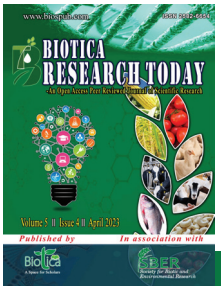
Bio. Res. Today 2023, 5(4):326-328



Biotica Research Today

e-ISSN: 2582-6654

April, 2023

Article ID: RT1301 **Popular Article**

Participatory Extension Approach: Empowering Farmers

Sushmita Saini, Sonali Mallick and Smruti Ranjan Padhan*

ICAR-Indian Agricultural Research Institute, Pusa, New Delhi, Delhi (110 012), India

Open Access

Corresponding Author

Smruti Ranjan Padhan

✉: smrutiranjaniari@gmail.com

Conflict of interests: The author has declared that no conflict of interest exists.

How to cite this article?

Saini *et al*., 2023. Participatory Extension Approach: Empowering Farmers. *Biotica Research Today* 5(4), 326-328.

Abstract

Participatory Extension Approach (PEA) has emerged as a promising approach to agricultural extension that prioritizes the active participation and empowerment of farmers in the development process. The historical evolution of PEA shows how it has emerged as an alternative to traditional top-down extension approaches. PEA emphasizes the use of participatory tools and techniques such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and Participatory Technology Development (PTD) to enable farmers to participate actively in the extension process with encompassing the key principles of community participation, relevance, and sustainability. Improved farmer knowledge, skills, and practices, as well as improved social capital and rural livelihoods are the crucial benefits of PEA. At the same time challenges, including resistance to change, limited resources, power dynamics, lack of institutional support, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation hinders the implementation of PEA. However, with effective communication, capacity building, and enabling policy environments, PEA has the potential to promote sustainable agriculture and rural development.

Keywords: Participation, Participatory Rural Appraisal, Participatory Technology Development, Sustainability

Introduction

Agricultural extension is a crucial component of the agricultural sector, especially in developing countries involving the transfer of knowledge and information from researchers to farmers to improve agricultural productivity, efficiency, and profitability. However, the traditional extension approaches, which are mostly top-down and expert-driven approach, have been criticized for not effectively addressing the needs and challenges faced by farmers. Finding an answer to these issues, participatory extension approach (PEA) has emerged as a promising alternative that emphasizes the active participation of farmers in the extension process (Sethi and Sharma, 2012). It is a bottom-up and participatory approach that recognizes farmers as experts in their own contexts and promotes the co-creation of knowledge and solutions through collaboration between farmers and extension agents and grounded in the principles of participation, empowerment, and ownership.

Historical Evolution of Participatory Extension Approach

The historical evolution of PEA can be broadly summarized into the following points:

- The emergence of PEA as a response to the limitations of traditional top-down extension approaches that did not fully address the needs and challenges faced by farmers.
- Formal mention of PEA in a 1982 World Bank report that advocated for the active participation of farmers in the design and implementation of agricultural development programs.
- Development and adoption of participatory methods and tools, such as the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach, during the 1980s and 1990s, which contributed to the effectiveness of PEA in promoting learning, knowledge sharing, and innovation among farmers.
- Incorporation of new technologies and communication tools, such as mobile phones, radios, and social media platforms, in the 2000s to enhance farmer participation.
- Ongoing evolution and refinement of PEA to address the emerging challenges and opportunities in agricultural extension.

Overall, the historical evolution of PEA reflects a shift towards more participatory and bottom-up approaches to agricultural extension, with a focus on involving farmers

Article History

RECEIVED on 17th April 2023 RECEIVED in revised form 21st April 2023 ACCEPTED in final form 22nd April 2023

in the development process and promoting learning, knowledge sharing, and innovation.

Key Principles of Participatory Extension Approach

The key principles of PEA (Figure 1) involve participation, empowerment, ownership, context-specificity and sustainability ensuring the extension approach is relevant and effective in addressing the local needs and challenges of farmers (Venkatesan *et al*., 2023).

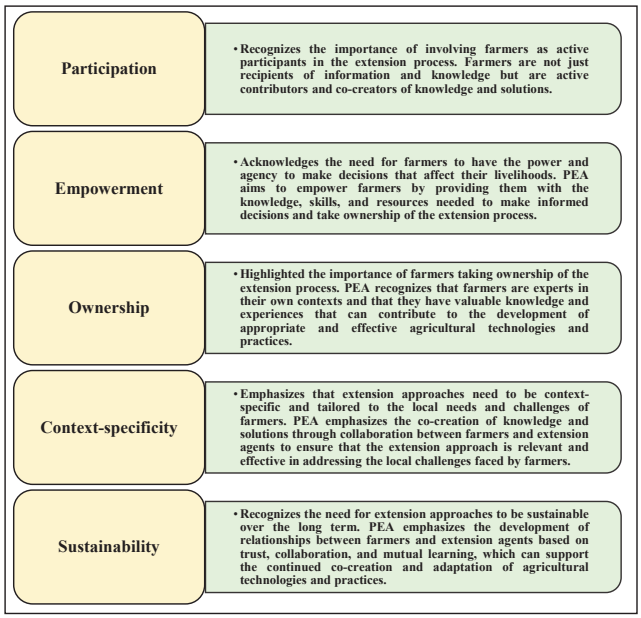


Figure 1: Key principles of PEA

Benefits of Participatory Extension Approach

PEA has gained increasing attention in recent years as an alternative to traditional top-down extension approaches that did not fully address the needs and challenges faced by farmers. Below are some of the key benefits of PEA.

• *Improved relevance and effectiveness*: PEA enable extension agents to gain a better understanding of the local needs and challenges faced by farmers, leading to the development of context-specific and relevant solutions that are more effective in addressing the challenges faced by farmers.

• *Increased adoption and sustainability of agricultural practices*: PEA fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among farmers, leading to increased adoption and sustained use of agricultural practices and technologies. This helps to promote long-term sustainability and impact.

• *Enhanced knowledge sharing and learning*: PEA creates opportunities for farmers and extension agents to exchange knowledge and experiences, leading to mutual learning and increased capacity building among both groups. This promotes innovation and the development of more effective and context-specific solutions.

• *Increased social capital*: PEA promotes the development of relationships between farmers and extension agents based on trust, collaboration, and mutual learning. This leads to the development of social capital, which can support the continued co-creation and adaptation of agricultural technologies and practices.

• *Improved livelihoods*: PEA contributes to improved livelihoods of farmers through increased productivity, profitability, and resilience. By promoting the adoption of appropriate and effective agricultural practices and technologies, PEA can contribute to increased food security and improved livelihoods.

Tools and Techniques used in Participatory Extension Approach

A number of tools and technology has been evolved and

Table 1: Tools and Techniques used in PEA

Tools and Techniques	Explanation
Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)	A group of methods used to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act. PRA techniques include mapping, transect walks, and social mapping, among others.
Farmer Field Schools (FFS)	A group-based learning process that uses participatory methods to build farmers' knowledge and skills in specific areas of agriculture. FFS involves regular group meetings, hands-on learning, and experimentation to promote the adoption of improved practices and technologies.
Participatory Technology Development (PTD)	A process that involves farmers and extension agents working together to co-create and test new agricultural technologies and practices. PTD emphasizes the active participation and ownership of farmers in the development process.
Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)	A process that involves farmers and extension agents working together to identify and address specific problems or challenges. PLA emphasizes the use of participatory methods and tools to enable local people to analyze and address their own problems.
Community-based organizations (CBOs)	Local organizations formed by farmers to collectively address common challenges and interests. CBOs can be used as a platform for promoting the active participation and ownership of farmers in the extension process.
Communication and information sharing	PEA emphasizes the importance of two-way communication and information sharing between farmers and extension agents. This can involve the use of various communication channels, such as mobile phones, radio, and other digital technologies, to promote effective and timely sharing of information and knowledge.

evaluated for proper implementation of participatory approaches which are summarized in the table 1.

Challenges in Implementing Participatory Extension Approach

However, implementing PEA is not without its challenges. Below are some of the key challenges that need to be addressed to ensure a successful implementation of the PEA.

• *Resistance to change*: Farmers and extension agents may be resistant to change and may be hesitant to adopt new and unfamiliar approaches. It is important to recognize and address this resistance through effective communication and engagement strategies.

• *Limited resources*: Implementing PEA requires significant time, resources, and capacity building, which may be limited in some contexts. This can pose a challenge to the widespread adoption and implementation of PEA.

• *Power dynamics*: PEA involves the active participation and empowerment of farmers, which can challenge traditional power dynamics and hierarchies. This can lead to resistance and pushback from those who feel threatened by these changes.

• *Lack of institutional support*: The success of PEA depends on institutional support and enabling policy environments that promote the adoption of participatory approaches. However, such support may be limited in some contexts, leading to challenges in implementing PEA.

• *Inadequate monitoring and evaluation*: Effective monitoring and evaluation are critical to the success of PEA, but they are often overlooked or inadequately addressed. This can make it difficult to assess the impact of PEA and to identify areas for improvement.

Conclusion

PEA is a participatory and farmer-oriented approach that aims to promote sustainable agricultural development by engaging farmers as active participants in the extension process representing a significant departure from traditional top-down extension approaches to promote sustainable agriculture and rural development. It emphasizes the active participation and empowerment of farmers in the development process and prioritizes the co-creation and adoption of context-specific and relevant agricultural practices and technologies that meet the needs and challenges of local farmers. This approach has the potential to address the limitations of traditional extension approaches and contribute to the development of context-specific and effective agricultural technologies and practices. Addressing the challenges in implementing PEA requires effective communication, capacity building, and enabling policy environments to support the successful implementation of participatory approaches.

References

Sethi, R.C., Sharma, R.B., 2012. Effective extension approaches for sustainable agricultural development. *International Journal of Farm Sciences* 2(1), 116-123.

Venkatesan, P., Sivaramane, N., Sontakki, B.S., Rao, Ch. S., Chahal, V.P., Singh, A.K., Sivakumar, P.S., Seetharaman, P., Kalyani, B., 2023. Aligning Agricultural Research and Extension for Sustainable Development Goals in India: A Case of Farmer FIRST Programme. *Sustainability* 15(3), 2463. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3390/su15032463.