



Kisan Call Centre (KCC) & E-Choupal: Farmer Helplines and Digital Kiosks

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Agriculture is an important sector in economic and social development in most of the developing countries. Agriculture plays a significant role in Indian economy. The role of agriculture in India's socio-economic development is inherent since ancient times. Even today agriculture forms a significant part of the GDP and overall growth and sustainability of India. This sector provides employment to 51 of the total workforce, being the largest economic sector amongst others such as mining, tourism, retail, textile, industry and services. As being mentioned, the challenges before the agricultural practices in India are immense. It will not only benefit the overall economic progress of the country, but is also essential for the workforce of the nation, two thirds of which, directly or indirectly depends on the same. With the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the catering of the needs of the farmers has become easy. ICT in a broader term and it encompasses gadgets, tools, applications, internet etc. there have been many interventions by private and government in application of ICT in agriculture and allied aspects (Patil *et al.*, 2017). ICT projects like Kisan Call Centre (KCC) initiated by government of India, Raina Mitra Kendras' info kiosks of Indian country Department of Agriculture, Krishi Marata Vahini Kiosks developed by Karnataka Agricultural Marketing Board and e-choupals, a private initiative of ITC Limited are delivering the grass root level and are widely popular across the India. KCC was launched on 21st January, 2004 by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India throughout the country to cater the needs of the farming communities. KCC provides an information on technologies, crop protection, sources of information, e.g.: advice to addressing specific problems answered by expert's information on Government health programmes, contact details of health service providers, counselling services on HIV Counselling and legal advice in 22 local languages (Goyal *et al.*, 2019). Farmer from any part of the country can get the solutions for his queries by contacting KCC by dialling the toll-free number 1800-180-1551 (Kavitha and Anandraja, 2017). The operator at the KCC will attend the call to answer queries of the farmers immediately. In case the operator at the call centre is not able to address the farmers' query immediately, the call will be forwarded to agricultural specialists. The Hindi term 'e-choupal' means village meeting place. E-choupal is a virtual marketplace where farmers may deal directly with a processor and get a higher price for their fruit. E-choupal utilizes existing intermediaries' physical transmission capabilities & aggregation, logistics, bridge finance, and counterparty risk. ITC Limited introduced E-choupal in India in June 2000, and it has since grown to be the biggest Internet-based intervention in rural India.

Objectives of KCC

Fill Knowledge Chasms: Get farmers in distant or rural regions linked with agricultural researchers and extension agents.

Facilitate Government Schemes: Inform farmers regarding subsidies, crop insurance, and other government schemes.

Enable Sustainable Agriculture: Promote uptake of new techniques such as integrated pest management, improvement of soil health, and effective water use.

Key features

Toll-free access: Farmers can call a toll-free number (1800 180-1551) from anywhere in India. This makes it inclusive and breaks the financial constraint for small and marginal farmers.

Operational Mechanism: Calls are answered by operators, and if needed, escalated to agricultural specialists.

Coverage: Call centers are available for every state, handling queries from across the country.

Registration: Farmers can register through SMS (51969 or 7738299899) or online portal (mkisan.gov.in).

Multilingual Support: Facilities are made available in various regional languages, given the multi-lingual nature of people in India. This makes language not a constraint for farmers to access important information.

Expert guidance: Answers are furnished by agricultural experts, scientists, and trained officials. Support is offered on a broad array of subjects:

Pest and Disease management : Expert team from crop protection team provide the right guidance to the farmers regarding occurrence, damage and mitigation of pest and disease problems.

Crop production: From the sowing of seeds to the harvest of crop, entire package of practices details understanding in vernacular language given by the expert team.

Fertilizers and Nutrient management: Expert team of KCC providing the details of various fertilizers doses, importance and proper application methods.

Weather Information: Notifications and forecasts to enable farmers to schedule sowing and harvesting.

Livestock and Animal Husbandry: Animal health support, feeding, and breeding tips.

Government Schemes: Subsidy, crop insurance, loans, and other schemes for farmer welfare.

Time-saving: Farmers obtain instant information without having to travel long distances to research institutions or agricultural offices. Reduces the effort, time, and cost of seeking agricultural advice in person.

Feedback Mechanism: Farmers can give feedback on the guidance provided, which helps enhance the quality of service. Regular monitoring helps ensure that questions are handled effectively and efficiently.

E-Choupal

e-Choupal is a revolutionary initiative undertaken by ITC Limited to empower farmers by giving them access to live information about agriculture, weather, market prices, and optimum farming practices. The initiative creates digital kiosks in villages that are operated by local farmers referred to as "sanchalaks." The kiosks serve as focal points for the community, providing farmers with timely knowledge and service to enhance productivity, profitability and sustainability in agriculture. Farmers have immediate access to a vast amount of agricultural knowledge thanks to the computers and internet access provided in the rural kiosks. Farmers can make informed decisions regarding production and marketing by using E-Choupal to obtain information on crop prices, quality standards, and cutting-edge agricultural techniques. Additionally, the kiosks serve as a hub for community gatherings where locals get together to discuss agricultural issues, share knowledge, and learn from one

another. With the use of agri-sourcing-led efficiencies, the innovative e-Choupal model establishes a substantial two-way, multidimensional conduit that can effectively transport goods and services into and out of rural India (Raja and Naika, 2019). Over 4 million farmers are served by this effort, which currently has about 6500 installations spread throughout nearly 40,000 communities. Farmers in the ten states of Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu can currently access information via the "e-Choupal" website. Over the next 5 years it is ITC's Vision to develop a network of 20,000 e-Choupals, thereby expanding coverage to 100,000 villages representing one sixth of rural India.

Conclusion

Kisan Call Centers (KCC) and e-Choupal are both ground-breaking programs that are essential to providing farmers with timely, accurate, and useful information. While KCC focuses more on advisory services, offering guidance on crop management, pest control, irrigation, and government programs, e-Choupal focuses more on market connectivity and digital literacy, enabling farmers to access current market prices, demand trends, and cutting-edge farming techniques. The two platforms work together to fill up important information gaps, promote improved decision-making, and facilitate the adoption of sustainable agriculture practices. Together, KCC and e-Choupal boost production, income, and resilience by combining expert advice with market knowledge. This helps farmers overcome the difficulties of modern farming and achieve greater economic and social empowerment.

References

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