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Training Needs of VAAs/VHAs in Tribal Mandals of Visakhapatnam District of Andhra Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to identify the training needs of the newly recruited Village Agricultural Assistants (VAAs) or Village Horticultural Assistants (VHAs)working in 11 mandals of Visakapatnam tribal agency area during 2020. The results of the study indicate that a total of 16 crops were identified on which the trainingswere required. Among the cultivation aspects, pest and disease management, crop varieties, manures and fertilizers, weed management and other training aspects were identified as most important. Under agricultural area, the aspects like soil sampling and soil testing, soil health cards analysis, quality seed production, agricultural weather, organic farming practices, farmers groups organising etc were identified. On the extension front, preparation of audio-visual aids, organising information centre, organising training programmes, social media etc were identified as important training aspects on which trainings were required. Under Job related areas, training aspects like village data base management, handling online programmes for farmers, digital kiosk operation etc were identified. Also, constraints for participating in on-campus training programme *viz.*, heavy work load, overlapping activities, long distance to training institutions, scheduled activities and multiple department works were identified. Also lack of internet facility, non-availability of suitable gadgets and equipment, overlapping of online classes with other scheduled works were identified as constraints that hinders the staff participation in the online mode of training programmes.

Keywords: *Training Needs Identification, Village Level Extension Personal, Village Agricultural Assistants and Village Horticultural Assistants.*

The Government of Andhra Pradesh established Village Secretariats in all the Gram Panchayats in the state of Andhra Pradesh during 2019 (GoAP, 2019). In each Village Secretariat, an agricultural qualitied staff by name Village Agricultural Assistant (VAA) or Village Horticultural Assistant (VHA) has been recruited based on major extent of agricultural or horticultural crops in the particular village. The newly recruited VAAs and VHAs were responsible for the extending all the agricultural and horticultural related technical services, extension activities, Government schemes and other programmed services to the farmers in the village in which they were positioned. The structured job chart was also given to VAAs and VHAs to work in the Village Secretariats (DoA, 2019).

Training Needs Assessment refers to the organizational process of collecting and analyzing data for making decision on when and on what the trainings need to be conducted (Clarke, 2003). Training need assessment in the thematic areas like improved agricultural practices, programme development and other job-related areas will help the village level field staff to improve their job competencies (Kumari

Kavitha *et.al.*, 2017). Further, training needs assessment should be conducted on regular basis to identify the most suitable and needed training areas (Hemanga Kumar K, 2014).

In order to improve the technical, extension and job competency skills of the newly recruited village level staff, new training modules need to be designed and impart training to the newly recruited staff. Before proposing any training programmes and formulating training calendar, training need assessment need to be conducted to identify the various areas and aspects on which the newly recruited staff were expecting to train up based on their perceived field level knowledge, skills requirements and job-related aspects.

Keeping in view of this, the present study was conducted with the following objectives 1. To identify training needs as perceived by the staff. 2. To elicit constrains faced by the staff in participating in on-campus and also online mode of training programmes.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted by adopting exploratory research design in the 11 tribal agency mandals of Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh *viz.*, Chinthapalle, Paderu, Araku Valley, G. Madugula, G.K.Veedhi, Hukkumpeta, Munchingput, Koyyuru, Pedabayalu, Ananthagiri and Dumriguda during 2020. All the VAAs and VHAs who were working in 11 mandals were listed and among them a total of 60 respondents were selected randomly. Based on the job chart and discussion with the staff, Superior Officers and Extension Specialists, training areas were identified under five categories *viz.*, crops, cultivation aspects, agricultural related aspects, extension related aspects and job-related aspects.Under each training area, various training aspects were listed.A semi structured online questionnaire was prepared and shared to all the selected respondents to collect the responses.

The response was collected on the three-point rating scale *viz.*, "Mostly Needed", "Needed" and "Not Needed" and quantified by assigning the scores of 3, 2 and 1 to the aspects of the continuum, respectively. Based on the TNI, the Need Hierarchy Rank was assigned for identification of mostly needed topics among the given category. Training Need Index (TNI) was computed by using the formula:

Training Need Index (TNI) =

$$\frac{\text{Score obtained}}{\text{Maximum Obtainable score}} \times 100$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Training needs on crops as perceived by respondents

The results reveal that as per the importance perceived by the respondents, most important crops on which trainingswere needed includes: rice (98.89 TNI & rank I), millets (91.11 TNI & rank II), rajmash (89.44 TNI & rank III), niger (70.56 TNI & rank IV), redgram (68.33 TNI & rank V), maize (67.22 TNI & rank VI), wheat (53.33 TNI & rank VII), mustard (48.33 TNI & rank VIII), sunflower (47.78 TNI & rank IX) and vegetables (30.00 TNI & rank X). These major crops were cultivated in the entire agency area and hence the importance of getting more technical knowledge was perceived by the respondents. Organising the trainings on these major crops will help to improve the ability of the field extension staff to render more agro advisories to the farmers.

Other crops which are cultivating in the agency area on which trainings were required includes: turmeric (28.33 TNI & rank XI), pepper (18.33 TNI & rank XII), cashew (16.11 TNI & rank XIII), coffee (14.44 TNI & rank XIV), ginger (9.44 TNI & rank

XV) and sugarcane (8.33 TNI & rank XVI). As these crops are less in extent and grown in selected pockets of agency areas, when compared to the major crops cultivated, but still these were the important crops for farmers which brings income. Trainings programmes on these crops will help the VAAs & VHAs to acquire more knowledge and can help the farmers for improving the cultivation aspects in a scientific way.

Training needs on crop cultivation aspects as perceived by the respondents.

The results indicates that, with respect to crops cultivation areas, the majority of the VAAs and VHAs were perceived that pest and disease management (96.11 TNI & rank I) was most important aspect on which they need training programmes, followed by crop varieties (90.00 TNI & rank II), manures and fertilizers (89.44 TNI & rank III), weed management (86.11 TNI & rank IV), intercultural operations (82.22 TNI & rank V), cropping seasons (78.89 TNI & rank VI), land preparation (78.78 TNI & rank VII), farm implements and machinery (76.11 TNI & rank VIII) and post-harvest handling and storage (71.11 TNI & rank IX). Being working at village level, all VAAs and VHAs are the primary contact staff to whom the farmer regularly approaches for agro advisories on pest and disease control, information on new varieties, manures and fertilizer dosages and schedule and other crop cultivation aspects during the cropping season. Hence, the staff felt that these topics were important to get themselves trained. Conducting the refresher trainings on these aspects for various crops will help to improve the awareness and knowledge of VAAs and VHAs and thereby they can deliver the technical duties most effectively.

Training needs on agricultural related areas as perceived by the respondents.

The result highlights the preference of the training areas on different agricultural related areas as perceived VAAs and VHAs. The most important aspects perceived were soil sampling and soil testing (86.11 TNI & rank I), soil health cards analysis for giving advices (85.56 TNI & rank II), quality seed production (85.00 TNI & rand III), agricultural weather aspects (83.33 TNI & rank IV), organic farming practices (84.44 TNI & rank V), farmers groups organising (83.44 TNI & rank VI), farmers producers organisations (79.94 TNI & rank VII), agro chemical quality testing (75.00 TNI & rank VIII), agricultural marketing aspects (72.22 TNI & rank IX), food processing, value addition and marketing linkages (71.11 TNI & rank X) and value chain management (61.11 TNI & rank XI).

After cultivation aspects of crops, the major aspects as per the job chart given to the VAAs and VHAs were rightly perceived that undergoing training programmes on the important areas like soil testing and soil health cards is important because most of the government schemes and programmes related to Soil Health Management. As VAAs and VHAs were placed at village and were entrusted to work with various farmers groups and due to this reason,staff felt that farmers groups organising and facilitating Farmers producers' organisations are important aspect on which they need to train up. Providing trainings on other areas as perceived as important like agro chemicals quality testing, food processing, value addition, agricultural marketing and value chain because it will help to deliver the agricultural based livelihood promotion programmes more effectively by the staff at grass root level.

Training needs on extension areas as perceived by the respondents:

The results prioritizes the most important training areas which include: preparation and usage

of Audio-visual aids (87.22 TNI & rank I), organising agricultural information corners (86.67 TNI & rank II), organising training programmes (86.11 TNI & rank III), technology transfer through social science (85.56 TNI and rank IV), agricultural information sources (85.00 TNI & rank V), crop insurance (80.56 TNI & rank VI), field extension methods (76.11 TNI & rank VII), writing skills (73.33 TNI & rank VIII), farmers socio economy survey (70.00 TNI & rank IX) and mass media information generation (61.11 TNI & rank X).

As per the job chart for VAAs and VHAs, they have to participate in arrangement of various awareness programmes at village level, hence, they need to develop skills in preparation of audio visuals aids specifically for the programme. At the panchayat level, VAAs and VHAs are organising agricultural information centres for the benefit of farmers, hence, there is a need to develop conduct a training programme on how to organise and maintain the information centre in technical manner. Training up the staff on organising training programmes and training methodologies, will help in better organising of all the training programmes conducted by agricultural and allied departments at the village level. As VAAs and VHAs are involved at field level implementation of crop insurance programmes, train them on the various aspects related to crop insurance and it will help them to deliver the crop insurance services rendered to the farmers. Training the staff on various extension methods like Polambadi, Field Demonstrations, Field Days, On-farm Testing etc will help them to conduct them at village level in a systematic framework. Further, training programmes on writing skills and mass media management aspects will help the village level staff to prepare the field reports, press reporting, documentation of success stories etc.

Training needs on job-related areas as perceived by the respondents.

The results indicate that the perceived order of importance of the training areas under job-related training area include, Village data base maintenance (85.56 TNI & rank I), handling online programmes for farmers (81.11 TNA & rank II), Digital kiosk operation (80.00 TNI and rank III), farm information sources (75.00 TNI & rank IV), online marketing (71.11 TNI & rank V), digital library establishment (68.89 TNI & rank VI), social audit methods (67.22 TNI & rank VII) and plant health clinic services (63.33 TNI & rank VIII). As per the job chart given for the staff, some of the new aspects which were not even covered academically also were perceived important for undergoing training programme. As the VAAs and VHAs were the new positions created along with new job tasks, developing training modules on the job-related topics and organising training programmes will help to improve the job competences of the staff.

Constrains faced by the respondents to participate in on-campus training programmes

Table 1. Constraints faced to participate on campus training programmes as perceived by the respondents:

S.No.	Constraint for participating in campus programmes	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	Heavy work load	45	75	I
2	Overlapping works	31	51.67	II
3	More number of meetings	23	38.33	III
4	Long distance from working place to training centres	20	33.33	IV
5	Scheduled and attached works	19	31.67	V
6	Multiple departmentsworks to attend	14	23.33	VI

For enhancing training participation by the staff, the constraints were identified. Table 1 results showcases the major constraints faced by the staff. The degree of various constraint can be known by the number of respondents reported a particular constraint. Among the constraints, heavy work load (rank I), overlapping works (rank II), more number of meetings (rank III), long distance from working to training Centres (rank IV), scheduled and attached works (rank V) and multiple departments works to attend (rank VI). At the village level, VAAs and VHAs were assigned with various field level activities and over lapping works, the staff were finding difficult to make out the separate dates for attending the training programmes. Further, in agency area, the staff have to travel long distance from remote areas to the training Centres. As these staff were responsible for delivering various programmes and schemes of the government which were scheduled activities like bank works, uploading the details of the farmers by the due dates, e-crop booking etc makes them stick to the villages and deliver the scheduled works. Multiple departments related to agriculture were conducting programmes in the village, for which these staff are the major organizer. Hence, the department of agriculture have to schedule the training programmes in line with other activities, so that the staff can participate fully in the training programmes.

Constrains faced by the respondents to participate in online mode of training programmes

Table 2. Constrains faced to participate in online mode of training programmes as perceived by the respondents:

S.No.	Constraint	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	No internet facility in many areas	54	90	I
2	Lack of suitable gadgets and equipment	42	70	II
3	Overlapping of scheduled works during online training classes	25	41.67	III

Now-a-days, training programmes were conducted through online mode which will save time and logistics of the trainees and training organizers. Table 2 results identified the some of the constrains which were perceived by the VAAs and VHAs. Major constraints *viz.*, there no internet facility in many areas (rank I), lack of suitable gadgets and equipment (rank II) and finally, overlapping of scheduled works during online training classes (rank III). These constraints can be overcome by providing internet facilities and also equip the staff and officers with latest hardware equipment along with power back up systems. The overlapping of training schedules and scheduled programmes of the staff can be sorted out by coordinating the training institutions with the department of agricultural officers at the district level.

CONCLUSION

The study identified various training areas and also specific training aspects that were actually required for the field staff working at village level. The crops that are cultivated in the area, and among them the perceived importance for undergoing training programmes by the VAAs and VHAs were clearly identified in the study. Further, the most important training aspects under crops cultivation, agricultural and allied activities, extension aspects and job related aspects were identified with their priority. The study findings will help the training institutions like State Agricultural Universities, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), District Resource Centres (DRCs), District Agricultural Advisory and Transfer of Technology Centres (DAATTCs) and other capacity building

institutions to prepare the new training modules based on the identified training aspects.Further, the constraints for participating in on-campus and online mode of training programmes can be taken into consideration by the concerned authorities for effective participation of the staff. Further, based on the training needs identified, training calendar can be prepared with refresher trainings, technical subject related trainings and job related aspects trainings. This will ultimately improve the job competencies of the newly recruited VAAs and VHAs.

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