

Farmers information needs in rural Manipur: an assessment

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Attempts to find out the information needs of the persons engaged in the agricultural activities particularly farmers community in the rural areas of Manipur. Data on farmers information needs were collected by using pre-tested semi structured questionnaire and data processed and analyzed through Minitab-software. The paper highlights the channels of getting information by rural farmers' community in order to fulfill their information needs. The observations of the present study have also revealed that rural farmers community need a variety of information but the required information for their day to day agricultural activities are unmet. Considerable work and efforts are needed for imparting information support for sustainable agricultural development with the application of emerging information and communication technologies for information oriented and socio-economic empowerment of the rural farming community.

Introduction

Manipur, one of the States in the North-Eastern region of India is an isolated hill-girt State stretching between longitudes 93.03 E and 94.78 E and latitudes 23.80 N and 25.68 N. It is a charming place encircled by nine hill ranges on all sides with a small and beautiful oval valley at the centre¹. According to 2001 Census, the population of the State is 22, 93, 896 (Final) registering a population density of 97 per sq. kms. Out of the total population of the State, 17, 17, 928 (74.89 %) are living in the rural areas while only 5, 75, 968 (25.11%) live in urban area. The literacy rate of Manipur is 70.5% (80.3% male literate and 60.5% female literate) as per records of the 2001 Census².

The economic upliftment of the entire State depends, to a large extent, on the progress of agricultural sector. The non-income poverty in terms of inadequate information support system on advanced farm technologies, market intelligence and rural development schemes create the poverty in the State. The limited technical manpower to disseminate information in rural and remote areas, lack of transport and communication facilities, inadequate financial support to the technology transfer and less infrastructure facility create huge technological gap among the rural farming community. Further, due to non-availability of proper information and communication network system, need based information dissemination

centre and improved technological information to the farmers, agriculture becomes less remunerative and it is also creating food insecurity problems³. Keeping the above facts in view, a survey was conducted by the authors on the "Community Information Needs in Rural Manipur". A part of this study, specially the "Farmers Information Needs in Rural Manipur" is discussed in this paper. The paper seeks to find out the information needs of rural farmers' community of Manipur State and also tries to find out some means through which the information can be disseminated to foster the information oriented and socio-economic empowerment of the rural farming community.

Need of the study

The rural farmers' community requires various types of information for their day-to-day agricultural activities. But, rural areas in the State lack proper information infrastructure and service centres. Rural farmers' are not getting the right information at the right time, leading to slow development of rural farmers' community in sustainable agricultural development activities. Information support system for rural farmers' community is a prerequisite for sustainable agricultural development in the State of Manipur. In a State like Manipur with agro-based rural economy, rural development can play a major role in national development. Therefore, quick and

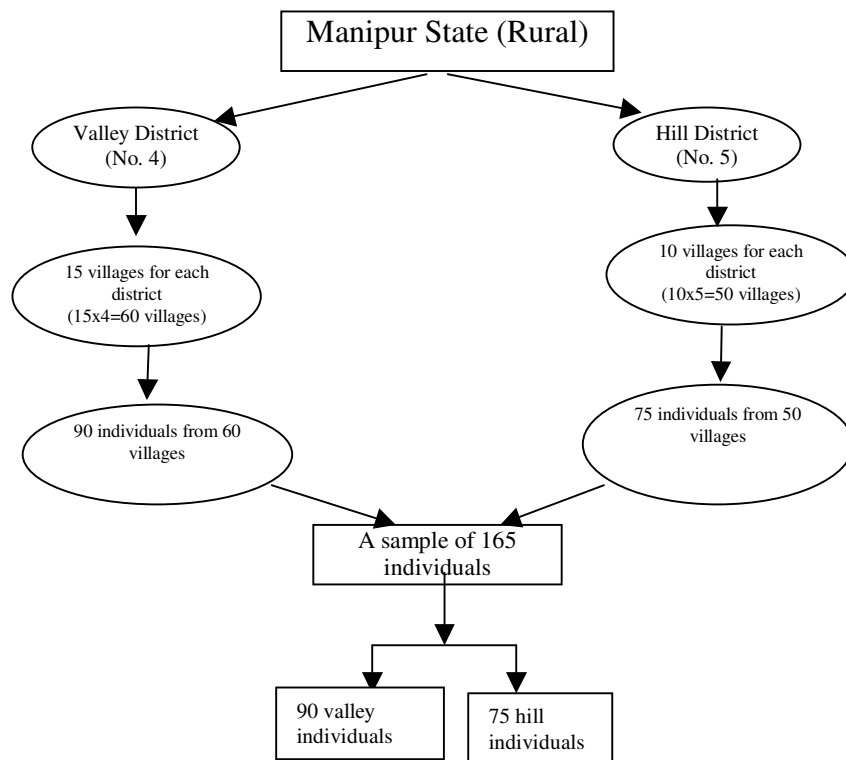


Fig. 1 — The flow chart of sampling

easy access to information is vital for the development of rural areas.

In view of the failure of the present agricultural information system and non-existence of a rural information centre/village knowledge centre in the villages of Manipur, there is an urgent need to study the various information needs of the rural farmers community in order to fulfill the required information by villagers as well as farmers community to uplift the socio-economic, cultural and all round development of the rural community for the construction of information oriented as well as knowledge based society in the State of Manipur and country as a whole.

Objectives of the study

The present study is taken up with the following objectives:

1. To identify the information needs of the farmers community in the rural areas of Manipur State; and
2. To examine the channels of information communication and sources of information dependence used by the farmers.

Methodology

The present study is based on a primary data of 165 individual farmers of Manipur State. Sampling adopted for this study is multistage sampling. Pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire was used as the tool of survey. Data was processed and analyzed through Minitab-software with well known statistical formula like chi-square test as a way to highlight the information needs of the rural farmers' community.

Multi-stage sampling

In the first stage, stratified random sampling was adopted by classifying the entire rural area of Manipur State, the study population, into two strata, viz., rural valley districts and rural hill districts. Sixty villages, 15 from each valley district, from the first stratum have been selected, while 50 villages, 10 from each hill district, from the second stratum. Simple random sampling is again used as the second stage sampling by which 165 individuals have been selected from selected villages for both valley and hill. In the third stage the sample has been again classified into two parts with 90 individuals from valley and 75 from hill for data collection.

Table 1 — Distribution of individuals with respect to background variables

Background variable	Region	Responses	Percentage
Type of respondents	Hill	75	45.5
	Valley	90	54.5
Sex	Male	134	81.21
	Female	31	18.79
Age-group	Below 20	-	-
	20-25	14	8.48
	25-35	44	26.67
	35-55	85	51.52
	55 & Above	22	13.33
	Mean		43.42
	Standard deviation		241.30
Educational attainment	Illiterate	75	45.45
	Under Matric	61	36.67
	Matric	17	10.30
	Secondary	9	5.45
	Graduate	3	1.83
	Post-graduate	-	-

Rural farmers' information needs

The farmers' information needs are not uniform amongst all rural areas. The needs are different according to the state of development of the concerned rural areas. Those, which are closer to urban areas have access to better infrastructure facilities, where as the others have very poor infrastructure facilities⁴.

Specific information needed by farmers' community

Farming community can be classified into three categories as small scale, medium scale and large scale farmers depending on the size of farm possessed by them. However in the present context it is logical to classify as literate and illiterate farmers. Literate farmers may be provided agricultural information through KVKs (Krishi Vigyan Kendra) by training or by print and electronic media. But in the case of illiterate farmers, this method of communication cannot be followed. This category of farming community can be educated effectively by audio-visual and demonstration methods.

Information needs of the farmers may be divided into six groups⁵.

1. Field acquisition: Farmers are required to know the different types of schemes, subsidies purchasing of agricultural land.

2. Agricultural inputs: Farmers need information about improved variety of seeds, pesticides, agricultural equipment, weather conditions, harvest and post harvest technology etc.
3. Agricultural technology: Farmers should be fed with information about innovative technology in their farming.
4. Agricultural credit: Farmers need information about credit facilities, terms of loans etc.
5. Agricultural marketing: Day to day market trend on price of different variety of crops are necessary for the farmers.
6. Food technology: Information on post harvest food technology is needed by the farmers to get optimum benefit out of their crop.

Analysis

Personal identification

Background information of the sample population is shown in Table 1. Ninety individuals from valley and 75 individuals from hill constitute the sample with the percentage of 54.5% and 45.5% respectively. There are 134 (81.21%) and 31 females (18.79%) in the sample studied.

The highest percentage (51.52) of individuals belong to the age group 35-55 years followed by the age group 25-

35 years (26.67%), 55 years and above (13.33%) and 20-25 years (8.48%). Over all average age of the people in the sample is found to be 43.42 years with standard deviation of 241.30 years.

Maximum number of persons (45.45%) in the study sample are illiterate. 36.67% of the people are below matriculate, 10.30% are matriculates, 5.45% are secondary school pass out and 1.83% are graduates.

Information needs

Need of information by farmers community

It is well known that farmers need information. This is reiterated by response of the farmers shown in Table 2 that 46.67% of farmers need information regularly whereas 38.18% farmers need information sometimes. Only 15.15% farmers have stated that they do not need information at all.

Type of information needed by farmers' community

The types of information needed by farmer community is shown in Table 3. 'Agricultural information' with 80.61%, 'health information' with 73.33%, followed by 'educational and training information' with 63.03% were

Table 2 — Distribution of respondents with respect to information needs

Type of responses	No. of responses	Percentage
Yes	77	46.67
No	25	15.15
Sometimes	63	38.18
Total	165	100

the major information needed by the farmers.

Specific information needed by farmers' community

Here, the information needed by farmers is classified into six major groups as shown in Table 4 and they are again distributed between hill and valley. For hill, highest percentage (23.71) of farmers need information regarding variety of seeds, pesticides, fertilizer, equipment, weather condition, irrigation, harvest, post harvesting technology while the highest percentage (21.92) of valley farmers also need information on variety of seeds, pesticides, fertilizer, equipment, weather condition, irrigation, harvest, post harvesting technology. It is also seen that for each region there is visible difference of percentage among the six groups of information. The variation is again tested by χ^2 and finding shows that the number of respondents is significantly different over the information groups for both hill and valley as evident by the corresponding highly significant value of P. But, if the specific information needed by farmers between hill and valley regions is compared it is found that there is no significant difference between hill and valley regions as evident by corresponding value of $P > 0.5$. From this result it may be concluded that there is no difference between hill and valley regarding the information needed by farmers group.

Information channel

In order to fulfill their information needs, the rural farmers' community used only a few information channels for communication and information retrieving purposes. Majority of the farmers use 'radio' as the most

Table 3 — Distribution of respondents with respect to types of information needed by hill & valley farmers' community

Types of information needs	No. of responses	Percentage
Agricultural information	133	80.61
Health information	121	73.33
Food & nutritional information	58	35.15
Environmental information	21	12.73
Technological information	12	7.27
Educational & training information	104	63.03
Business and trade information	32	19.39
Govt. policies and plans	16	9.70
Credit system, Information on People, Culture, Games & Sports	-	-
Any Others	-	-

Percentage is more than 100 because of multiple choices

Table 4 — Distribution of specific information needed by farmers

Farmers community	Agriculture need	Hill No. of respondent	Valley No. of Respondent
	Subsidies, purchasing agricultural land.	36(18.56%)	49(18.85%)
	Variety of seeds, pesticides, fertilizer, equipment, weather condition, irrigation, harvest, post harvesting technology	46(23.71%)	57(21.92%)
	Adoption of new technology.	16(8.25%)	32(12.31%)
	Credit facilities, source, terms & conditions	39(20.10%)	43(16.54%)
	Market trend, price, and stock available	25(12.89%)	38(14.62%)
	Post harvest, food technology (how to preserved, store the harvest crops)	32(16.49%)	41(15.74%)
	χ^2	30.711	17.400
Test value	d.f.	5	5
	P-value	<0.001	0.004
	Total	$\chi^2=2.951, d.f.= 5, P= 0.707$	

Table 5 — Distribution of individuals with respect to medium of getting information by farmers' community

Medium of information	Hill responses	Percentage	Valley responses	Percentage
Newspaper	8	10.67	15	16.67
Radio	32	42.67	58	64.44
T.V.	23	30.67	41	45.56
Library	-	-	-	-
Any other	-	-	-	-

common information channels, followed by T.V and newspapers available both in local dialect and regional languages.

Medium of getting information by farmers' community

Table 5 shows the distribution of respondents with percentage according to the medium of information. It further highlights the variation of medium used by the hill and valley farmer community. Radio is main source of getting information which is followed by television and newspaper. Library use is not found in the sample

studied. The pattern is found to exist in both regions. Thus one can conclude that availability of information service centre (library/information centre/community information centre etc) in the rural areas (both hill and valley) is significantly very less.

Conclusion

For carrying out various activities by farmers of rural areas, among other things, information support is also vital. As discussed above, majority of the rural farmers are not having access most of the required agricultural

information. Therefore, application of ICT based agricultural information support system is very much important for the dissemination of agricultural information and technological know how by rural farming community.

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