Chapter 1

Prologue

During the mid-1990s, the Government of India and the World Bank began exploring new approaches to extension that would address these system problems and constraints. The result was a new, decentralized extension approach, which would focus more directly on agricultural diversification and increasing farm income and rural employment. The central institutional innovation that emerged to address these system problems was the Agricultural Technology Management Agency or "ATMA" model that was introduced at the district level.

The Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) is an autonomous organization registered under the "Societies Registration Act of 1860" responsible for technology dissemination activities at the district level. It has linkages with all departments of the government and research organisations as well as NGOs and agencies associated with agricultural development in the district. The ATMA would be a society of key stakeholders involved in agricultural activities for sustainable agricultural development in the district

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- Integrate extension programs across the line departments (i.e., more of a farming systems approach),
- Link research and extension activities within each district, and
- Decentralize decision-making through "bottom-up" planning procedures that would directly involve farmers and the private sector in planning and implementing extension programs at the block and district-levels.

With this background, the following objectives have been delineated for the study-

1. To generate a perception on organizational & functional structure and components of ATMA for some selected districts.
2. To elicit the perception level of ATMA stakeholders from a score of agro-ecological and socio-economic variables.
3. To estimate the level and direction of interactions amongst and between the dependent variables (Y_1-Y_5) and independent variables (X_1-X_{11})
4. Based on the empirical evidences, to delineate some strategic intervention for up gradation of functions of ATMA functionaries.

HISTORY OF ATMA:

In order to address the key constraints faced by extension system in the country with respect to reducing capacity of public extension services, its lack of decentralized and demand driven focus, the Innovations in Technology Dissemination component of National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP) was implemented in seven States in the country namely, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Maharashtra and Punjab through four project districts in each State. This component aimed at pilot testing new institutional arrangements for technology

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dissemination at district level and below in order to move towards an integrated extension delivery.

The purpose of NATP's innovation in Technology Dissemination Component is to pilot test new organizational arrangements and operational procedures not merely strengthen the existing extension system. One key concept or goal is to decentralize decision-making to the district level through the creation of Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA). A second goal is to increase farmer input into programme planning and resource allocation, especially at the Block level, and to increase accountability to stakeholders. A third major goal is to increase programme coordination and integration, so that the programme thrust such as farming System innovations, Farmer organization, Technology gaps and Natural Resource Management can be more effectively and efficiently implemented.

This Scheme was approved on 29th March, 2005. The Scheme has made extension system farmer driven and farmer accountable. 237 Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) at district level have been set up to operationalise the extension reforms with active participation of farmers / farmer groups, NGOs, Krishi Vigyan Kendras, Panchayati Raj Institutions and other Stakeholder operating at district level and below. The release of funds are based on Strategic Research and Extension plan (SEWP)/ State Extension Work Plans (SEWPs) prepared by the State Governments. State level Extension Plans have been developed keeping in mind the strategic extension needs of the farmers. 252 districts across all the States/UTs in the country were covered under the scheme during the 10th Plan.

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ATMA and Extension Reforms:

Extension Reforms in India were pilot tested in 28 Districts in 7 States from 1998 to 2005. This successful experiment served as a basis to launch the Scheme "*Support to State Extension Programmes for Extension Reforms*" in the year 2005-06. It was revamped, expanded and strengthened comprehensively in the year 2010. Coverage of the scheme was increased in a phased manner. It is currently operational in 639 districts and the remaining rural districts are also proposed to be covered.

The 12th Plan Approach Paper identifies several challenges faced by the agricultural extension and also gives suggestions to deal with the same. Some of these include integrating Krishi Vigyan Kendrs (KVKs) problem solving skills and the feed-back they provide to State Agriculture Universities (SAUs) and National Agriculture Research System (NARS) with ATMA and strengthen district level planning; using technology to reach out to the farmers, raising capability of rural poor to conserve and manage their livestock and fisheries resources and derive sustainable incomes; link small farmers to markets; promote decentralized participatory research as well as knowledge intensive alternatives in rain-fed regions.

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