Progressive Research – An International Journal
Vol. 5 (Special Issue) : 385-387 (2010), ISSN : 0973-6417

Society for Scientific Development in Agriculture and Technology, Meerut (U.P.) INDIA

IT – AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Anita Kumari[1], Yanendra Kumar Singh[2*] and S.R. Singh[3]

[1]*Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Sabour, Bhagalpur, Bihar*

[2]*Bihar Agricultural College, Sabour, Bhagalpur, Bihar*

[3]*Department of Extension Education, BAC, Sabour, Bhagalpur, Bihar*

***Correspondence author** (Yanendra Kumar Singh) **Email :** yanendrakumar@yahoo.com*

ABSTRACT

Today we are living an information age. Information is a vital resource and plays a crucial role in achieving progress in all spheres of life. Developed countries took lead in developing themselves through increased use of modern information technology. IT accommodates new ideas and new thoughts and invites new methods. At this juncture of its wide spread popularity, the field of agriculture and rural development is no exception. The role of IT to develop agriculture and to improve quality of life in rural area is being growingly established. Agriculture is one of the important sectors of the Indian economy. No doubt, India has made considerable progress in agriculture since independence particularly after mid sixties. Now, Indian agriculture is diversifying and farmers are embarking on a variety of enterprises viz, dairy, poultry, fruit cultivation, processing, value addition and export of their produce, raw material or processed. The focus is changing fast from that of second half of the 20th century of subsistence agriculture to industrial agriculture. Although the need to produce more and more of grains and other essential food items remains important, the trend is clearly in favour of profit making from farming and not remaining satisfied from a good grain harvest. The message is clear. The farmers are also bracing themselves for earning more per unit time and per rupee investment. This is likely to keep up in the coming future and with the increased use of the information technology; the Indian farmer will not leave behind.

The present study has indicated that the information technology especially mobile, telephone and TV are gaining popularity among the farmers over the traditional extension methods in Bhagalpur district. The use of computer, however, is yet to catch up. As many as 88.0% respondents owned and used mobiles whereas 23% of them also owned basic phone at their homes. 52% respondents owned TV out of whom 41% owned coloured TV. As regarding a computer, only 3% owned the desktop and 8% of the respondents only possessed the skill of operating computer, 2 out of them being the expert. However, only 5% of respondents could use internet which is vital for fetching or exchanging communication through this most important communication break through. Never the less, there were a few too good no. of computer literates in the entire 52 village the respondents belonged to. This could be a good back up for initiating any computer based education or e-extension in Bhagalpur district.

***Key words :** Effective tool, agricultural and rural development, Socio-personal profile of the respondents.*

Today we are living an information age. Information is a vital resource and plays a crucial role in achieving progress in all spheres of life. The report of the "Task Force on India as knowledge Super Power (2001)" emphasized the need for developing the capacity to generate, absorb, disseminate and protect knowledge and also to exploit knowledge as a powerful tool to derive societal transformation. The background report of "working Group on Information Technology for the Masses" declared "It is firm view of the Government that if any technology can create new opportunities to bridge the gap between information haves and have nots in the present time it is Information Technology" (Working Group of GOI, Background Report, 2000). Developed countries took lead in developing themselves through increased use of modern information technology. IT accommodates new ideas and new thoughts and invites new methods. At this juncture of its wide spread popularity, the field of agriculture and rural development is no exception. The role of IT to develop agriculture and to improve quality of life in rural area is being growingly established.

Agriculture is one of the important sectors of Indian economy. The India has made considerable progress in agriculture since independence particularly after mid sixties. Now, Indian farmers besides crop cultivation have entered into enterprises like dairy, poultry, fruit cultivation, processing, value addition and export of their produced. In the last half of 20th century

the focus of technology development in agriculture was to increase the production efficiency of the farm by innovation in machinery, pesticides, fertilizers, plant breeding etc. but in the changed rural and agriculture scenario of the country Indian farmers need to be updated with latest knowledge of agricultural and allied field to compete for global marketing. He must have information like new techniques of farming, new agricultural inputs, Government policy, marketing and export potential of their crop and products. IT can help average farmers to get this relevant information and can play its imperative impact. The farmers who access this information have a better chance of succeeding them those who do not access the same. Hence access to information is a crucial requirement for agricultural and rural development. Scientific research in the field of agriculture allied activities is moving very fast there is no dearth of technical know how in these days of advanced technologies. Despite this rapid development in knowledge much of the research finding are hardly put into practices. It is observed that the rural population still have difficulty in accessing crucial information in order to make timely decision. IT, if used innovatively can help in bridging technological, knowledge and income divides. Keeping in view above fact an attempt is made in this paper to find out the utilization of IT in the effective transfer of technology.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in Bhagalpur district of Bihar State, which comes under the jurisdiction of Rajendra Agricultural University, Bihar, Pusa. The data was collected form 100 farmers who had visited the Agri-Expo 2008 held Bihar Agricultural College, Sabour. Random sampling technique was used to draw representative sample of respondents. The respondents were representing 52 of Bhagalpur district. However, frequencies of respondents were varying from village to village. Personal interview technique was employed to collect data on interview schedule specially designed for the investigation. After collection the data were subjected to percentage analysis to derive the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was observed (table-1) that the majority of respondents (72%) belong to middle age group followed by young (16%) age group. The majority of the respondents (33%) had their educational qualification as 10th and above followed by 6th to 9th class (30%) the income group for a majority of the respondents (49%) was in the range of 25000 to 50000 followed by above 100000. The majority of the respondents have medium size of land holding and their main occupation was farming. The majority of respondents had no membership in their social structure.

Table–1 : Socio-personal profile of the respondents. N = 100

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Age		
Young (upto 30 year)	16	16
Middle (31-56 year)	72	72
Old (above 56 year)	12	12
Literacy level		
Illiterate	21	21
1st to 5th Class	12	12
6th to 9th Class	30	30
10th and above	33	33
Graduate	04	04
Income (Rs.)		
Below 25000	18	18
25000 to 50000	49	49
Above 100000	33	33
Occupation		
Farming	60	60
Dairy	28	28
Labourer	07	07
Others	05	05
Size of Land holding		
Small	39	39
Medium	56	56
Large	05	05
Social Participation		
No membership	67	67
Membership in one organization	29	29
Membership in more than organization	04	04

As indicated in table-2, as many as 88.0% respondents owned and used mobiles whereas 23% of them also owned basic phone at their homes. 52% respondents owned TV out of whom 41% owned coloured TV. As regarding a computer, only 3% owned the desktop.

Table–2 : Distribution of the respondents on the basis of availability of Information Technology sources. N = 100

IT Sources	Frequency	Percentage
Basic Phone	23	23
Mobile	80	80
Television (B&W)	11	11
Television (Colour)	41	41
Computer	03	03

Table–3 : Skill of use of Information Technology Sources. N = 100

IT Use Skill	Frequency	Percentage
Operating Computer (Expert)	08 (2)	08 (2)
Internet	05	05

Table-3 showed that 8% of the respondents only possessed the skill of operating computer and 2 out of them being the expert. However, only 5% of respondents could use internet which is vital for fetching or exchanging communication through this most important communication break through.

Table–4 : Extent of use of Information Technology Sources and Traditional Extension Sources. N = 100

Sources	Extent of use (In percentage)			
	Mostly	Some time	Rarely	Never
IT Sources	71	14	12	03
Traditional Extension Sources*	–	08	13	79

*Folk Dance, Traditional Dram, Pupped Show, Panchyat.

Table-4, depicted that majority (71%) of respondent mostly use IT source followed by 14% use some time and 12% use rarely whereas 3% never use IT sources on the other hand majority (79%) of respondent never use Traditional Extension Sources followed by 13% rarely use and 8% some time use whereas none of them mostly use Traditional Extension Sources. It is clear that respondents use IT sources more than Traditional Extension Sources.

Table–5 : Perference of respondent towards Information Technology Sources and Traditional Extension Sources. N = 100

Sources	In percentage		
	Mostly Preferred	Preferred	Some What Preferred
IT Sources	72	23	05
Traditional Extension Sources*	–	12	88

*Folk Dance, Traditional Dram, Pupped Show, Panchyat.

A perusal on Table-5, indicated that majority of respondents (72%) mostly preferred IT sources followed by 23% preferred and 5% some what preferred, whereas preference regarding traditional extension sources showed that majority of respondents (88%) some what preferred followed by 12% preferred and none of them mostly preferred it. It can be said that IT sources are more preferred then traditional Extension Sources in Bhagalpur district.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the above findings. That the information technology specially mobile, telephone and TV are gaining popularity among the farmers over the traditional extension methods in Bhagalpur district. The use of computer, however, is yet to catch up. Never the less, there were a few too good no. of computer literates in the entire 52 village the respondents belonged to. This could be a good back up for initiating any computer based education or e-extension in Bhagalpur district.

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