success.

The understanding of the communicator, his message, purpose and implications are important on the part of the audience (Shirazi, 1984; Khan 1994).

The understanding on the part of the audience/farmers and consequently the effectiveness of the message can be enhanced by minimizing the use of professional language, scientific terms and jargons during the communication process. Instead the use of common language and signs promotes the understanding the effectiveness of the message (Woods 1981; Shirazi, 1984).

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