

Gramin Information Centre, Gomukh Trust, Pune, Maharashtra, India

Agriculture Information Centre

Introduction

Description of case Study

Founded in 1995, the Gomukh trust works in 4 main sectors (Water resources, Environment, Agriculture and Livelihood). Their main ICT-related project is the establishment of Information Centres in different villages. They are also planning an Information Hub for the farmers in partnership with the Borawake Agro-Techno-Commercial Foundation (an organisation set up to promote new ideas in agriculture and agrobusiness). This hub would focus on collecting data aimed at the beneficiary villages. Including determining crop pattern as per the agro-climatic zones such as vegetables, fruits, cash crops, medicinal and aromatic plants and oil seeds plus knowledge base for animal wealth through their produce and by-products as economic farm support activities.

The first Information Centre was established in the village called Chale in Pune district in the state of Maharashtra by Gomukh and Mahratta Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture (MCCIA), another NGO. More Information Centres are going to be established, 4 GICs in each district in Maharashtra i.e. totally 23 districts in Maharashtra. Farmers can walk into these GICs for help on various problems including prevention of disease, control, treatment of crop diseases, cropping patterns and even information on weather, rainfall etc. In addition, the project will also link farmers with potential markets across the country and overseas so that he gets a better price for his produces and escapes the clutches of middlemen

Aim of Project

To develop a network of Agri business and food processing sector ultimately to work as network to supply technology information, market intelligence, prices, demand supply and international scenario.

Role of ICTS

To provide agriculture information to rural farmers through the use of the internet.

Sources of Funding

GIC at Chale

Rupees 1,00,000 from the Government of Maharashtra

Rupees 40,000.00 donated from the United Western Bank of India and balance of Rs.

1,00,000 from Gomukh Trust

Development of the Apex Information Hub project

The development of the Apex Information Hub, which is the proposed project, is estimated at about \$ 1.25 million. The project development cost will be about \$1.75 million. Thus the total cost of the project will be about \$3million.

Funded through: Government of Maharashtra; United Western Bank of India; Gomukh Trust

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Project process

A major problem for the farmers has been the lack of access to key information. Markets too far away have left behind legacy of low yields and exploitation by middle men out to make a killing. The information centre plans to battle this trend by connecting the farmer to the selling arena.

A model Gramin Information Centre will have 1 server and 3 user nodes. The management of these centres will be carried out by local people/ local NGO. The one existing centre at Chale is being looked after by 'Gomukh'. The participation level of local people is gradually improving with the increase in the awareness level of information technology in these areas. The involvement of local youths from villages, who are well aware of the agro-climatic conditions, soil conditions of that region would increase to manage these information centres. These persons are generally agriculture graduates. It is intended that such graduates will be specially trained as service providers in operational aspects of computers, use of Internet facility and search retrieval and giving the required/relevant data to the farmers and Agribusiness Entrepreneurs in local language.

Gomukh has taken a membership of a site called www.agriwatch.com from where farmers can get the information about market rates from major markets in India, good farm practices and techniques and farming technology is also used. Currently there are a few computers connected to the Internet. The staff at the Gramin Information Centre use the Internet to provide information relevant to farmers thus keeping them updated in the field of agriculture. At present, it is the only ICT related activity in the Information Centre.

Points of Interest

Frequent electricity cuts, computer illiteracy and lack of knowledge of the English language. Hence the farmers cannot use information from the net directly but have to depend on the local staff.

A 'rice programme' using the facilities of GIC and the registration onto www.agriwatch.com, had increased rice yield from 1.5 tons to 7 tons per hectare. To encourage the spread of organic farming and increase farmers' income, some farmers were sent to Jalgaon (a town in Maharashtra state) after which 37 farmers started organic farming. In an agreement with Gomukh, a company named Ion Exchange will now guarantee assured prices for the farmers' produce.