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STATUS OF FARM SCHOOLS IN NORTH EAST STATES

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ABSTRACT

Farm schools use experiential learning and a group approach to facilitate farmers in making decisions, solving problems, and learning new techniques. There is limited evidence on what extent they are organized and how well they are functioning especially in North East India. A study was undertaken to assess the status of Farm School under the "Support to State Extension Programmes for Extension Reforms" scheme of Directorate of Agriculture (DAC), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Govt of India (GOI). The scheme is being implemented since 2005-06 in the whole country including the North Eastern states. A random sampling technique was followed for selection of Farm Schools in 8 North Eastern states viz. Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. A total of 171 numbers of Farm Schools were selected for the study covering all the eight states of North East. The data were collected through mailed questionnaire method from 30 districts of the selected NE states. Majority (27.5%) of Farm schools have selected 'Vegetable production' as subject matter followed by 'Cultivation of Spices & Condiments' (14.0%), 'Cultivation of rice' (13.5%) and 'Cultivation of banana' (7.6%). About 5.8% Farm school have selected each of the subject matters like 'Piggery', 'Cultivation of pulses & oilseeds' and floriculture. There is an enormous potentiality for commercial venture of spices & condiments and medicinal plants from the agro-ecological and socio- cultural perspectives in NE states. There is also need and scope of forming Federation of Vegetable and livestock enterprises to meet the higher demand of these commodities in the this region.

INTRODUCTION

The group and farmer's led extension approaches like formation of 'Commodity Interest Group' (CIGs) and 'Farm Schools' at village levels are gaining momentum under the Centrally Sponsored "Support to State Extension Programmes for Extension Reforms" scheme which is being implemented since 2005-06. Farm School is a way of disseminating technical information based on a participatory and interactive learning approach. Farm schools provide participatory platforms for improving decision-making capacity and stimulating local innovation for sustainable agriculture. Farm Schools offer community-based non-formal education to groups of 20–25 farmers. Discovery-based learning is related to agro-ecological principles in a participatory learning process throughout a crop cycle (*Braun et.al,2000*). Farm School focus on identifying concrete solutions for local problems by means of increasing the capacity of individuals and local groups for critical analysis and decision-making.

The Key institution in implementing the scheme is the 'Agricultural Technology Management Agency' (ATMA) which is responsible for facilitating and coordinating "group-led" extension activities within the district. The ATMA calls for integrated approach wherein different stakeholders come closer to plan organise and execute the activities to take full advantage of the technologies demonstrated in the operational area (*Kumar et.al, 2011*). It is important to address the researchable questions like what extent the Farm Schools are organized in North Eastern states, whether the Farm Schools have been organized keeping in view the agro-ecological and socio-economic potentialities of the region and what are the constraints faced by the extension functionaries in facilitating and promoting Farm schools.

In this context, the proposed study was conducted with the following objective

1. To identify the commodity wise distribution pattern of Farm School in NE states
2. To identify the constraints faced by the Block Level Extension functionaries in promoting Farm School in NE states

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in eight states of North East including Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. Responses were collected through mailed questionnaire method. Questionnaires were sent to Project Director (P.D) of all the ATMA districts of North East. However, responses were obtained only from 30 nos. of P.D, ATMA. The responses were obtained from five districts of Assam, six districts of Nagaland, seven districts of Arunachal Pradesh, six districts of Mizoram and two districts each from Manipur, Sikkim and Meghalaya. The statistical techniques used for analysing the data are percentage and frequency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pattern of distribution of Farm Schools on different disciplines

A total number of 8 (eight) disciplines of activities have been reported to be selected by 171 Farm Schools in the NE states. It can be observed from table 1 that 8 domains of 'Agri-Horti' crops, 3 domains of 'Live stocks' and one domain each of 'Fishery', 'Apiculture', 'Sericulture', 'Artificial insemination', 'Vermi compost production' and 'Mushroom production' have been selected by the Farm Schools.

It can be seen from Table 1 that majority (78.9%) of the Farm school have selected 'Agri-Horti' crops followed by 'Live stocks'(8.8%), 'Fishery'(4.1%), 'Artificial insemination'(2.9%),'Vermicompost' production (2.3%), 'Mushroom production' (1.2%), 'Sericulture'(1.2%) and Apiculture (0.6%).

Pattern of distribution of Farm Schools on different commodities

It can be seen from Table 2 that majority (27.5%) of Farm schools have selected 'Vegetable production' as subject matter followed by 'Cultivation of Spices & Condiments' (14.0%), 'Cultivation of rice' (13.5%) and 'Cultivation of banana' (7.6%). About 5.8% Farm school have selected each of the subject matters like 'Piggery', 'Cultivation of pulses & oilseeds' and floriculture.

However, 'Cultivation of Cash crop' and 'Fishery' have been selected by 4.1% Farm school each which is followed by 'Fishery' (4.1%), 'Artificial insemination' (2.9%), 'Vermi compost' production (2.3%), and 'Poultry' (1.8%). About 1.2% Farm schools have selected each of the subject matters like 'Mushroom production', 'Sericulture' and 'Dairy'. Only 0.6% Farm school each has selected the activities like 'Apiculture' and 'Cultivation of aromatic & medicinal plants'

Table 1: Pattern of distribution of farm schools on different disciplines n=171

Sl. No	Types	Nos of domain	Number of Farm Schools	Percentage
1	Agri-Horti Crops	8	135	78.9
2	Live stocks	3	15	8.8
3	Fishery	1	7	4.1
4	Apiculture	1	1	0.6
5	Sericulture	1	2	1.2
6	Artificial insemination	1	5	2.9
7	Vermi compost production	1	4	2.3
8	Mushroom production	1	2	1.2

Table 2: Pattern of distribution of Farm Schools on different commodities n= 171

Sl. No	Types	Number of Farm Schools	Percentage
A	**Agri- Horti crops**		
1	Vegetables	47	27.5
2	Spices & condiments	24	14.0
3	Banana cultivation	13	7.6
4	Floriculture	10	5.8
5	Pulses& Oilseeds	10	5.8
6	Cash crops	7	4.1
7	Medicinal & aromatic plants	1	0.6
8	Rice	23	13.5
B	Livestock		
1	Piggery	10	5.8
2	Poultry	3	1.8
3	Dairy	2	1.2
C	Fishery	7	4.1

D	Apiculture	1	0.6
E	Sericulture	2	1.2
F	Artificial insemination	5	2.9
G	Vermi compost production	4	2.3
H	Mushroom production	2	1.2
	Total	**171**	

Pattern of distribution of farm schools on agri-horti commodities

A total of 8 (eight) activities under 'Agri-Horti' commodity have been selected by 135 Farm Schools. It can be observed from Table 3 that majority (34.8%) of the farm schools have selected 'Vegetable production' as subject matter followed by 'Cultivation of Spices & condiments' (17.8%), 'Cultivation of rice' (17.0%), 'Cultivation of banana' (9.6%), 'Cultivation oilseeds & pulses' (7.4%), 'Floriculture' (7.4%%), 'Cultivation of cash crops'(5.2%) and 'Cultivation of medicinal & aromatic plants'(0.7%).

Pattern of distribution of farm schools on livestock commodities

A total of 3(three) activities under 'Livestock' commodity have been selected by 15 Farm Schools. It can be seen from table 4 that majority (66.7%) of the Farm Schools have selected 'Piggery' followed by 'Poultry' (20%), and 'Dairy (13.3%).

Table 3: Pattern of distribution of Farm Schools on 'Agri-Horti' commodities n= 135

Sl. No	Types	Number of Farm Schools	Percentage
1	Vegetables	47	34.8
2	Spices & condiments	24	17.8
3	Banana cultivation	13	9.6
4	Floriculture	10	7.4
5	Pulses& Oilseeds	10	7.4
6	Cash crops	7	5.2
7	Medicinal & aromatic plants	1	0.7
8	Rice	23	17.0
	Total	**135**	

Table 4. Pattern of distribution of Farm Schools on 'Livestock' commodities n=15

Sl. No	Types	Number of Farm Schools	Percentage
1	Piggery	10	66.7
2	Poultry	3	20
3	Dairy	2	13.3
	Total	**15**	

Constraints faced by extension personnel in facilitating farm schools

Three different constraints faced by the extension personnel in promoting Farm Schools were reported in the study. It can be observed from Table 5 that extension personnel of majority (80%) of the districts reported the constraint of 'Inadequate financial support under the ATMA Scheme' followed by 'Involvement of ATMA functionaries in the schemes other than ATMA' (40%) and 'Lack of external trainer in close proximity' (20%).

1. Inadequate financial support under the ATMA Scheme

The cost norms provision for organizing and promoting Farm School as per the ATMA Cafeteria in respect to 'logistics support', 'honorarium provision', 'food expenses', 'travel expenses' and for 'printed literature' were reported to be inadequate to meet the expenses.

The provision of cost norms in the Cafeteria for 'travel expenses'@ Rs.150 per trainer per visit, 'honorarium' @ Rs.250 per trainer per visit, 'printed literature'@ Rs.50 per participant, 'food expenses' @Rs.30 per participant and 'logistics support' @ Rs.1000 per Farm School were reported to be minimum due to which the smooth functioning of Farm Schools are hampered.

2. Involvement of ATMA functionaries in the schemes other than ATMA

The BTT (Block Technology Team) convenors are still working as drawing and disbursing officers at block level ATMA activities. It was reported that they had to carry out multifarious responsibilities of a number of departmental schemes in addition to be ATMA scheme. Further they have to be involved in

the activities like flood relief, election duty etc which often delays the formation of Farm Schools and their proper functioning.

3. Lack of external trainer in close proximity

Six (6) of the hill districts in North East reported that resource persons/external trainer for all the subject areas are not available nearby area particularly in Dairy and Fishery sectors. Further, it was reported that the nominal rate of travel expenses in the ATMA cafeteria restricted the hiring of external trainer from the distant places. It creates problem in upgrading the skills & knowledge of achiever farmers and often leads to the selection of limited area of subject matters.

Table 5 : Percentage distribution of constraints in facilitating Farm Schools n=30

Sl. No.	Statements	Frequency & percentage
1	Inadequate financial support under the ATMA Scheme	24 (80)
2	Involvement of ATMA functionaries in the schemes other than ATMA	12 (40)
3	Lack of external trainer in close proximity	6 (20)

(Figure within parenthesis indicate percentage)

CONCLUSION

The importance of Farm Schools in North East states is enormous. Most of the Farm Schools have selected the subjects of 'Vegetable cultivation' followed by 'Cultivation of spices & condiments. Among the Farm Schools undertaking 'Livestock' activities, majority of them were engaged in 'Piggery' followed by 'Fishery' activities. There is considerable scope for improving the production and productivity of livestock in this region due to the higher demand of these commodities in the hills states. There is a need for extensive transfer of technology programme and provision of adequate training facilities to the livestock growers of the hill states of North East.

Need based and location specific programs, which promise to raise nutritional security, should be identified and implemented effectively in these region. The reported constraints affect the Farm School movements which ultimately affect the usefulness of the ATMA schemes in the NE states. The reported constraints are needed to be addressed seriously for smooth formation and functioning of the Farm Schools in the NE region.

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