

Introduction

Realizing the growing importance of information in agricultural development, the Agriculture Information Section (AIS) became operational in 1965 as a separate unit in the Department of Agriculture. This section was renamed as Agriculture Communication Division (ACD) in 1990. In course of restructuring of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives in 2000, it was given its current name of Agricultural Information and Communication Center (AICC) and was attached to the Ministry as one of its central units with greater role and responsibility.

AICC is a professional wing of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives entrusted to produce agricultural information relevant to farmers, traders, entrepreneurs and professionals and to communicate the information through Radio, Television and Print media. The Center also bears the additional responsibility and challenge of managing and using digital information generated recently by the growing application of personal computer, internet and mobile telephone in modernizing agricultural development in the country.

Vision

Building an organization driven by information and communication technology (ICT) capable of ensuring timely, faster and relevant access to information to facilitate agricultural stakeholders and practitioners for building knowledge based farm communities.

Mission

Serving as a full-fledged Center founded on ICT culture to

motivate communities to adopt knowledge-based agricultural systems by fostering greater organizational efficiency and interrelationships among farmers, extension workers, researchers and entrepreneurs.

Organizational Objectives

1. To fulfill the information needs of agricultural practitioners and farm communities through the use of modern information and communication technology.
2. To identify, capture, document and disseminate agricultural information and knowledge resources for professionals, stakeholders, producers, processors and traders in easy, transparent and faster ways.
3. To motivate farmers and growers using media of mass communication to adopt modern farm practices in order to increase farm productions.
4. To develop networks of agricultural information and communication systems to enhance information sharing within and among stakeholder organizations.
5. To help close the digital divide between rich and poor farmers, urban and rural areas through innovative use of ICT in a way to ensure food security, poverty alleviation and sustainable agricultural development.

Major Functions

- Production and broadcast of farm radio programs and agricultural news,
- Production and broadcast of video documentaries,

agricultural programs and news from Nepal Television,

- ✿ Publication and distribution of bimonthly agricultural magazine, diary, calendar, booklet, folder and print works.
- ✿ Agricultural information collection, documentation, maintaining digital library and website updating.
- ✿ Acquisition and completion of programs that are available under working fund act (WFA).

Program Activities

Farm Radio Program

Radio has been the most effective means of mass communication since its establishment in 1951 in Nepal. Its broadcasts in short wave are received all over the country while 83 percent of the population can receive medium wave broadcast. It is estimated that there are about 2.5 million radio sets in the country. AICC has been running its farm radio program since December 10, 1966. It produces seven programs a week of 15-minute duration each in its own studios and aired on Radio Nepal from 6.40 to 6.55 daily at the evening time (Table 1). Regional stations of Radio Nepal are also running agricultural programs and some private FM radios have also been broadcasting farm programs produced locally.



Table 1. Farm Radio Broadcast Schedule

Day	Activity (Time 6.40-6.55 pm)
Sunday	Agricultural news
Monday	Your questions and our answers
Tuesday	Agricultural Research and Development
Wednesday	Interview with farmer and specialist
Thursday	Livestock farming radio magazine
Friday	Dialogue between JTA and old woman
Saturday	Commercial Agriculture

Agriculture Television Program

Nepal Television (NTV), which started its service in 1984, has 3 studios and 15 broadcasting centers telecasting to about 50 percent of land coverage and 65 percent of population coverage in Nepal. NTV is using geo-satellite to broadcast its programs and capable of live cast with its Digital Satellite News Gathering (DSNG) equipment from any part of the country. Its second channel the metro NTV2 is also running in the recent years while 3 of 5 licensed private television companies are providing services at this time. There have been 326 licensed cable TV operators, of which 206 cable TV companies are operating in different parts across the country.

AICC has been telecasting 15 minutes program since 1996 from NTV daily at the evening time (Table 2). From the mid July 2006, the telecasting duration has been extended to 20 minutes. The video unit of



AICC produces a number of documentaries on various aspects of farming annually and broadcast through NTV agricultural program. From October 2004, *Agricultural News* has been broadcasting on Friday of each week. AICC in collaboration with NTV has recently restructured its program format to introduce value-added services reflecting the changed needs of the users.

Table 2. Television Program Schedule

Days	Activity (6:30-6:50)
Sunday	Discussion on Agricultural Issues
Monday	Success Story
Tuesday	Farmers' Problems and Technicians' Reply
Wednesday	Agriculture Technology
Thursday	Agriculture in Foreign Country
Friday	Agricultural News
Saturday	Agricultural Teleserial

AICC publication and Print media

AICC has been publishing *Krishi*, a vernacular bimonthly agriculture magazine for over 40 years. It has been updated and reformed in its look and style recently. The center's other publications are agriculture diary, booklets, leaflets, and calendars. Among these publications booklet and folder are distributed free of cost to the farmers, agriculture technicians and other



concerned persons. Bimonthly magazine and calendar are provided to the central as well district level offices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives on a quota basis. In case of Bimonthly magazine, there is provision of subscription as annual and life memberships to the persons and organizations.



Computer Application and Internet Use

Computer, email and Internet have become increasingly popular since the introduction of computers in Nepal by the government in 1971. With access to low cost personal computers in recent years and the growing involvement of private sector in computer business, the availability of internet became possible only towards 1993-94 but in limited scale. The rate of computerization and automation in public sector remained still low as most computers are used for word processing purpose.

AICC possesses about a dozen of computers with radio link broad band connectivity installed at the Center. This has given a way to reform governance making the organization more efficient, transparent and effective in the exchange of information within and between organizations. To be of use AICC has created its web portal www.aicc.gov.np in which general agricultural statistics of Nepal and



introduction of organizations, departments, centers, boards and committees under the ministry are placed. As an electronic journal the bimonthly agriculture-*Krishi* has also been put in the website as pdf file which can easily be downloaded and read. The National Agriculture Policy 2004, Agriculture Business Policy 2004, and a number of booklets on various aspects of agricultural technologies are also kept in the website. As these materials are in vernacular Nepali, any citizen and literate farmer can read and get benefited from the information. The portal is also a gateway to all government ministries and relevant organizations as they are linked to the website. Some important websites linked to this URL are www.moac.gov.np, www.nardf.org.np, and www.narc.nepal.org

Program Implementation

Coordination Committee and Editorial Board

A coordination committee headed by the Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives serves as an apex body to guide, support and evaluate the programs formulated under the working fund act. The major chunk of fund is used in publishing agriculture diary, calendar, and agricultural technology book (first time published). The resource generation under this fund comes from the donation of the government of Nepal, fee and rent as charged to the agencies for its services offered on various activities.

To support the publication of the bimonthly *krishi* magazine there exists an editorial board chaired by the Secretary of MOAC. The Chief of the center acts as Member-Secretary and chief Editor for the Coordination

Committee and the Board respectively.

AICC Operation

The head of the center is called centre Chief and acts as the principal executive officer of AICC in respect to administrative and financial management, planning, implementation and evaluation of program activities. A team of six professional officers along with 28 non-gazetted staffs supports the chief on day-to-day works at the center.

Currently there are six technical units in AICC as given below. In addition to these units, there is a support unit for finance, administration and store.

1. Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit
2. Agricultural Information & Documentation Unit
3. Audio-Visual Unit
4. Farm Radio Unit
5. Publication Material Production Unit
6. Printing and Distribution Unit

Physical Facilities

The AICC has following equipments and machines:

Offset press machine	2 sets
Radio recording studio	2 sets
Video editing room	1 set
Video camera	2 sets
Digital camera	2 sets

Field recorders	3 sets
Computers	10 sets
LCD projector	1 set
Slide projector	1 set
Photocopy machine	1 set
Non linear editing equipment	1 set

Recent Initiatives and Achievements

- Agricultural News Broadcasting in Radio and Nepal Television,
- Establishment of Information and Documentation Unit,
- Reformed in the entire Agriculture Television program making inclusion of teleserial, Agriculture talk and Agriculture in foreign countries in the weekly format.
- Website Construction and Online Magazine, Statistics, and Booklets Hosting,
- Radio Link High Speed Internet Connection at the AICC Premises,
- Improvement in the Structure and Look of the Bimonthly Magazine, *Krishi*,
- Agriculture Technology Book (Nepali) Published and Distribution in Progress.

ICT Guidelines and Directives*

ICT has been recognized as one of the most important infrastructures for spurring agricultural development. Many of the existing conventional methods and technologies have become obsolete or ineffective at the advent of global IT revolution. It is therefore imperative for us to reap the fruit of IT revolution in bringing farm communities into the chain of ICT to build a sustainable and knowledge based farming system. The challenge that lays ahead us is how to utilize ICT effectively for the benefit of the masses of the farmers at the grass root levels. To address such a question and to bring ICT at farmers' doorsteps in playing a greater role in farm technology diffusion, rural market integration and to diversify productive capacity of rural people, the Government of Nepal, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, on the initiation of AICC, has made the following decisions (22.10.2061) on the application of ICT in agricultural development in the country.

Central Level

- Establishment of Agricultural Information and Documentation Unit (AIDU) at AICC to collect agricultural information, processing and distribution management and making available of new technologies to technicians, farm communities and concern agencies through CD-ROM library, CD and emails ,
- Gradual computer networking of central, regional and district agencies under the ministry of agriculture and

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cooperatives to the central agricultural information and documentation system.

- Agricultural programs on radio and television will be made more informative and attractive to the audience and collaborative works will be launched with the local FM radios.
- AICC will focus its attention to publish materials related to common problem of technology, market development and policy matters on agricultural development.
- Monitoring and coordination of agricultural information and communication programs implemented by the regional and district offices.
- Formulation of working procedures for the establishment of rural agricultural information center (RAIC) at the districts.
- To include the above-mentioned agenda, program formulation will be done based on the priority and within the approved budget ceilings.

Regional Level

- To strengthen the regional agriculture communication unit one of the agriculture extension officers at the

Regional Directorate of Agriculture is given responsibility of the unit. Agriculture communication unit should implement the agriculture information and communication programs in coordination with the Regional Directorate of Livestock Services and other allied agencies.

- Carry out the role of coordination and monitoring for the farm radio programs implemented by the district offices. In coordination of district agencies and private broadcasters programs to be formulated to make the on going regional radio program more effective and region specific.
- Formulation of program to establish regional agricultural information and documentation unit.
- Organize at least one workshop a year for an interaction among local press, representatives of national media, agricultural technicians, local bodies and NGOs to make them known about the regional agricultural information and communication and other activities.

District Level

- Agriculture extension officer (AEO) of DADO is made responsible to formulate and implement agricultural information and communication program in coordination with other related agencies at the district.

- Formulate programs to establish agricultural information and documentation unit (AIDU) at DADO.
- Adopt print and publication program based on the local needs and feasibility.
- In view of the local needs and feasibility initiate the launching of farm radio program from the local FM station.
- Formulate programs to motivate local cooperatives or farmer's groups to create Rural Agricultural Information Center (RAIC) through the identification and with collaboration of communities, local cooperative societies, VDCs, DDCs and local NGOs.
- Plan for an *E-extension* to be implemented as pilot project through RAIC or active groups of farmers in the district.
- Allocate necessary budget provision for one officer and one JT/JTA working in the related area for their training on e-mail and Internet, radio, television and print media journalism and information reporting. The duration of such training is one week for officers and two weeks for JT/JTAs. Training coordination will be done by AICC.