

Information Seeking Behaviour of the Tribal Farmers of Meghalaya

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In an eadeavour to identify the major sources of information prevailing in the four selected villages of East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya it has been observed that personal localite sources are much more relied upon than the mass media and personal cosmopolite sources. Therefore, mass media must play the pivital role so that it can reach every nook and corner and can influence the receivers to a great extent. A study was, therefore, initiated to identify the various sources of information commonly utilised by the farmers and to study the reasons for preferring specific information sources by them during 1998.

The study was conducted in four villages of East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. One village was selected randomly from each block of 4 blocks of the district. For selecting the sample, the farmers who were practising improved agricultural practices in principal crops at this area were considered. In all, 100 respondents were selected for the study in consultation with Headmen and Block Development Officers. A well structured pretested interview schedule was administered among the respondents to collect the data. The data so collected were analysed by using percentage calculation method.

All the available information sources were categorised into four major groups and four different aspects of farm practices were also identified to study the farmers' dependence on those sources.

Table 1. Sources of information utilised by the farmers

Improved farm practices	Sources of information (%) (N=100)			
	Personal cosmopolite	Personal localite	Mass media	Other sources
Improved variety	45	52	33	20
Fertiliser application	52	58	36	42
Plant protection measures	62	66	35	47
Farm implements	63	72	26	43

It was observed that personal localite sources were the most frequently consulted sources of the farmers in all aspects of improved farm practices followed by personal cosmopolite and others. This may be due to the fact that the farmers are having credibility and trust-worthiness on localite sources rather than the other sources.

The farmers were asked to narrate the probable reasons behind their preference for different sources regarding the improved agricultural practices. (Table 2.)

Table 2. Reasons for preference of different sources

Reasons	Information sources (%)			
	Personal cosmopolite	Personal localite	Mass media	Other sources
Accessibility	52	78	18	34
Detailed information	58	62	36	16
Scope for future reference	34	33	65	12
Degree of credibility	76	76	75	57
Easily understandable	74	82	29	56
Degree of reliability	73	75	72	53
Detailed discussion	83	86	—	8
Opportunity to acquire skill	33	40	6	69
Information as well as input supply	80	66	—	18
Saves time and cost	21	68	36	50

It is evident from Table 2 that the scope for detailed discussion was the basic reason behind opting-for personal-localite sources as quoted by 86.% of the farmers followed by easily receivable 82% and easy accesibility (78%). The other important factors were credibility, reliability, economy (in terms of time and cost) etc. The important factors behind the dependence on personal cosmopolite and mass media were scope for detailed discussion, ready supply of input and information, scope for future reference, opportunity to acquire skill etc.

It is interesting to note that personal localite sources are more important to the farmers than the mass media and other sources. Though there is immense scope for dissemination of techniques through different mass media sources, it could not live upto expectation as far as farmers' preference is concerned. Moreover, the reasons for preference quoted by the farmers like easy accessibility, credibility, reliability, scope for detailed information and discussion etc. must be considered by the mass media before catering to the information needs of the farmers.