

Ronald E. Ostman (ed). *Communication in Indian Agriculture*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. 1989. 319 pp. Bibliography. Price: Rs 225.00.

The editor of the book under review divides the process of agricultural development into three crucial stages. The first two stages, i.e., the basic scientific research to develop the crops, birds and animals and the development of the technology to process the increased yields, are essentially productivity-enhancing in nature and are generally available in most developing countries or can be transplanted. However, the third and most crucial stage is the transferring of this knowledge from the educational centres to the farmers' fields, which is generally neglected. This is, often, the greatest single impediment to agricultural development. A host of complex sociological, cultural, attitudinal, educational, economic, and evolutionary factors have a direct bearing on the development of this stage. It is this stage that is the focus of the book.

There are several areas where effective agricultural communicators can play a key catalytic role in streamlining the eventual translation of new knowledge to the farmers' fields. At the practical applied level, their role lies in helping to improve communication with the government, university, or research institute and between the research institute, the government planners, and the farmers. At the theoretical and research level, their role lies in the evaluation of the effectiveness of various communication strategies in terms of the overall objectives, and in the search for ways to improve interpersonal, organizational, and mass-scale communications. Effective communicators also have a key role in the dissemination of the results obtained at the research level about the most expedient methods of communication amongst the users.

The core of this book is based on the fifteen papers presented at the national seminar on Agricultural Communication Research organized by the Centre of Advanced Studies in Agricultural Communication at Pantnagar University of Agriculture and Technology in January 1986. Three other chapters were added and the book was neatly arranged in four parts: (i) Research Processes, Indian Communication Theory and Context; (ii) Current Examples of Indian Agricultural Communication Knowledge; (iii) Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods; and (iv) Future Research Directions in Agricultural Communication. These four parts, coupled with the foreword and prologue and an extensive selected bibliography, round off an excellent book on a topic that is extremely pertinent not only for India but for most agrarian economies undergoing technical change and transformation.

The first part of the book, based on the first three chapters, provides an outline of the research processes and how these may be adapted for local research on agricultural communications. The review of the Indian Government policies pertaining to communications activities in national development reveals that policies

which emulated western practices were less successful than expected, and stresses the need for developing an indigenous theory of communication. This part also presents a scathing historical review of Indian leadership and planning. Both are "found wanting". The importance of defining clearly the "top down", "participatory", or "bottom up" strategies is underscored in the detailed review of the rural development experience of India. The feasibility of adopting a strategy based on the Chinese rural development experience is keenly analysed. The success of the Chinese experience is correctly attributed to the equitable distribution of rural resources and the existence of a group of people who are ready to look after the interests of the masses.

By far the most interesting part of the book is the one dealing with the current examples of research in agricultural communications. The article by Singh, on "Recent Researches", is a concise diagrammatic presentation of the agricultural communication system in India. It shows the three distinct 'systems', i.e., the research system, the extension/communication system, and the client system, each with its component organs and specific functions. It would have been worthwhile also to stress the importance of communications between these different systems which are often lacking. While the diagrammatic representation stresses the feed-back function in both the extension services and the client system, this feed-back between the client system, the extension/communication system, and the research system is often the missing link in the effective identification of research priorities and the dissemination of need-based technologies. Research in India indicates that farmers rank demonstrations at the highest but folders, leaflets, and bulletins at the lowest in terms of credibility. However, there are significant differences in the rank ordering of different sources in terms of credibility of different sources of information.

The survey of recent researches also finds that communication fidelity, i.e., the amount of knowledge gained, the kind of attitude formed, and the extent of adoption, depends significantly and positively on the language compatibility of the message, the communicator's degree of contact with the recipient, the profitability of the message, the frequency of channel use, the socio-economic status of the recipient, and the recipient's past experience with the communicator's message. The studies indicate that age, education, economic status, and progressive outlook are positively associated with the use of formal sources of communication, and that small and big farmers differ in their communication behaviour according to perceived credibility of different sources. It is this very difference in response that can determine reception and response, which determine the success or failure of any dissemination programme. The survey highlights the importance of sensitivity to a host of factors, such as those highlighted above for the success of a communications

programme.

Agricultural journalism, though generally aimed at the small sub-section of the educated, is nevertheless an extremely important part of the overall communication system. But agricultural journalism is virtually non-existent in Pakistan. The studies in India indicate that there are several bottlenecks to the effective use of this very potent medium of communication. Amongst the several constraints listed in the chapter by Trikha is the dearth of the objective and scientific fact, the absence or shortage of mature professional journalist researchers, and the bottlenecks in the distribution of the print material. Here, again, the powerful feed-back effects of agricultural journalism from the clients to the researchers and policy-makers cannot be over-emphasized.

The book contains summaries of 22 research studies conducted between 1982 and 1986 by post-graduate students of the Department of Agricultural Communication at G. B. Pant University. These studies provide a brief though diverse cross-section evaluation of different communication programmes and projects. It would be useful to see these studies presented in much greater detail, perhaps as a separate volume. There is much that people connected with agricultural communication at the research, policy-making, and implementation stages can learn from the diversity of the experiences reported in the case studies.

The last part of the book is concerned with future research directions in agricultural communications. It is built on the premise that "continued advances in communications technologies have given humankind powerful tools for the betterment of the human condition". The emphasis throughout is on the wise use of the communications for the improvement of the human condition. In defining the research priorities, it is underscored to take into consideration the questions of social disparity, hierarchy, and heterogeneity. The last part highlights the essential message of the book that agricultural communication is not and should not be based on a one-way trickle-down communication. It should take advantage of the existing channels of communication within the communities, work simultaneously at various levels, and fully exploit the potential of the mass- and small-scale media. It should recognize the tremendous diversity of the target groups and be sensitive to their perceptions in order to be successful.

As with generally all edited books, and considering the range of the aspects it addresses, the book tends to lose focus at times. Certain chapters are not as succinct or as exhaustive as others. A few, such as the chapters on the review of the Indian rural development experience and on the relevance of the Chinese experience, seem out of place. However, the editor recognizes this in his foreword to the book; and considering the fact that the book is a seminal contribution, such lapses are to be expected. The book is strongly recommended for those interested in the processes

of agricultural development and how these can be accelerated.

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