

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

My dear readers of Journal of Extension Education,

Recently I had a chance to interact with the participants of a Model Training Course (MTC) on 'Market-led extension', who were senior functionaries of the Departments of Agriculture from different parts of India. Of late, apart from their conventional function of providing knowledge for improved agricultural productivity, the public extension system is expected to link small and marginal farmers with high-value markets.

India has been effective in making its public extension system more market-driven, only to a certain extent (Swanson, 2006) and there is an urgent need to link these farmers, with limited marketing capabilities, to markets with the help of effective ICT-based Agricultural Market Information Services, so that they increase their bargaining power with knowledge of market prices without being dependent on middlemen and traders.

During the interaction with the MTC trainees, it was felt that the present day extension agents too often jump in to ICT-based solutions for the problems in marketing. Those extension practitioners who use ICT tools to improve the marketing ability of the farmers need to consider the following questions before formulating a strategy (USAID, 2013), it was felt:

Value - *is there a demonstrated value-add to users of the proposed ICT solution?* : In order for a solution to be sustainable, users must understand and be empowered to act upon the value-add that they can gain.

Behaviour Change - *what behaviour changes are required for the users to integrate the ICT solution into their business cycle?* : Adopting new ICT solutions will require farmers and other value chain actors to change their behaviours.

Technical Literacy - *do users have the knowledge and skills to successfully use the solution?* Not having the literacy of ICT tools has prevented many users, especially rural farmers, from accessing pricing information and other tools

Gender - *what are implications for gender dynamics?*

Ownership - *have farmers invested their own resources (time, data or income) in the solutions?*

Replicability - *is this model specific to a particular geographic area or agricultural sector?*

Simplicity - *are there free or off-the-shelf alternatives?* : Extension agents should also consider that there might be simple and free technology solutions available.

Before identifying an ICT strategy, the extension agents can ask these aforementioned questions, which would enable in finding out if it actually fits both the needs of the programme and those of the farmers who are involved.

This issue of JEE discusses contemporary issues such as people's participation and impact of group formation. Do send your feedback on the papers and suggestions for Special issues to editorextension@gmail.com.