

Original Research Article

Availability of Information and Communication Technology among the agricultural line department officials of Odisha

ABSTRACT

The study to determine the availability of Information and Communication Technology among the agricultural line department officials of Odisha was undertaken in Khordha district of Odisha state in the year 2021. For the present study, 105 respondents (22 district level agricultural officials, 59 block level agricultural officials and 24 village level agricultural officials) were selected by following stratified random sampling method. Keeping in view the sampling area, sampling size and the method of data collection ex-post facto research design was used for the study. The data collected was statistically analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean score and mean percentage score. The study revealed that majority of the district level agricultural officials (100%) had the availability of Microsoft package, laptop, internet services, social media, e-mail, web based search engines, modem, mobile phone, headphone, television and video conferencing and the block level agricultural officials (100%) had the availability of Microsoft package, laptop, internet services, social media, e-mail, web based search engines, modem, mobile phone, television and video conferencing whereas the village level agricultural officials (100%) had the availability of only mobile phone and television. Proper awareness, provision of training and knowledge of ICT tools, uninterrupted power supply in the offices and the proper maintenance of ICT tools can rectify the constraints persisting in ICT tools handling.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology, Availability, Agricultural line department officials, Odisha.

1. INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technology (ICT) can be regarded as a pool of technology comprising of many tools which assist in storage, dealing out of information, or in broadcasting information, or both. The inclusion tools in ICT are technologies such as desktop and laptop computers, software, peripherals and which help in communication of data and dissipating information to a wider audience. The application-level usage of ICT is rapidly enlarging and diversifying. Most recent and emerging technological improvements such as e-agriculture focuses on the augmentation of agricultural and rural development through upgraded information and communication processes. To be specific, e-agriculture encompasses a cascade of input process such as conceptualization, design, development, evaluation and application of innovative ways to use ICT in the rural realm, with key attention on agriculture. This new technological revolution resolves and responds to farmers' needs accurately and swiftly when compared to the technology prevailing a decade earlier. Wolfert *et al.*, (2017) [1] noticed the advancement of technology *via* digital platforms such as e-commerce, computational power, agro-advisory apps, big data and satellite systems like remote sensing, quicken the information sharing and communication among farmers.

Smartphones are the most widely used ICT across the globe as per the observation recorded by O'Dea (2020) [2]. The research further conveyed that the highest share of smartphone users worldwide was supposedly noticed in developing countries (O'Dea, 2020) [2]. Research conducted by Statista (2020) [3] acclaimed that around 3.2 billion people in the world had the applicability of using smartphones and forecasted that this figure could proliferate to a number of 3.8 billion by 2021. The pace at which ICT applications are growing in every sector of the world has triggered the development of different ICT applications in the agriculture sector.

Globally, extension services revolve around dissemination of agricultural information, knowledge and new technologies to farmers and people exercising rural livelihood. According to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), agricultural advisory services (in short, agricultural extension) enact a crucial role in promoting productivity, enhancing food security, improving and improvising rural livelihoods, and uplifting agriculture as a pro-poor economic growth engine (IFPRI, 2020) [4]. The extension services articulate new ideas and technologies to rural inhabitants with the help of different methods and approaches. The main reason for introducing these different approaches is to help farmers understand the information and method demonstrated to them by the agricultural extension officers. In doing so, they espouse new technologies to improve their livelihoods and become resilient to challenges arising in their farming activities. Agricultural extension services can be a powerful tool in helping smallholders breach the chain of low productivity, vulnerability, and poverty as emphasized by Davis and Franzel (2018) [5]. The extension services uphold a better position for providing farmers with knowledge and tools about modern agricultural practices, greater access to finance, and market solutions. Extension and advisory services are vital to enhancement of rural and subsistence farmers which are regarded as the central pillar of agriculture and food supply chains in low-income countries (Francis, 2014) [6]. Usage of multidisciplinary tool such as educational methodologies, communication and group techniques by the extension services play a crucial role in promoting new technologies, communicating information and sharing knowledge among rural dwellers and farmers (Sousa *et al.*, 2016) [7]. ICTs have the potential to minimise the gap between extension and research to farmers. Globally, there are numerous ICT applications and programmes that are active and have been devised to improve communication among extension workers and other parties within the agriculture value chain. In Afghanistan, an ICT application platform called 'e-Afghan' (Bell, 2013) [8] has been formulated to connect farmers to extension workers, research institutions and other parties that avail and help farmers in Afghanistan to share credible information. In the same way, Digital Green in Ethiopia has forged an ICT agricultural advisory services platform known as FarmStack that blend farm-level data, input availability, local weather market information as well as linking extension system actors and information (Digital Green, 2019) [9]. Similarly, in Jamaica, the Lifelong Learning for Farmers program have developed an SMS interactive service to proffer rural farmers with information and knowledge on good agricultural practices (K'adamawe, 2012) [10]. Lastly, i-Shamba (a phone-based farmer club) has been set in motion in Kenya. The new technology has backed up a call centre, where agricultural extension experts and researchers extend technical assistance to subscribers through voice call or SMS on issues related to weather, inputs, good agricultural practices and market information (Tsan *et al.*, 2019) [11].

Extension workers are mandated to deliver agricultural information to farmers. Extension workers have the skills and the ability, but require a better path to acquire and propagate information. It is believed that ICTs can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of extension services if the extension workers would accept and use ICTs to improve themselves and farmers.

1.1 Objectives of the study

The major objective of the study was to determine the availability of Information and Communication Technologies among the agriculture line department officials of Odisha.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study included all the agricultural line department officials like District Agriculture Officer (DAO), Assistant Agricultural Officer (AAO), Assistant Horticulture officer (AHO), Village Agricultural Worker (VAW), Women Village Agricultural Worker (WVAW) and Subject Matter Specialists (SMS) from Khordha district of Odisha State. Keeping in view the objectives of the study, sampling area, sampling size and the method of data collection ex-post facto research design was used for the study.

2.1 Selection of respondents

A total of 105 respondents (22 district level agricultural officials, 59 block level agricultural officials and 24 village level agricultural officials) were selected by following stratified random sampling method. An interview schedule was constructed for assembling data from the agricultural line department officials. The secondary source of data was combined from thesis, journals, internet and official records of agriculture department.

2.2 Statistical tools used

The data collected from the sample respondents were coded, analysed and tabulated for comparative study. The statistical tools used for the study includes the various descriptive statistics and ranking. On the basis of average mean scores and mean scores, rank order was considered. The item securing highest average means scores/mean scores was assumed as first rank and then next highest was given second rank and so on.

Mean Score (MS) = Total score assigned by all the respondents to a practice ÷ Total number of respondents

Mean Percentage Score (MPS) = (Total score obtained by the respondents ÷ Maximum obtainable score) x 100

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data presented in Table 1 depicted that in case of district level agricultural officials Microsoft package, laptop, internet services, social media, e-mail, web-based search engines, modem, mobile phone, head phone, television and video conferencing (MS=3 and MPS=100) were most available among different ICT tools and ranked first and Radio (MS=1.64 and MPS=54.55) was the least available ICT tool and ranked twelfth.

Table 1. Availability wise distribution of district level agricultural officials

SL. NO	CATEGORY	DISTRICT LEVEL OFFICIALS (n=22)					
		Regularly	Occasionally	Not available	MS	MPS	Rank

		F	%	F	%	F	%			
A Computer related										
1	Microsoft package	22	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
2	Laptop	22	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
3	USB	18	81.82	4	18.18	0	0	2.82	93.94	II
4	Memory card	12	54.55	8	36.36	2	9.09	2.45	81.82	IV
5	Fax	11	50	11	50	0	0	2.5	83.33	III
6	Digital camera	6	27.27	8	36.36	8	36.36	1.91	63.64	XI
B Internet related										
1	Internet services	22	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
2	Social media	22	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
3	E-mail	22	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
4	Web based search engines	22	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
5	Modem	22	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
6	e-journals	8	36.36	10	45.45	4	18.18	2.18	72.73	VII
C Audio related										
1	Mobile phone	22	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
2	Microphone	6	27.27	10	45.45	6	27.27	2	66.67	X
3	Landline phone	10	45.45	8	36.36	4	18.18	2.27	75.76	VI
4	Bluetooth	12	54.55	6	27.27	4	18.18	2.36	78.79	V
5	Headphone	22	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
6	Radio	4	18.18	6	27.27	12	54.55	1.64	54.55	XII
D Audio-visual related										
1	Television	22	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
2	Video conferencing	22	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
3	Tablet device	8	36.36	9	40.91	5	22.73	2.14	71.21	VIII
4	Smart TV	20	90.91	0	0	2	9.09	2.82	93.94	II
5	DVD player	12	54.55	0	0	10	45.45	2.09	69.7	IX

*n=number of respondents

From Table 2, in case of block level agricultural officials Microsoft package, laptop, internet services, social media, e-mail, web-based search engines, modem, mobile phone, television and video conferencing (MS=3 and MPS=100) were most available among different ICT tools and ranked first and Fax (MS=1.15 and MPS=38.42) was the least available ICT tool and ranked fourteenth.

Table 3 indicated the availability of ICT tools by the village level agricultural officials. Mobile phone and television (MS=3 and MPS=100) were most available and Fax (MS=1 and MPS=33.33) was the least available among different ICT tools and ranked first and seventeenth respectively.

Table 2. Availability wise distribution of block level agricultural officials

SL. NO	CATEGORY	BLOCK LEVEL OFFICIALS (n=59)					
		Regularly	Occasional	Not	MS	MPS	Rank

		F		y		available				
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
A	Computer related									
1	Microsoft package	59	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
2	Laptop	59	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
3	USB	31	52.54	28	47.46	0	0	2.53	84.18	III
4	Memory card	25	42.37	23	38.98	11	18.64	2.24	74.58	V
5	Fax	0	0	9	15.25	50	84.75	1.15	38.42	XIV
6	Digital camera	5	8.47	20	33.9	34	57.63	1.51	50.28	XII
B	Internet related									
1	Internet services	59	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
2	Social media	59	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
3	E-mail	59	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
4	Web based search engines	59	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
5	Modem	59	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
6	e-journals	6	10.17	32	54.24	21	35.59	1.75	58.19	IX
C	Audio related									
1	Mobile phone	59	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
2	Microphone	4	6.78	33	55.93	22	37.29	1.69	56.5	X
3	Landline phone	20	33.9	24	40.68	15	25.42	2.08	69.49	VII
4	Bluetooth	33	55.93	0	0	26	44.07	2.12	70.62	VI
5	Headphone	55	93.22	0	0	4	6.78	2.86	95.48	II
6	Radio	12	20.34	0	0	47	79.66	1.41	46.89	XIII
D	Audio-visual related									
1	Television	59	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
2	Video conferencing	59	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
3	Tablet device	16	27.12	22	37.29	21	35.59	1.92	63.84	VIII
4	Smart TV	39	66.1	3	5.08	17	28.81	2.37	79.1	IV
5	DVD player	14	23.73	7	11.86	38	64.41	1.59	53.11	XI

*n=number of respondents

It can be observed from Table 1, 2 and 3 that the district level and the block level agricultural officials had regular availability of most of the ICT tools when compared with the village level agricultural officials. The probable reason for this may be due to less awareness on the importance of ICT tools among the village level agricultural officials. Therefore, the village level staffs should be made aware of the ICT tools by awareness camp and they should be provided with smart phones and other ICT tools at affordable prices to work smoothly and more efficiently. This result was in line with result of survey conducted by Agwu and Elizabeth (2013) [12] among the staffs of Women in Agriculture (WIA) in Nigeria which led to the observation that telephone and radio were available to 40.0% and 33.8% of respondents in offices, televisions and video machines were available in about 27.5% and 22.5% of them in their offices respectively and a smaller number of respondents (21.2%,18.8% and 12.5%) of them had accessibility to computers, duplicating machines and calculators respectively.

Fax machines or GIS or official e-mail address were accessible to none of them in their offices.

Table 3. Availability wise distribution of village level agricultural officials

SL. NO	CATEGORY	VILLAGE LEVEL OFFICIALS (n=24)								
		Regularly		Occasionally		Not available		MS	MPS	Rank
		F	%	F	%	F	%			
A	Computer related									
1	Microsoft package	0	0	2	8.33	22	91.67	1.08	36.11	XVI
2	Laptop	0	0	6	25	18	75	1.25	41.67	XIV
3	USB	0	0	4	16.67	20	83.33	1.17	38.89	XV
4	Memory card	11	45.83	0	0	13	54.17	1.92	63.89	VII
5	Fax	0	0	0	0	24	100	1	33.33	XVII
6	Digital camera	2	8.33	3	12.5	19	79.17	1.29	43.06	XIII
B	Internet related									
1	Internet services	6	25	9	37.5	9	37.5	1.88	62.5	VIII
2	Social media	18	75	0	0	6	25	2.5	83.33	III
3	E-mail	6	25	0	0	18	75	1.5	50	XI
4	Web based search engines	18	75	0	0	6	25	2.5	83.33	III
5	Modem	2	8.33	4	16.67	18	75	1.33	44.44	XII
6	e-journals	0	0	2	8.33	22	91.67	1.08	36.11	XVI
C	Audio related									
1	Mobile phone	24	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
2	Microphone	0	0	4	16.67	20	83.33	1.17	38.89	XV
3	Landline phone	14	58.33	4	16.67	6	25	2.33	77.78	IV
4	Bluetooth	4	16.67	0	0	20	83.33	1.33	44.44	XII
5	Headphone	20	83.33	0	0	4	16.67	2.67	88.89	II
6	Radio	12	50	4	16.67	8	33.33	2.17	72.22	VI
D	Audio-visual related									
1	Television	24	100	0	0	0	0	3	100	I
2	Video conferencing	13	54.17	5	20.83	6	25	2.29	76.39	V
3	Tablet device	3	12.5	0	0	21	87.5	1.25	41.67	XIV
4	Smart TV	9	37.5	0	0	15	62.5	1.75	58.33	X
5	DVD player	6	25	7	29.17	11	45.83	1.79	59.72	IX

*n=number of respondents

4. CONCLUSION

The study has revealed the fact that district level and block level agricultural officials had much more accessibility and availability to almost all the ICT tools, whereas the village level agricultural officials had comparatively limited accessibility and availability of most of the ICT tools. ICT tools are concurrently changing the overall outlook in enhancement of the agricultural and allied sector. But some constraints lie within the ICT tools usage which can be rectified and further move ahead. The following are the recommendations for rectifying the constraints persisting in ICT tools handling:

- Proper knowledge and awareness must be disseminated to all the levels of agricultural officials for the effective utilization of ICT tools.
- Proper ICT infrastructure should be there for the effective utilization of ICT tools in Government offices especially at block and village level.
- There should be a regular monetary provision at the Government offices for the maintenance of ICT tools.
- Staffs working at the village level need to be made more skilled for use of ICT tools through frequent trainings.
- Village level staffs should be provided with smart phones to work smoothly and more efficiently.
- The Government should ensure to suffice the availability of ICT tools to all levels of agricultural officials at affordable prices.
- Allocate sufficient funds and financial support for the procurement and installation of the ICT tools.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ICT- Information and Communication Technology

DAO-District Agriculture Officer

AAO-Assistant Agricultural Officer

AHO-Assistant Horticulture officer

VAW-Village Agricultural Worker

WVAW-Women Village Agricultural Worker

SMS-Subject Matter Specialists

UNDER PEER REVIEW