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Challenges experienced by lead farmers in the implementation of LEADS programme in Kerala: A critical analysis

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Abstract
In this study the main aim was to analyse the constraints faced by the farmers who were the part of LEADS programme (Lead farmer centred extension advisory and delivery services). LEADS programme was introduced as part of revitalizing the extension system in Kerala using the leadership competencies of lead farmers. The study was conducted in 120 Lead farmers across four districts of Kerala namely Kollam, Kannur, Wayanad and Palakkad. Technology repetition was the most important constraint experienced by the farmers followed by the constraint of irregularity in conducting satellite group meetings. Political bias was found to be high in LEADS programme. Another major constraint unearthed was regarding the inadequate number of capacity development programs. Lack of knowledge in understanding problems and needs of satellite farmers by LEAD farmers was the least relevant constraint. Suggestions for overcoming the constraints were also delineated.

Keywords: LEADS, constraints, technology and farmers

Introduction
Innovative approaches in agricultural extension always continues to evolve. Mandala *et al*., (2021) [3] indicates that agricultural development is fundamental not exclusively to accomplish independence in food grains but also guaranteeing family food security and to acquire value dissemination of pay. Recent years the agriculture world has seen a paradigm shift with the introduction of lead farmer based approach in agriculture. In India so many agricultural developments are being planned and implemented for the holistic development in agriculture and one such kind is the 'LEADS' in Kerala. (Lead farmer centred extension advisory and delivery service). LEADS was proposed by the planning board and approved by the Kerala government in 2011. It is an exemplary model of farmer to farmer extension approach. LEADS heavily relies on pivotal potentialities of lead farmers for the enhancement of knowledge dissemination, technology adoption, participatory technology development and innovative technology trials for the overall revival of agriculture sector. Each group will have one Lead farmer and 10 satellite farmers in the group. These leaders are considered as the the local champions and knowledge brokers who serve as the vital conduits between agricultural extension services and the farming community. Lead farmers are not only the masters of intricate cutting-edge technology but also with the formidable challenge of imparting knowledge in his fellow farmers. LEADS is being implemented in the four districts of Kollam, Palakkad, Kannur and Wayanad.
While LEADS has shown significant improvement in various contexts of crop improvement and production it is very crucial to analyze the challenges and constraints faced by the lead farmers and extension personnels in executing their roles constructively. The research paper explores and dissect the various components that obstruct the role performance of the farmers and extension personnels. By acknowledging these constraints, the stakeholders can formulate targeted interventions as well as policy recommendations to fortify the LEADS model to ensure sustainable development.

Methodology
The study was carried out in 40 panchayats under 20 blocks across the four districts of Kollam, Kannur, Palakkad and Wayanad. The villages were selected through purposive sampling. The respondents of the study were lead farmers of the selected districts. From each panchayat 3 lead farmers were selected so that a total of 120 farmers were selected from 40 panchayats.

The selection of the sample based on the criteria was that the farmers should be the progressive, innovative and an active member of LEADS programme selected by the Panchayat. The constraints faced by the respondents varied from farmers to farmers depending upon their socio-economic, psychological, technical and political status. The constraints were measured on a 3-point continuum scale as agree, somewhat agree and disagree and each respondents were asked to give scores accordingly as per their preference to various constraints and mean scores were worked out for each constraint. The data were collected through personal interview method using a pre-tested and semi-structured interview schedule. The statistical analysis done were using tools like frequency, mean and rank analysis etc.

Results and Discussion

As far as the study is concerned in case of farmers (Table 1) these are the most important impediments the farmers are facing in the LEADS. The Mean score for the continuums and the total score and the constraints given by the respondents is used for ranking.

Table 1: Constraints faced by farmers in LEADS

Constraints faced by farmers	Mean	Total Score	Agree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Rank (N=120)
Technology repetition over the years	2.45	294	55	35	10	1
Irregularity in conducting satellite group meetings	2.43	292	51.67	40	8.33	2
Political bias is high in LEADS programme	2.39	288	50.83	37.50	11.67	3
Capacity building programmes for farmers are less in number	2.37	285	50	37.5	12.5	4
Inactive participation of satellite farmers	2.31	278	41.67	48.33	10	5
Inadequate technical support from field assistants (field visits)	2.25	270	38.33	48.33	13.33	6
Field visits by expert teams are inadequate	2.22	267	33.33	55.83	10.83	7
Only those who have frequent contact with the KB are selected as lead and satellite farmer irrespective of merit	2.19	263	32.5	54.17	13.33	8
Delay in addressing the problems of famers through MTA	2.14	257	35.83	42.5	21.67	9
Climate change related constraints are not addressed in LEADS	2.13	256	31.67	50	18.33	10
Less encouragement and support for entrepreneurial activities	2.11	254	35	41.67	23.33	11
All progressive farmers in a Panchayat do not have opportunity to become lead farmer	2.10	252	26.67	56.67	16.67	12
Lack of knowledge in understanding problems and needs of satellite farmers by LEAD farmers	2.00	240	25	50	25	13

The result showed that the major constraint experienced by the farmers were the repetition of technology over the years with a total score of 294. In this constraint 55% of the respondents agreed, 35 percent of the respondents somewhat agreed and 10 percent of the respondents. This led to the conclusion that majority of the respondents were facing the problem of repetition of the technologies over the years in LEADS. The problem of technology repetition will backlash the intended objectives of LEADS programme. Irregularity in conducting satellite group meetings was also a major constraint observed by the lead farmers with a score of 292 with second rank. More than half of the respondents (51.67%) opined that the irregularity of the group meetings including the satellite farmers were not properly taking place, which in turn affect the technology dissemination.

Another major constraint felt by the farmer was regarding the political bias of the Panchayat officials and implementing authorities and was ranked 3. More than half (50.83%) of the respondents agreed to this aspect. The fourth ranked constraint was regarding the inadequate number of capacity development programmes. Half of the respondents (50.00%) agreed to this constraint. The lack of capacity development programme in this kind of a leadership based programme will affect the overall effectiveness of the programme. Frequent trainings and demonstration activities may be suggested to overcome this drawback. These results were in conformation with that reported by Mohanty *et al.,* (2013) [4].

The inactive participation of the satellite farmers was also an important constraint ranked 5th which is able to affect the overall outcome of the programme. 48.33 percent of the respondents somewhat agreed to this point. Inadequate support from the field assistants, especially in case of advisory services and field visit is another major constraint felt by the respondents is ranked 6th. Only 13.33 percent of the people have disagreement in this case. Similar results were obtained by Verma and Kumawat (2020) [9]. Another problem felt by the respondents were regarding the less number of field visit by the experts and is ranked 7th. The multi-disciplinary team visits, which is an important aspect of LEADS framework should be ensured adequately for the direct supervision and for expert suggestions and recommendations for the crops. 55.83 percent of the respondents somewhat agreed to this.

Another major drawback of the LEADS programme was that the farmers who were having regular contact with the krishi bhavan are selected as lead and satellite farmers irrespective of the merit. In this virtue the genuine and eligible farmers may get neglected and it was ranked as the 8th most important constraint. 54.17 percent of the respondents somewhat agreed to this constraint. Delay in addressing the problems of farmers through MTA (Monthly technological advice) is also an important barrier in the implementation of LEADS and it is ranked as 9th. The monthly technological advice should be conducted without fail /delay to address the crop production/protection related issues. Another major constraint identified in LEADS is that till now LEADS haven't addressed the climate change related challenges pertaining in agriculture especially during the present times of climate change and is ranked as the 10th constraint.

Other major constraints include the less support and encouragement for the entrepreneurial ventures, all the progressive farmers in the panchayat do not have the opportunity to become lead farmer and the lack of knowledge in understanding problems and needs of satellite farmers by LEAD farmers. The LEADS may intervene in supporting entrepreneurial ventures, may give opportunity to all the progressive farmers in panchayat to become lead farmer and the knowledge level of the lead farmer may be increased so

that he/she will be more efficient in guiding his satellite farmers.

Suggestions

- The continual updating and refining of technology over time are essential measures to prevent technological obsolescence.
- It is imperative to conduct meetings of the satellite group without any omission.
- The program should strive to eradicate any political bias.
- Capacity development programmes should be more in number
- Increase frequency of expert team field visits
- Merit-based selection of lead and satellite farmers
- Incorporate climate change considerations in LEADS
- Promote entrepreneurial activities
- Enhance knowledge transfer between LEAD and Satellite Farmers

Conclusions

In conclusion, this research has shed light on the shortcomings of the LEADS programme. The identified challenges need a multi-faceted approach involving policy revision, programme restructuring and capacity building initiatives. The programme should focus on bridging the knowledge gap between lead farmers and satellite farmers. By addressing these constraints, stakeholders including government bodies, agricultural experts and farmers can work collaboratively to enhance the resilience, productivity and sustainability of farming practices under LEADS in Kerala.

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