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An analysis of farmers' capacity of using information communication technology (ICT) to acquire agricultural information: a case study in Hungama area

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Agriculture sector contributes about 16.5% GDP of Sri Lankan economy and 32.2 percent of employment generation. Currently, ICT is the important and powerful tool to fulfil the information requirement of the agriculture sector. In present context the traditional agricultural extension (TAE) and transfer of technology (TOT) would be either shifted or link with ICT. This study was focused to identify the farmers' capacity to use ICT tools, to identify the most convenience ICT tools that can be used to acquire the information by vegetable farmers, to identify the type of information farmers are expecting via ICT, to identify the bottleneck to promote the ICT tools among farmers and to introduce appropriate suggestions to improve their knowledge by using ICT tools. Vegetable farmers in Hungama area were selected as target population and study location respectively. Both primary and secondary data sources were used for the analysis. Data were collected with the help of personal interviews and observations methods. Further, respondents were selected by using random sample methods. Sample size was 35. The descriptive statistics and correlation test were used to analyse the data. Majority were middle age, full time, middle experience farmers and practicing mono cropping system. Majority of farmers' family size was medium size and cultivated land size was less than 0.4ha while majority belong to middle income group. Further majority have participated at least one extension programme. However their ICT capacity is significantly poor. Lack of time, technological barriers such as low ability to use computer and ICT and poor English language ability were the most crucial problem for farmers. Therefore, their background does not facilitate to use the ICT in decision making process related to agriculture sector. On this background, significant initiations are required to increase the farmers' capacity on ICT. In this regard, strengthen of farmer and farm organizations determine the most important requirement to popularize the ICT among the farmers. Therefore, community based organization and officers of farm organization, extension officers and grass root level institutes viz. NGOs, Nenasala and Vidhatha centres should be taken this responsibility.

Keywords: information communication technology, ICT capacity and ICT Tools