



Demographic Characteristics of Opinion Leaders and Their Followers in Non Progressive and progressive Villages

Key words : Employment, NREGS, NREGS beneficiaries, Profile, Rural.

In Every society, there is a great demand for progressive farmers. Every society for its survival asks for more and better leaders, they play a significant role in shaping the destiny of the community. The problem of leadership has assumed a new significance a new dimension all over the world in the recent decades as a consequence of several rapid and drastic changes that have taken place in the traditional social order. This is more so in the developing countries like India where, massive nation building plans are underway. The experience in the past has shown unequivocally that programmes cannot succeed fully unless responsible and responsive leadership emerges at the grass root level. According to Taylor (1970) nothing is more important in community development programmes than to locate, use and develop local leaders. However, leaders in the Indian villages are not necessarily formal leaders. Political affiliation, political positions and the rural community. but these are silently trusted, people consult them, seek their advice and listen to them with respect. Their influence may or may not overflow the village boundaries. They may not be active in party politics and some of them probably have never contested elections for any office but still they are instrumental in the process of decision making.

They do not exercise power by themselves but they control others who exercise powers. Oomen (1970) distinguishes these informal and formal leaders as power reservoirs and power exercisers. These informal leaders may be opinion leaders from whom others seek information and advice.

Opinion leaders play an important role and fulfill several of the following functions in his or her group with regard to agricultural innovations.

- * Passes information from outside the group
- * Interprets outside information on the basis of his or her own opinion and experiences.
- * Legitimizes or rejects changes that others want to carry out. That is to say the opinion leader gives his or her approval or disapproval for these changes.

* Set an example for others to follow

* Is influential in changing group norms

Developing countries like ours where literacy is low and other mass media are less developed; farm opinion leaders assume a much more crucial role in transfer of ideas for the development of rural community. This study throws light on the distinct characters of the opinion leaders and their followers.

The study was conducted in the purposively selected Bapatla Mandal of Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh. Out of 20 villages in Bapatla Mandal, 2 villages namely Murukondapadu and Bhartipudi were selected on progressive ness criteria as progressive and non progressive villages respectively, 6 opinion leaders and 48 followers from each village were selected based on socio metrics scores. Selected opinion leaders and followers were interviewed to know their personal characteristics.

It is evident from Table 1 that the opinion leaders in the non progressive village were having middle school (50%) and high school (50%) level of education.

In progressive village, majority of the opinion leaders (83.33%) were having upto high school level of education. None of the opinion leader was illiterate.

Education is generally believed to have the effect of widening the mental horizon of a person. Thereby making them to be receptive for new ideas and it is also believed that more value is attached by the people to the advice and guidance of the educated persons. Because of enriched knowledge the opinion leaders were able to give advice to their followers. Further it was evident that in non progressive village, 18.75% of followers were illiterate and in progressive village, 4.17% were illiterate and majority of the followers (85.42%) in non progressive village and (72.92%) in progressive village were having lower educational level compared to the opinion leaders. The reasons may be that a considerable portion of the followers are from backward caste and scheduled castes. Their social circumstances and other personal and socio-economic background of followers might not have helped them to undergo higher level of education.

Table 1. Distribution of opinion leaders and followers in non progressive and progressive villages according to their level of education

(n= 108)

Category	Non-progressive village			Progressive village		
	Opinion leaders	Followers	Total	Opinion leaders	Followers	Total
Illiterate	- (0.00)	9 (18.75)	9 (16.67)	- (0.00)	2 (4.17)	2 (3.70)
Primary school	- (0.00)	18 (37.50)	18 (33.33)	- (0.00)	12 (25.00)	12 (22.23)
Middle School	3 (50.00)	14 (29.17)	17 (31.48)	1 (16.67)	21 (43.75)	22 (40.74)
High School	3 (50.00)	7 (14.58)	10 (18.52)	5 (83.33)	13 (27.08)	18 (33.33)
Graduate	- (0.00)	- (0.00)	- (0.00)	- (0.00)	- (0.00)	- (0.00)
Post Graduate	- (0.00)	- (0.00)	- (0.00)	- (0.00)	- (0.00)	- (0.00)

Table 2. Distribution of opinion leaders and followers in non progressive and progressive villages according to their Age.

(n= 108)

Category	Non-progressive village			Progressive village		
	Opinion leaders	Followers	Total	Opinion leaders	Followers	Total
Young (< 30 Yrs)	- (0.00)	3 (6.25)	3 (5.55)	- (0.00)	8 (16.67)	8 (14.81)
Middle aged (30-50 Yrs)	4 (66.67)	32 (66.67)	36 (66.67)	5 (83.33)	30 (62.50)	35 (64.81)
Old (>50 yrs)	2 (33.33)	13 (27.08)	15 (27.78)	1 (16.67)	10 (20.83)	11 (20.38)

The result was inline with the results of the study conducted by Shoba (1993) who found that followers had low education levels.

Age:

It is evident from Table 2 that majority of opinion leaders in non progressive village (66.67%) and in progressive village (83.33%) belonged to middle age group. During the investigation it was revealed that middle aged persons had high level of competence.

The table also revealed that none of the opinion leaders belonged to the young age group in both progressive and non progressive villages.

The socio-cultural system of our rural society usually compels the younger generation to obey and follow the advice of elders. Usually middle aged farmers have more work efficiency, maturity in farming and enthusiasm and balance of mind compared to old age and young aged people. They are easily to approachable to followers compared to

old aged and young aged people because they are having both maturity and scientific outlook. The followers attach credibility to the information of mature, experienced farm opinion leaders who are middle aged. The followers might perceive the younger people as inexperienced and have reservation to approach elderly people in the context of our socio-cultural setting. Yadav *etal.* (1990) and Shoba (1993) who also found that majority of opinion leaders were in middle aged group.

Majority of followers (66.67%) in non progressive village and (62.5%) in progressive village were in middle aged group. As it was found that majority of opinion leaders were in middle aged group, so these middle aged followers sought required information from their own age group without any ego problems.

LITERATURE CITED

- Taylor C 1970.** A critical analysis of India's community development program. Ministry of community development and cooperation, Government of India, Delhi.
- Oomen T K 1970.** Rural community power structure in India. *Social Forces* 49(2): 20-23.
- Shobha C K 1993.** A study on the characteristics and aspirations of women opinion leaders and their followers in Dharwad Taluk, Karnataka. M.Sc (Agril.) thesis, *Univeristy of Agricultural Sciences*, Dharwad.
- Yadav K D, Singh R L and Deshpande W R 1990.** Growth and pattern of leadership Maharashtra *Journal of Extension Education* 9:33-340.

Department of Extension Education
University of Agricultural Sciences
Dharwad

**K Rama Krishna
D M Chandargi**

(Received on 27.12.2010 and revised on 29.12.2010)