

**SAARC Agriculture Centre - Dhaka**

**“Regional Workshop on the Roles of Media for Accelerating Agricultural Growth in SAARC Countries: Experiences and Lessons from South Asia”.**

**1. Background**

The SAARC region generates less than 2 percent of world income, supports 22 percent of world population, and is the home to 39 percent of the world's poor who earn less than a dollar a day. Most of the South Asian poors are dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods and survival. Around 60 percent of the region's labour force is involved in agriculture that contributes about 23 percent to the GDP.

Agriculture in South Asia is dominated by smallholders with an average holding size of 1.6 hectares. The holding size, however, varies considerably among the member countries. For examples, the average holding size in Bangladesh is 0.6 ha, in India 1.41 ha while it is 3.04 ha in Pakistan. The small holdings signify that there is little or limited scope for horizontal expansion of agriculture and, therefore, enhancing agricultural productivity from the limited land is apparently the only option open for increasing the income level and improving the living standard of the people, especially of the rural areas. New and improved agricultural technologies developed in Agricultural Research Institutes, Universities, in the private sector and often by the farmers themselves, have to be disseminated among the mass of farmers for increasing productivity and overcoming hunger and poverty.

In this context farmers need adequate information exposure to technologies that may be available. Research has shown that by and large farmer's exposure to information is an important factor influencing their technology adoption behavior.

In the SAARC region, it is primarily the public extension services that are mandated to disseminate new agricultural technologies. The Ministries of Agriculture in the member states have extension/technology transfer systems that use various approaches of technology dissemination. In recent times, however, NGOs and the private sector (e.g. seed companies and seed dealers, pesticide companies and pesticide dealers, fertilizer dealers) and in some cases professional organizations have been playing increasing roles in technology transfer.

The mass media are increasingly becoming important vehicles for technology transfer. These systems can be broadly classified as the conventional system and the digital system. The conventional media include print media, analogue AM and FM radio, VHF and UHF television, video, cinema and indigenous communication media, etc. Digital media cover mobile phones, personal computers, the internet, email, imaging technology, digital audio-video and digital broadcasts or cable television. These provide wide scope for information dissemination vis-a-vis transfer of agricultural technology.

**2. Media as agricultural extension tools**

During the 1970's and 1980's Training & Visiting (T&V) System of extension was introduced for technology dissemination. This system used personal, face-to-face extension methods to reach individuals and had its own strengths and weaknesses. One of the limitations of the T&V System was: it could not cover all the farmers of the community, especially the resource poor farmers.

The usual mechanism of technology dissemination is from research to extension and extension in turn passes on the messages to the end users (i.e. research - extension - farmers). The process is constrained in several ways. First, to the professionals in technology generation as well as in extension, the role of the media is not high in the agenda and the mass media are not usually considered in technology transfer programmes. Second, the dissemination process is constrained

where the research-extension linkage is weak. Third, the Technology Transfer Process, being primarily dependent on the physical presence of the extension worker, is limited in scale and is often slow. The involvement of mass media in technology transfer can apparently help overcome these constraints.

Print media such as newspapers, magazines, leaf-lets, booklets, posters and handbills are widely used in technology transfer. In many countries, agricultural technology supplement is published with daily or weekly newspapers. Agricultural periodicals (magazines) or technical bulletins are often used for disseminating agricultural technologies among farmers. However, the lack of literacy among the farming people in the SAARC region is a major limitation of the print media, and also the access to print media by the rural people is not always easy.

Electronic media can reach a large number of people and fast. AM and FM radio, as well as VHF and UHF television thus became the most cost-effective means of technology transfer to the farming community. Radio and television channels have been used to transfer agricultural technologies not only in the South Asia but also in other parts of the world.

Community radio and national radio channels may broadcast programmes for transfer of technology and in mobilizing farming communities. Especially, the community radio can be used in an interactive manner, as farmers can participate in such programmes through telephones or mobile sets. These methods are particularly useful in reaching a large number of people and quickly.

Private and public television channels also allocate airtime for telecasting agricultural programs in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka . Short technical messages can be telecast or broadcast on television and radio channels. However, the amount of information that can be transmitted by these electronic media is limited because of the short broadcast time that are usually available in private commercial and public television channels. They can, nonetheless, serve valuable functions in stimulating farmer's interest in new ideas and practices. Once stimulated or made aware of, farmers can seek additional information from neighbors, friends, progressive farmers or extension workers.

Digital media such as computers, DVD, VCD are currently being used for transferring agricultural technologies. In some South Asian countries ( India , Sri Lanka ), agricultural technologies are disseminated through digital formats like Telecasters and Cyber Extension Centres . Bangladesh also has developed, in the non-government sector, facilities for technology transfer using the digital media (D-net)

Among the modern communication systems, the use of mobile phones and computer is increasing rapidly and these technologies are growing faster than older forms of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as television, radio, mainline telephones and newspapers. It may, however, be noted that internet use remains low in less developed countries where the use of radio and television remains more prevalent.

The 'research - extension - farmer' route of technology transfer is usually dominated by professionals not always conversant with media skill. Therefore, a mix of expertise from research, extension and media can apparently strengthen the technology transfer team.

Media also plays an important role in providing information on commodity market, both domestic and global, and commodity prices. Similarly, media role is important in providing information on government policies like subsidy, crop insurance, etc., probable weather conditions (e.g. rainfall), and also for warning on probable natural calamities like floods, cyclones, etc.

Notwithstanding the above facts, the growth in agriculture in South Asian countries has not been encouraging in recent times; rather it has been disappointing, compared to the growth 2-3 decades ago. This has happened despite an apparent increase in media coverage these days on agriculture through more newspapers, magazines, electronic media (especially TV), etc. While the economic growth of the countries of the region has been impressive in recent years, agriculture seems to be wavering. One needs to look into the matter critically to highlight where things are going wrong.

### **3. The regional workshop**

Each SAARC country has its own experiences of using media as extension tools and the experiences apparently differ from one country to another. The 20th Meeting of the Governing Board (GB) of SAIC considered that there is scope for sharing the experiences and the lessons learnt in using media, journalism and reporting as extension tools that could benefit the farmers of member states. SAARC Agriculture Centre, therefore, has taken the initiative to organize a workshop on "The Roles of Media for Accelerating Agricultural Growth in SAARC Countries: Experiences and Lessons from South Asia".

### **4. Workshop objectives**

The workshop aims to strengthen linkages among research, extension, farmer and marketing through improved use of both print and electronic media in the SAARC Member States. It focuses on sharing experiences relating to the role of media in agricultural development with a view to addressing the problems that are common to Member countries and exchange expertise and programmes for serving the farmers of the region.

While there is potential benefit from sharing experiences in technology transfer among the member countries, the emerging issues of free trade and WTO agreement of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) are likely to affect technology diffusion in one way or the other. Here again the role of media, especially in awareness creation on the implications of free trade and IPR regimes appear to be of critical importance. The media has a significant role to play in shaping public opinion and in framing policies that would best meet the needs of the farming communities of the region. The member countries would also benefit from the experiences of one another in addressing the issues and in adopting coping strategies.

The workshop thus aims to bring all these pertinent experiences from member countries together that can be shared to the benefit of the farming communities of member countries. The objectives of the workshop, therefore, are:

To take a stock of the role of media (conventional and digital) in agricultural development in South Asia.

- To share better practices and skills in designing and broadcasting relevant agricultural programmes to farmers.
- To evolve strategies for exchange of professional expertise and relevant agricultural programmes among SAARC Member States.
- To explore the role of media in the overall technology transfer process with special reference to Free Trade and WTO Agreement of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).

### **5. Workshop goal and themes**

The country paper may cover the following themes:

1. Policy support for media for agricultural development: Government initiatives; media initiatives in support of agricultural development; Government regulations and procedures.
2. Needs and characteristics of agricultural knowledge required by farmers; role of public-private

partnerships among media agencies; institutional arrangements in producing media contents for agricultural programmes.

3. Areas of capacity building for researchers, extension workers and media producers for better use of media for agricultural development; strategies to exchange expertise and programmes.
4. Better practices of producing relevant agricultural programmes; scalable procedures in broadcasting or telecasting agricultural programmes; appropriate broadcasting technologies/techniques; content preparation; characteristics and relevant formats of agricultural programmes.
5. Agricultural information resources through networks; digitization of agricultural content; business models of agricultural information networks for farmers.
6. Success stories/lessons learnt from media use in technology transfer and rural development.

#### **6. Expected outputs**

The workshop is expected to provide:

- (a) A better understanding related to the role of media in accelerating agricultural growth.
- (b) Identification of constraints in accessing media, especially by poorer farmers and farmwomen in general and underprivileged regions in particular, and strategies for overcoming the constraints.
- (c) Documentation of success stories and strategies for their replication

#### **7. Workshop resource persons**

The keynote speech for the workshop will be delivered by an eminent personality in the field of agricultural communication from the region with wide exposure in media having significant contribution in articulating ideas on the subject.

TWO participants each from a SAARC member state will be invited to the workshop. The respective countries may preferably identify participants who are currently engaged in the public sector technology dissemination using media, journalism and reporting. In this context personnel from institutions/organizations involved in agricultural information services, technology packaging and transfer in research systems, monitoring of technology transfer, publication and documentation, extension management, communication of agricultural information etc. may be relevant for the workshop. The participants will be the key resource persons and will make presentation of the country papers based on the themes outlined under Item 5 above.

The member countries may encourage the participation of a third participant from the private sector/ NGOs / professional organizations involved in technology dissemination and/or the use of media for agricultural extension.

Additional presentation of papers and participation from public and private sector extension agencies, NGOs, universities and other relevant institutions, development organizations and media personnel from the host country as well as institutions would be the additional resources in the workshop.

Nominated participants/resource persons are requested to send in papers to the organizers of the workshop in advance. **One copy of the paper should be sent to: (a) The Director, Technology Transfer Institute, National Agricultural Research Centre, Chak Shahzad, Islamabad, Pakistan, and another copy to (b) The Director, SAARC Agriculture Centre, BARC Complex, New Airport Road, Farmgate, Dhaka 1215, Bangladesh.** The proceedings/outcomes of the workshop will be published by SAARC Agriculture Centre and will be distributed to relevant institution(s) of member countries.

### **8. Workshop plan**

SAARC Agriculture Centre, in collaboration with the Technology Transfer Institute at National Agricultural Research Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan, the host institution in Pakistan, will organize a three-day workshop including a study tour of the resource persons/participants on the third day. The workshop will be held on 27-29 November 2007.

A modest honorarium will be paid for each paper presented by the participant(s) / resource person(s) nominated by respective SAARC member States.

SAARC Agriculture Centre will pay for the return airfare in economy class for two resource persons of each member states and local hospitality (accommodation, food and local transport). The sponsoring country may bear the expenses of the airfare of the third participant. The local resources of the host country would be used for the technical and logistic support for arranging the workshop.

### **9. Further Information**

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