

Revolutionising agriculture the IT way

Background:

That Information Technology has taken the world by storm is a forgone conclusion. In Jharkhand too, the computers have done wonders in several spheres but the agriculture sector has by and large remained untouched. The State despite having much potential to be an agriculturally prosperous could not do so for avoiding the benefits of Information Technology. The word computer till the recent past was a taboo for most of the officials associated with agriculture in the State and for the farmers it was an alien term. Neither the farmers nor the officials were aware of the landmine of information they could have by becoming computer literate. The ignorance was also preventing the dissemination of farming know-how.

SAMETI, to do away with the lacuna, conducted its survey and came to the conclusion that the numerous training programmes were not bringing in the desired results, as computers had no role to play in it. Though various research works were being successfully concluded, the farmers were not benefiting from it, as the result seldom percolated to the grassroots. SAMETI took upon itself to set the record straight and embarked on an intensive computer literacy programme. It was not an easy task, as shivers ran down the spine of the officials on listening the word computer. SAMETI was equally determined and instead of imposing the 'friendly' computer on them, gradually motivated them by organizing seminars, where projections and presentations were made using computers and other electronic gadgets.

SAMETI keeping a close watch on their attitude found that the officials were being gradually drawn to computers. The colourful projections made using the computers and the laser printouts did the trick.

Intervention and process:

To start with SAMETI decided to discourage data entry by using typewriter and encourage the same through computers. Data entry is supposed to be the introductory chapter of computer literacy. The ATMA officials who came to SAMETI office, Ranchi, for managerial and technical training started raising demand for computer training. SAMETI grasped the opportunity with both hands and organised training for the officials of four districts, where ATMA was functional in the State. The first training was organised at Dumka in which 25 officials from Chaibasa, Jamtara and Palamu took part apart from the host district in June, 2003. The project director and the deputy project director of ATMA in these districts were the first to be exposed to the world of computers. They were supposed to encourage their subordinates and other officials associated with agriculture to become computer literate. At the end of the five-day training, it was found that the officials were no more reluctant to work on computers. The participants voiced demand for more such training to clear their remaining doubts. SAMETI in response asked them to 'explore' the computers on their own, as it would not only answer their queries but also make them aware of many new things. Soon after, ATMA offices requested SAMETI to organise such trainings in each district so that the block, Krishi Vigyan Kendra and Zonal Research Station officials too could take part in it. SAMETI obliged the demand by organizing the same in each of the four districts from which over 100 officials benefited. Computer was fast gaining root in ATMA offices was for all to see. The

training programme also ensured that the computers already with the ATMA offices and its line departments were put to good use. Another encouraging sign was the participation of a few farmers in the training.

With computers becoming acceptable, it was decided at the Executive Council meeting to formulate a training programme for prevention of distortion of information. It had come to SAMETI's notice that precious research results by the time it reaches the end users were getting distorted or diluted. But before embarking on this mission, SAMETI Executive Council decided to strengthen the basics by further organizing preliminary training programmes.

Apart from preliminary exposure to computers, the participants at the training were also acquainted with videoconferencing and other 'IT revolutions' in the agriculture sector by experts from MANAGE.

The State Agriculture department requested SAMETI to organise such trainings for its staff in non-ATMA districts. SAMETI fulfilled the demand by organizing two training programmes for district agriculture officers and district soil conservation officers. SAMETI also arranged a workshop for ATMA officials to prepare district-specific websites. This resulted in the hosting of two ATMA websites and the work on remaining two is in progress. SAMETI too has hosted its own website.

BENEFITS & IMPACT:

The officers associated with agriculture, who till the other day were under the impression that computer was of no help to them, have realised their folly and are using it more in their day to day work. Computers have also enabled them to become more systematic in their work and are now more frequently using it to store information. A majority of them has even started

using e-mails, which has considerably cut down on correspondence time and cost incurred. The officials too have started to realize that earlier the information before reaching the end users was getting distorted, which by the use of computers can be removed. They are now able to deliver the research outcome to the farmers in more lucid terms. Some of the officials have even started exploring the Web for more information on agriculture. With the power of knowledge in their repertoire, the ATMA officials feel more comfortable to face the farmers.

LESSONS LEARNT:

1. Computers should not be imposed on the agriculture officials but gradual exposure through colourful presentations can draw them to computers.
2. At first step, the trainees should be imparted training about the basics and tough chapters should be avoided.
3. The new computer literates should be encouraged to explore the computer on their own.
4. The senior agriculture officials should volunteer for computer training for the subordinates to follow suit.
5. Incentives should be given for utilisation of computers in day-to-day work.