

Chapter 11

Role of Open and Distance Learning in Agriculture Education in India

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ABSTRACT

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) can be an effective and cost effective tool to reach the masses in imparting the required skills and technical proficiency. The conventional Agricultural education system has not utilized the potential of ODL in a big way for extending the reach of agriculture education and capacity building activities. Some of the challenges in ODL system include: identifying the right type and level of programme, selecting the appropriate pedagogy model, covering of large and diverse clientele group, popularization and recognition of the programmes and linkages with the industry. For successful implementation of the ODL programmes in agriculture, the interventions proposed are synergy between ODL and conventional system to improve GER and bridge the gap between demand and supply, collaboration with different institutions and industry for development and delivery of the programmes, linkage with the government schemes, popularization and recognition of ODL programmes, utilization of modern technologies, etc.

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INTRODUCTION

India is an agrarian country and about two-third of the population depend on agriculture and allied sectors as a source of livelihood. The sector has made significant strides with some serious concerns. The focus is shifting towards sustainable agriculture, food security and adoption of good agriculture practices for safe food. The perpetual crisis of distressed farmers on one hand and emerging trends in use of high-end tools and technologies on the other hand call for strengthening of capacity building activities in the sector. This becomes more important with the announcement in the Union Budget 2016-17 about one of the important objectives of the Government of India that is to “Double the income of farmers by the year 2022”. The scenario demands dynamic and enterprising human capital in agriculture i.e. knowledgeable & skilled, flexible, innovative, passionate and an entrepreneurial. The farmer should be able to adopt modern agronomic practices and new technologies in harmony with the indigenous practices and local realities to increase productivity. There exists a huge demand for skilled/trained manpower in agriculture and allied sectors. In India, the Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR) is a key player in agriculture education, research and extension. Though ICAR, KVKs, Central and State Government(s) are focusing on skill development at the grass root level, it is not adequate to meet the requirements of skilled manpower. The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) can be an effective and cost effective tool to reach the masses in imparting the required skills and technical proficiency. The ODL can also facilitate with the Agriculture Skill Council for certification of workers/ farm workers and professionals of the sector which is the need of the hour. The ODL in the agriculture sector is in nascent stage and is evolving with time. The chapter, set in this backdrop, reflects on the issues, challenges, roles and the strategies for the implementation of ODL for a quality Agriculture Education in the country.

BACKGROUND

India is an agrarian country and its importance cannot be ignored for sustainable and inclusive growth of the country. It is rightly said that “Prosperity in society can only be sustained with the desired growth of Agriculture Sector”. The sector has green, white, pink and yellow revolution to its credit and which is well reflected with the country’s ranking, in production level, in the World. The agriculture sector is shifting towards second green revolution based on improving the productivity by integrating traditional and scientific knowledge, taking agriculture to untapped

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