

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION THROUGH EXTENSION SERVICES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, SRI LANKA

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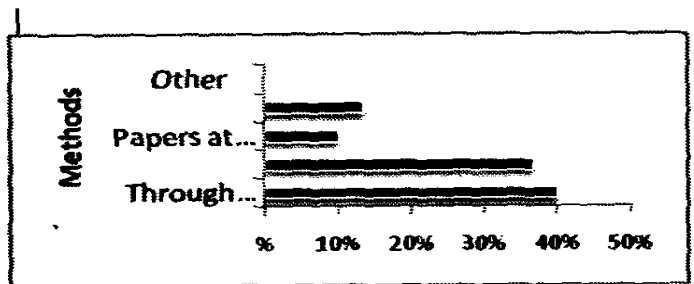
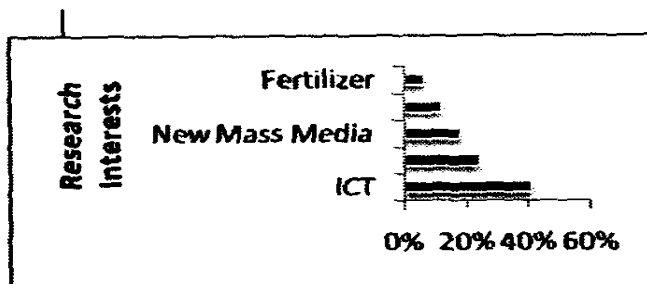
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Agriculture plays an important role in the livelihoods of rural communities and agriculture extension services help to improve productivity and upgrade the living standards of people with the provision of necessary information related to latest innovations, bridging the gap between research and practice¹. However, transfer of research output to farming communities has many limitations, especially in developing countries. In Sri Lanka, the Department of Agriculture (DOA) is the main research and development institution with a large mandate of research and extension and personnel particularly involved with the food crop sector. The DOA provides extension, advisory, training and education services to farmers on new technologies and improved farming practices based on research, carried out in its own institutes.

The study was focused on the point of view of twenty five respondents from the total surveyed population, which included both researchers and extension officers in the DOA. Objectives of the research were to find out whether the extension officers are engaged in research; the type of research conducted by them; whether the research are relevant in addressing farmer problems; whether the research outputs are included in farmer extension programs; the methods used for dissemination of new information both to the scientific community and farmers and barriers for effective delivery of information to the farmers.

A survey was conducted based on a structured questionnaire which included open and closed ended questions. Microsoft excel package was used for graphical data presentation.



Th Figure 1: Research interests of extension personnel

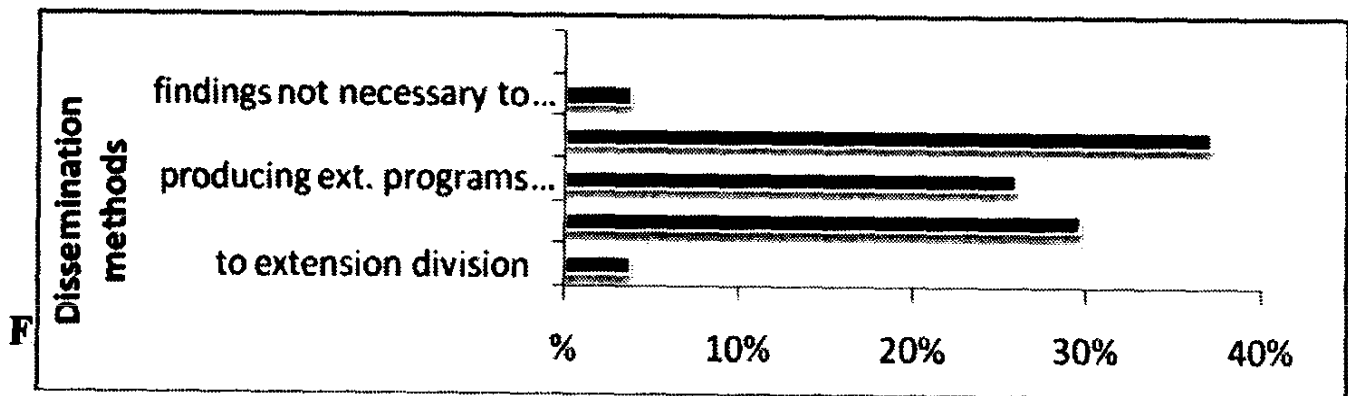
Figure: 2 Dissemination methods

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(Information Communication Technology) based research with the intention of making use of modern technologies for effective transfer of information to farmers (Figure 1). The research included 'cyber extension' through 'Goviya.lk' web site, multimedia CD-ROMS, and online agripedia (Wikipedi) for Sri Lanka, etc. Further, 24% extension officers were engaged in research for improving food processing methods, that were helpful for the farmers to reduce their crop losses. Research on 'new mass media', which is a very relevant area accounted for 18% of extension personnel. Twelve percent of extension personnel were interested in researching on improving field extension programs and preparation of handbooks for farmers and on fertilizer use (6%). According to the data, the majority of extension personnel (40%) preferred dissemination of their research outputs to the scientific community through publications while 13.3% used 'departmental research

forums' for research communication (Figure 2). The most preferred language used by extension personnel to disseminate information to scientific community was English language, which accounted for 53%, while sinhala and tamil languages accounted for 35% and 12%, respectively.

Further, the survey was focused on collecting information on how the extension personnel disseminated information to farming communities. The majority of extension personnel (37%) transferred their research outputs to farming communities through mass media including news paper write ups, television and radio programmes, while a total of 29.6% extension personnel sent their research information to audio visual unit of the DOA and also used them for producing extension material by themselves (Figure 3).



The main languages used for disseminating information to farmers Sinhala and Tamil. The data further revealed that obtaining research outputs from the researchers have been the major barrier for carrying out effective extension services by extension personnel in the DOA. The shortage of extension staff to evaluate regular programmes with farmers, shortage of facilities for preparation of extension materials such as audio-visual and printing facilities, *etc.*, were also identified as barriers for the extension personnel. In addition, lack of support from the top management, and political interference were identified as critical reasons for unstable flow of information to farmers as shown by the data.

The suggestions given by extension personnel for improvement of extension services can be listed out as shortage of extension personnel to undertake regular programmes for farmers, delay in receiving research findings, lack of IT facilities, lapses in the central government and provincial department's research/extension linkages, and the lapses on the linkages between researchers and extension personnel in the DOA.

REFERENCES

1. Dissanayake U.L., Wickramasuriya, H.V.A., and Wijekoon, R. (2009) Evaluation of computer-based learning material in agricultural information dissemination in Sri Lanka. *Tropical Agricultural Research* vol 11(02): 73