

Chapter 5

Feasibility Study for Setting up a Community Radio

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter the authors have tried to identify the feasibility of setting up a community radio station in agriculture hubs in India to create awareness about various agriculture credit schemes, government sponsored schemes, best farming practices and weather information amongst farmers. The authors are of the opinion that a more informed farmer will lead to better planning and stave off farmer suicides. While the community radio program could be an effective medium for disseminating information, its penetration and acceptance in a rural community depends upon some key factors such as proximity of the place to an urban location where visual media enjoys a wider audience. The chapter attempts to bring forth the challenges faced in establishing a CR program in Raghunathpur in the state of Uttar Pradesh and sheds light on why the initiative may not be viable. Finally the authors conclude the study by suggesting other alternatives of empowering the Indian farmer in such locations.

INTRODUCTION

“Agriculture is still the world’s most widespread occupation. Half of humankind tills the soil, over three-quarters of them by hand. Agriculture is like a tradition handed down from generation to generation in sweat, graft and toil, because for humanity it is a prerequisite of survival.”

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With more than 1.2 billion mouths to feed in the country alone, leaving aside the ones outside the country, and still maintain healthy food reserves, the task of the agriculture sector in India is awe-inspiring. The sector's contribution to the Indian economy **may have** declined, and rightly so, in the years gone-by, but the importance of the sector is not lost on us Indians.

India is principally an agricultural country. The Indian agriculture department, with its allied sectors, is unquestionably the largest livelihood provider in India. Most of the industries also depend upon the sector for their raw material requirements. Steady investments in technology upgrade, irrigation channels, accentuation on modern agricultural practices and provision of agricultural credit and subsidies are the major factors contributed to agriculture magnification.

Ministry of Agriculture's Department of Agriculture and Cooperation acts as the nodal institution responsible for agricultural development in India. The body has under its purview the formulation and implementation of national policies and other programmes which help the country to lead on the path of rapid agricultural growth, with the help of proper utilization of the country's resources like land, water, soil and flora.

But, despite the Indian agriculture sector being renowned over the world as a powerhouse, there still exist many a challenge. Some of these arise due to the booming and uncontrolled population growth of India. This calls for efforts to raise the productivity per unit of the land. The water resources available are limited. And the ones that are available need to be utilized properly. The agricultural growth has to fulfil the food security needs of the nation on one hand and help in reducing the rural poverty.

Underlying all this lays the importance of the farmers of India. It would not be unjust to say that close to 70% of the country's population comprises farmers. It is needless to say that they form the backbone of India, in more ways than one. They produce the cash-crops enabling our country's exports and feed the mouths of India. Also, they are responsible for raw materials that our industries desperately need. To perform all these duties, what does a farmer need? He needs arable land, water, seeds, etc. But most importantly, a farmer needs information. Relevant and timely information. This could include any information on some of the best farming practices applied throughout the world, information on weather trends, and information on how to reach the desired markets without the interference of the "middle-men". All this allows a farmer to make correct decisions regarding the choice of crops to plant, where to buy his inputs and finally where to sell his produce with profitable margins. (The World Bank, 2012)

Bachhav (2002) in his study on the "Information Needs of the Rural Farmers: A Study from Maharashtra, India: A Survey" has brought out some astonishing facts to the light. According to him, the needs of the farmer "are different according to the state of developments of the concerned rural areas". These needs could very well vary from village to village, in the same district itself. In his study, he indicates that farmers involved in wheat production may be more concerned about market rates and available transportation facilities, whereas the farmers in Arunachal Pradesh need information on pest and disease management. His study rightly shows that majority of farmers did not have easy or any access to information related to their main activities. Babu et al. (2011) in their study on information needs of Tamil Nadu's farmers, found out that there were a lot of constraints in accessing the right information for the farmers. Some of these included "poor availability, poor reliability, lack of awareness of information sources available among farmers and untimely provision of information". (Babu, 2011)

One way to cater to such informational needs in a regular and timely manner is the conceptualization called Community Radio, hereby referred to as CR in the rest of the document. These are not your traditional broadcasts of radio, and are very much different from the commercial and public broadcasting methodologies. CR stations set up for such broadcasts are responsible for serving interests of communi-

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