

Role of radio on agricultural development: A review

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This article discusses the role of radio in agricultural development of Nepal. The work is based on the review of some selected texts. The author's main position here is that Nepal's present radio boom bears a high scope for a significant role in the promotion of agriculture, and that discoursing this issue should get due importance since Nepalese economy is highly dependent on agricultural products.

Impact of radio in agriculture

Regular transmission of radio programs related to agriculture gives valuable information about new farming methods. Radio transmission is quick and reaches to a wider population. As the farmers receive useful information from the radio, gradually they bring change in farming method applying new techniques (Ekoja, 2003, p.21).

Information and knowledge are two significant factors for rural development. The knowledge of locality further assists the farmers. Dissemination of information along with new concepts and farming techniques can bring novel opportunities to the farmers (Mohammad Retz Nazn and Hasan Harbullah, 2010, pp. 13-20).

The study done by Jenkins and his contemporary in northern California has shown that the mass communication has provided much useful knowledge related to agriculture and the experience was quite meaningful.

Radio has been proved as the important tool for the enhancement of agriculture in the rural area. In the developing

countries, radio is the powerful and effective medium to project the information and knowledge related to agriculture. (Nakabugu, 2001, FAO, 2001)

According to Sharma (2008), radio is the reliable medium that can cover wider area and can reach to the large number of people. The strength of radio as the medium of communication is that it is cost effective in terms of transmission, presentation and portability.

Radio can be useful medium to educate farmers if it appeals them with new programs having modern agricultural technologies. However, the literacy of farmers is important to understand such programs and apply them appropriately (Mohammad Reza Nazari and Abu Hassan Hasbullah, 2010 *ibid*).

As the rural farmers themselves participate in the radio programs, they become more interesting and effective because of the feeling of the ownership. The message and information easily gets through.

Important information related to agriculture can be provided using radio. Nakabugu (2010) further writes:

Information on better farming methods, improved seeds, timely planting, agro-forestry, better harvesting methods, soil conservation, marketing, post-harvest handling and diversification.

He states that rural radio gives farmers an opportunity to interact with each other and other relevant authorities e.g. extension workers, crop and animal experts through format like live talk shows, phone in programs and on location broadcasts. He further adds, "Since Rural radio is community based, it can be used to mobilize people towards community development work as construction of valley dams, protected wells and immunization of animals".

The international organizations like United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) have been using radio for the development in respective fields since 1960. (Chapman, R. et. al, 2003) Chapman (2003) further writes about rural radio:

The strength of rural radio as an extension tool is widely regarded to lie in its ability to reach illiterate farmers and provide them with information relating to all aspects of agricultural production in a language they understand.

This emphasizes that rural radio, as a tool of agricultural development and rural development should aim to bring transformation in the livelihood of the farmers by providing useful information. Chapman, R. et al (2003) remark about rural radio:

Rural radio can be used to improve the sharing of agricultural information by remote rural farming communities. Participatory communication techniques can support agricultural extension efforts especially using local languages and rural radio to communicate directly with farmers and listener groups.

About his study on the impact of farm radio in Pune, India, Paul Neurath (1959, 1960) remarks that the listener that listen the radio have more knowledge about modern methods of farming than those who do not listen. The study shows that Farm Radio Forum has functioned as the agent for the transmission of knowledge and information related to agriculture (FAO, 1956, 1959).

Another study of FAO (2005) has found that farm radio has contributed in terms of strengthening social unity, enhancing

communicative ability, giving knowledge about locality, preserving environment and solving the problems that arise in the communities. The study has recommended that farm radio should be used extensively as a tool for rural development.

Sharma (2001) states that agricultural programs transmitted by Radio Nepal have been very much useful in the context of Nepal. Such programs have left positive impacts in both small and large scale development. Sharma further adds:

Agricultural radio and TV program is seen more in the areas of vegetable cultivation, plant protection, pesticides, cereal crops livestock and poultry, store management of the cereal crops.

The study further says that the farmers of Parbat district have been listening agricultural programs with much interest and enthusiasm. To make such programs regular, more effective and interesting, the farmers have recommended including such subject matters:

- vegetable cultivation with hybrid technology
- irrigation management
- improved seeds of different crops
- source, quality, improved breeds of livestock and poultry etc.

The study by CEDA (2001) on the impact of agricultural programs transmitted by Radio Nepal mentions that such programs have helped the farmers to improve the farming methods. The farmers have received the agricultural programs transmitted by Radio Nepal and Nepal Television for information and knowledge. It was found that the farmers have listened with enthusiasm the agricultural programs like Sukrabarko Budhi Aamai (The Old Mother on Friday), question answer on Friday, veterinary series on Tuesday, discussion on Thursday and farming program on Sunday.

The first and foremost role of radio education is to help the farmer accept new agricultural technology for obtaining higher yields and changing the age-old concept of low yields : this is being done remarkably well, as is evident from the fact that new technology, in general, has been accepted by the farmers of different categories . Their willingness to augment their farm income by adopting sophisticated improved agricultural practices to be regarded as a most remarkable change in their behavior.

In our context, radio can function as a tool for dissemination of reliable information related to agriculture to bring change in the farming methods thereby bringing economical transformation in the country.

Concluding remarks

The farm radios across the world that have created awareness among the farmers indicate the success of such radios. The radios disseminate information across the countryside about modern farming system in terms of hybrid seeds, off-seasonal vegetables, selection of seeds, and marketing of the agricultural products. Nevertheless, the programs need to be village-centred, dialogic, dramatic and easy to understand. There is the lack of agricultural journalists in our context. If the programs can be transmitted in local languages from the community radios, it will assist for the development of rural areas of Nepal.

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