

# Community Radio as a Catalyst for Agricultural Information Dissemination and Rural Empowerment

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## Introduction

Accelerating farm production, bolstering rural livelihoods, and promoting sustainable agricultural development all depend on having access to timely and trustworthy agricultural information. In order to spread information on better crop production techniques, pest and disease control, climate advisories, and market prospects, agricultural extension programs are essential. Farm demonstrations, field visits, farmer meetings, and written advising materials have been the mainstays of extension communication in the past. Even though these strategies are still crucial, they frequently encounter obstacles such as a shortage of extension agents, geographic limitations, and trouble reaching scattered rural communities.

In this regard, communication technologies are becoming more and more crucial to the development of agricultural extension systems. Community radio is one of these technologies that have become popular for providing rural communities with agricultural information in an efficient and interactive manner. Community radio is a locally run broadcasting program that caters to the interests and information requirements of a particular community. Community radio promotes educational and developmental programming that is pertinent to the local people, in contrast to commercial radio stations that concentrate on entertainment or advertising.

Farmers, particularly those with little formal education, can access and comprehend agricultural information thanks to community radio stations' programming in regional languages and dialects. Radio is still one of the most accessible and reasonably priced forms of communication in many rural places. Community radio programs can increase farmers' awareness, understanding, and adoption of better agricultural techniques, according to studies (Chapman *et al.*, 2003). Consequently, community radio is becoming more widely acknowledged as a useful instrument for enhancing rural communication networks and bolstering agricultural extension.

**Concept and Characteristics of Community Radio: A Radio by the people, of the people and for the people**

A community-owned, community-run, and non-profit broadcasting service is referred to as community radio. Community radio's main goal is to provide locals a forum to discuss topics impacting their everyday lives, share information, and voice their opinions. Community radio prioritizes involvement, inclusivity, and local relevance in contrast to public or commercial broadcasting systems. Community radio's emphasis on localized material is one of its distinguishing features. Programs are created with the local community's cultural, social, and economic circumstances in mind. Community radio agricultural programs frequently cover topics unique to a certain area, such as crop management techniques appropriate for the local agro-climatic conditions, pest and disease outbreaks, irrigation management, and market pricing information.

Additionally, community radio promotes participatory communication by including farmers, extension agents, researchers, and local residents in the production of radio shows. By using a participative method, it is possible to guarantee that the information shared is pertinent, useful, and sensitive to farmers' requirements. Fraser and Estrada (2001) claim that by offering a forum for discussion and information sharing, community radio significantly contributes to the empowerment of rural communities.

## Role of Community Radio in Agricultural Information Dissemination

### 1. Information on Local Agriculture

Community radio's capacity to deliver agricultural information that is customized to the unique requirements of nearby farmers is one of its main benefits. The local climate, soil properties, and cropping systems all influence agricultural methods. Farmers can obtain knowledge that is directly related to their farming operations by listening to programs on community radio stations that tackle these local realities. Radio shows, for instance, can offer timely advice on crop management techniques, pest and disease control strategies, fertilizer use, and irrigation timing. Farmers can adopt suitable technology and make well-informed decisions with the use of such localized information.

## 2. Utilizing the Local Language and Cultural Setting

In order to communicate effectively, language is essential. It's possible that many rural farmers don't speak the official or national languages that are utilized in the media. Local languages and dialects are frequently used to broadcast community radio programs, which improves accessibility and comprehension. Agricultural information may also be made more approachable and interesting by using local idioms, culturally appropriate examples, and narrative approaches. Farmers are therefore more likely to comprehend and remember the information conveyed by community radio broadcasts.

## 3. An Economical Communication Channel

In comparison to other mass media platforms, community radio is seen as an inexpensive communication channel. In rural homes, radios are generally accessible and reasonably priced. Community radio broadcasts are an effective way to spread agricultural knowledge since they may reach a lot of farmers at once. Chapman *et al.* (2003) state that rural radio programs have been effectively employed in a number of nations to advance agricultural technologies and raise farmers' awareness of better farming techniques.

## 4. Prompt Information Dissemination

Time is of the essence in agricultural operations. Farmers need fast information on disease control, insect outbreaks, weather forecasts, and changes in market prices. Such timely information might be aired on daily or weekly agricultural programs on community radio stations. Additionally, radio broadcasts may be used to warn farmers and offer advice on proper management techniques during crises, such as severe weather or insect outbreaks. Farmers may reduce losses and increase agricultural output with the aid of this timely information distribution.

## 5. Encouraging Farmer Involvement and Information Exchange

Farmers and local communities are encouraged to actively participate in community radio. Through radio conversations, interviews, and narrative shows, farmers may share their stories, indigenous knowledge, and effective farming techniques. An essential feature of agricultural extension is farmer-to-farmer learning, which is encouraged by this participatory method. Others are frequently inspired to try new methods and embrace advances after hearing about the achievements of other farmers. Participatory communication strategies, such as radio shows that promote farmer stories, can greatly improve information sharing in rural areas. (Van Mele, 2011).

## Types of Community Radio's Agricultural Program

A variety of agricultural programs aimed at meeting farmers' information needs are broadcast on community radio stations. Typical program formats include the following

1. **Expert interviews:** Farm management techniques and crop production technologies are advised by agricultural scientists and extension specialists.
2. **Farmer success stories:** Forward-thinking farmers discuss their experiences implementing cutting-edge farming techniques.
3. **Interactive Q&A sessions:** Farmers can submit or call in questions about agricultural issues they encounter in the field.
4. **Weather and market information:** Farmers can organize their agricultural activities with the support of updates on weather forecasts, rainfall patterns, and market pricing.
5. **Government programs and policy awareness:** Radio shows educate farmers about subsidies, rural development projects, and agricultural assistance programs.

## Familiar Community Radio's in India

1. **Radio Namaskar in Odisha:** Focuses on agriculture, health, education and local culture preservation
2. **Sangham Radio in Telengana:** It is running by women's collectives, focusing on issues related to women's empowerment, health and educational programmes.
3. **Alfaz-e-Mewat in Haryana:** Addresses the issues of rural development, education, and local governance in Hindi & Mewati languages.
4. **Kisan Vani Community Radio in TNAU, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.**
5. **Kalanjiyam Community Radio in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu.**
6. **PUSA Radio, IARI, New Delhi.**
7. **Anna FM, Anna University, Chennai** – first campus community radio in India
8. **Radio Adanur, University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad.**
9. **Mandakini Ki Awaz in Uttranchal.**
10. **Apna Radio in Uttranchal.**

## Advantages of Community Radio in Agricultural Extension

1. **Broad rural reach:** Radio transmissions can travel to far-off places where there may not be many other ways to communicate. (Radius up to 15 K.M)

2. **Accessibility for low-literacy audiences:** Farmers with less formal education can obtain agricultural information through audio-based communication.
3. **Encouragement of participative communication:** Community members actively participate in the creation of content and programs.
4. **Increasing connections between farmers and experts:** Technical advice is frequently given by agricultural scientists and extension specialists on radio shows.
5. **Increasing awareness and knowledge:** Farmers' comprehension of better farming techniques is enhanced by frequent agricultural broadcasts.
6. **Increases credibility and trust**  
Agricultural advisories are more likely to be accepted because farmers are more likely to believe information conveyed by familiar community members and local voices.
7. **Closes the gap between research, extension, and farmers**  
Community radio facilitates two-way contact between farmers, scientists, and extension agents.
8. **Encourages inclusive communication**  
It reaches underrepresented groups who are frequently left out of standard extension institutions, including smallholders, women farmers, and tribal communities.
9. **Encourages the use of native knowledge systems**  
Local knowledge can be preserved and validated by farmers sharing traditional practices.
10. **Communication about risks and disasters**  
useful for swiftly disseminating emergency advisories, insect outbreaks, floods, and drought notifications.

#### Challenges in Community Radio Operations

1. **Insufficient interaction in contrast to digital media:** Real-time interactivity is occasionally limited, in contrast to mobile apps.
2. **Impact measurement is challenging:** It might be difficult to evaluate how radio programs affect farmer adoption and behavior.
3. **Problems with content relevance:** Programs may become overly general and fail to meet the unique needs of farmers if they are not adequately planned.
4. **Dependent on outside funds:** Sustainability is impacted by the fact that many stations depend on funding from the government or donors.

5. **Regulatory limitations:** Growth and operation of community radio stations may be restricted by licensing and policy rules.
6. **Inadequate technical infrastructure:** Broadcast quality can be impacted by malfunctioning equipment and maintenance problems.
7. **Digital media competition:** Younger farmers may listen to less radio as they use smartphones and the internet more frequently.
8. **Time-bound broadcasts:** if programs aren't available on demand, farmers can miss them.
9. **Insufficiently qualified human resources:** Technical operations and content production frequently lack qualified staff.
10. **Participation restrictions based on gender:** Social and cultural barriers may prevent women farmers from participating fully.

#### Conclusion

In agricultural extension, especially in rural regions, community radio has become a useful and inclusive communication tool. It improves farmers' comprehension and facilitates better decision-making by providing timely, localized information in languages they are comfortable with. It enhances the flow of knowledge and encourages participatory learning by connecting researchers, extension agents, and farmers. In addition to promoting farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange, farmers' participation in content generation enhances the information's relevance and trustworthiness. Community radio plays a crucial role in ensuring that low-literate farmers and smallholders have access to information, which helps create more equitable extension services.

However, overcoming obstacles including scarce resources, limited coverage, and the requirement for human and technical capacity is necessary for it to be effective. Community radio's reach and engagement can be increased by incorporating digital tools like mobile apps. Community radio may play a significant role in enhancing farmer knowledge, hastening the adoption of new technologies, and promoting sustainable agricultural development with increased institutional support and capacity building.

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