

Role Of Mass Media In Disseminating Agricultural Information Among Tribal Women In Sivasagar District, Assam

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Abstract

Information is a very essential resource in agricultural development and a foremost determining factor for rural transformation. Proper dissemination of agricultural information enables farmers to make well-informed decisions on production, marketing, and innovation. Yet, gender inequalities in access to communication remain constraints to rural women's inclusion in agricultural modernization. This research investigates the role and patterns of usage of mass media as channels of agricultural information among tribal women in Sivasagar district, Assam. Data were gathered from 95 tribal women farmers using structured interviews and analyzed with the help of SPSS. Findings reveal that interpersonal communication is in control of information flow, while mass media, particularly radio and television, have a negligible impact owing to literacy deficits, socio-cultural limitations, and infrastructural weaknesses. The paper concludes with recommendations to reinforce gender-sensitive communication approaches and integrating mass media with local extension systems.

Keywords: *Mass Media, Information, Agriculture, Tribal Women*

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I. Introduction

Agrarian development in rural communities is heavily based on access to pertinent, timely, and accurate information. Success or failure of agricultural businesses frequently rests on the capacity of farmers to access and adapt technological innovations and market information successfully. Traditional economists regarded agricultural development as the cornerstone of economic advancement, whereas Schramm (1964) emphasized communication as an important factor in national development.

In countries like India, agriculture needs to be modernized through proper dissemination of scientific methods among farmers, especially women who make up a considerable segment of agricultural workers. Agricultural communication, says Demiryürek (2008), improves managerial capacity and decision-making via social and information networks. Still, the persistence of gender differentials in access to information, exposure to media, and literacy levels has resulted in women farmers being less aware compared to their male counterparts (World Bank, 2007). This research discusses these dynamics among tribal women farmers of Sivasagar district, Assam, where the traditional means of communication remain prevalent in rural life.

II. Review Of Literature

Women are highly involved in food production at the local and international levels. FAO (1995, 1998) approximated that women produce more than half of the world's food grains and are leading actors in post-harvest and seed management operations (World Bank, 2009). Researchers from all over South Asia and Africa (Jiggins, 1993; Martin & Adams, 1987; Joshi et al., 1995; Pionetti, 2006) emphasized women's central role in seed conservation and knowledge transfer through kinship and informal networks.

Yet, women's work tends to be invisible because of gender-biased institutional frameworks and restricted access to productive resources like land, credit, and training (Gupta, 1993; Al-Amin et al., 2004). Agricultural extension services have been faulted for lack of gender sensitivity (Subedi & Garforth, 1996), leading to asymmetrical provision of information to men and women. Ramachandran (2008) and Parveen (2005) observed that social obstacles and literacy deficits further limit women's access to agricultural innovations.

In Assam, where rural life continues to be based on agriculture, mass media have increasingly entered village environments, providing new channels of agricultural communication. However, the nature of access and utilization by tribal women of such media, to their potential benefits, is unclear—hence the justification for the current study.

III. Study Area

Sivasagar district, located in the Brahmaputra Valley and sharing boundary to the south with Nagaland, is famous for its fertile plains and agrarian economy. The district population is 1,150,253, comprising 48.7% female and a literacy rate of 81.36% (Census, 2011). The major occupation is agriculture, with major crops such as paddy, tea, banana, potato, and fruits and vegetables.

The research was carried out at Lahdoigarh Mising village, Amguri Development Block. The village, situated around 30 km from the district headquarters, is inhabited by a population of 457 in 115 families, mostly from the Mising tribal community.

IV. Objectives

1. To evaluate the contribution of mass media in spreading agricultural information among tribal women.
2. To determine the use pattern and acceptability of various media sources by tribal women farmers.

V. Methodology

A purposive sample of 95 women farmers were chosen from the Lahdoigarh village. Respondents were selected on the basis of their cultivation activity and participation in agricultural decision-making within the household. Primary data were gathered by conducting structured interviews on socio-economic profile, exposure to media, and sources of information. The data were analyzed in SPSS, and results were expressed in terms of frequency and percentage distribution.

VI. Socio-Economic Profile Of Respondents

Table 1.

Profile of Tribal Women Farmers			
Attribute	Categories	No.	%
Age	15–34	12	12.63
	35–59	67	70.52
	60+	16	16.84
Family Size	Small (≤ 5 members)	50	52.64
	Large (> 5 members)	45	47.36
Housing Type	Pacca	43	45.26
	Semi-Pacca	38	40.00
	Kachcha	14	14.73
Landholding (Bighas)	1–5	24	25.26
	6–10	65	68.42
	6–20	6	6.32
Education	Primary	47	37.90
	High School	49	39.52
	Higher Secondary	23	18.55

Majority of the respondents fall in the middle age group (35–59 years) and possess moderate landholdings. Educational levels are low, with few having a higher secondary school education, which is likely to affect accessibility to media and processing information.

VII. Results And Discussion

Sources of Agricultural Information

Table 2.

Distribution of Farmers by Agricultural Information Sources

Information Source	No.	%
Husband/Family/Relatives	90	94.73
Fellow Farmers	80	84.21
Television	25	26.31
Radio	20	21.05
Extension Officials	6	6.31
Print Media	5	5.26
Local Dealer	3	3.51

The result shows that interpersonal networks—particularly family and other farmers—are the primary sources of agricultural information. Television or radio was used only by a quarter of respondents for agricultural

information. This is not just an indicator of infrastructural limitation but also reflects socio-cultural patterns of limitations on women's public visibility.

Media Preferences

Table 3.
Preference for Mass Media

Media Type	1st (%)	2nd (%)	3rd (%)	Total (%)
Television	11.58	9.47	5.26	26.31
Radio	9.47	7.37	4.21	21.05
Print Media	2.10	2.10	1.06	5.26

Television is the most favored medium, used mainly for entertainment and not for agricultural education. Radio is the second most favored, but it is not very relevant for agriculture because listening is irregular and targeted programming in local languages does not exist.

Frequency of Media Use

Table 4.
Frequency of Listening to Agricultural Radio Programmes

Frequency	No.	%
Occasionally	11	11.58
Rarely	9	9.47
Never	75	78.94

Table 5.
Frequency of Watching Agricultural TV Programmes

Frequency	No.	%
Regularly	4	4.21
Occasionally	12	12.63
Rarely	9	9.47
Never	70	73.69

The findings prove that there is little interaction with mass media for agriculture information. Radio and television are mainly employed by most respondents for entertainment or news purposes. Inadequate electricity supply, poor availability of agricultural broadcast, and low media literacy aggravate the issue.

VIII. Conclusion And Recommendations

The research establishes that mass media have a marginal influence in passing out agricultural information among tribal women farmers in Sivasagar district. More than 90% of the respondents rely on interpersonal channels like wives or fellow farmers. Low literacy rates, socio-cultural barriers, and infrastructural inadequacies limit women's access to formal and mass-mediated information.

In order to improve agricultural communication among tribal women, the following actions are suggested:

1. Gender-Sensitive Extension Services: Training and demonstrations for women farmers on a specific basis.
2. Localized Media Content: Radio and television programmes in tribal languages with concrete visual demonstrations.
3. Integration of Media and Interpersonal Networks: Mass media, NGOs, and progressive farmers' partnership to strengthen the flow of information.
4. Use of Mobile-Based Platforms: Introduction of mobile agricultural advisory systems in rural areas progressively.
5. Capacity Building: Women's literacy and media training to enhance interpretation and application of information.

Mass media have the potential to revolutionize agricultural production and empower rural women, but their potential can only be actualized through a participatory, inclusive, and context-sensitive communication strategy.

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