

ASHA: Hope for Farm Prosperity

Provision of Agribusiness services using ICT by Assam SFAC, INDIA

Web portal : www.assamagribusiness.nic.in

Goal : Empowerment and well being of **Farmers and other partners of Farm Sector / Agribusiness** and increased livelihood opportunities using ICT.

Objectives of ASHA:

1. Knowledge and Value Addition networking: To provide a platform for enabling easy, efficient, reliable and cost effective communication among Agribusiness partners viz., Farmers, Government, Technological, Financial and other Institutions, Civil Society, local self Governments and Corporate; and facilitate team work under one umbrella for avowed objective of maximization of incomes with sustainability and sustainable livelihoods to the extent possible. There by take part in achieving the first UN Millennium Development Goal, namely the elimination of hunger and poverty.
2. Knowledge Access: To ensure easy access to and to popularize various opportunities to Farmers -offered by Government, Technology, Institutions, Market and Voluntarism by circumventing the conventional extension barriers- human element and their capacities and motivation, time bound services, resource constraint, and difficulties in coordinating knowledge dissemination among various partners. On the other side it will aim at harnessing the investments and expand the reach out of knowledge based institutions.
3. Linkages: To provide and strengthen linkages in Farm chain –farm to firm to fork and facilitate value addition.
4. Entrepreneurship: To bring in business orientation and entrepreneurship development among the farmers- especially among the small and marginal farmers.

5. Capacity Building: Capacity and confidence building of farmers, Government Functionaries and other partners in performance of their business and duties and maximize profits and satisfaction.
6. Complementarily: To complement the existing conventional extension machinery (5000 personnel to cover more than 5 million farmers in the state of Assam) in its mandate.
7. To associate with others - building ICT infrastructure network, tools & techniques.

Service Sectors : Farm Sector -comprising

- ❖ Agriculture
- ❖ Horticulture
- ❖ Animal Husbandry and Veterinary
- ❖ Fishery
- ❖ Sericulture

Target Group :

- ❖ Farmers / Producer Organizations
- ❖ Government Functionaries
- ❖ Scientists / Technologists
- ❖ Bankers
- ❖ Institutions
- ❖ Civil Society
- ❖ Corporate / Traders

Services offered (Illustrative list):

Scientific Production Practices	Agribusiness News	Credit and Banking	Corporate Corner
Market Price	Events	Insurance	Agribusiness Institutions
Weather	Contact Numbers	Marketing	Laws and policies
Environment	Success Stories	Processing	Export and WTO

Schemes	Producer Organizations	Technology	Statistics
Trainings	NGOs/ SHGs	Entrepreneurship	Buy and Sell
Crop / Enterprise Guide	Research and Development Institutions	Quality Certification	Project Profiles
Ask Expert	Disaster Management	Consultancy	Employment

Service Delivery Mechanism:

The organized access points of ICT services are Community Information Centres (CICs) located in 219 Community Rural Development Blocks of the state. These centres were set up by the Government of India and Government of Assam jointly and were inaugurated in 2002 and were earlier known as Youth Computer literacy centres. After the launch of ASHA by Assam SFAC, these centres' image has been transformed to that of Community Knowledge Centres where in farmer could relate him /her self with the benefit of ICT. For availing the services farmers are being enrolled as members of CICs on nominal user fees, while orientation is being offered on free of cost.

ASHA Frame work: visit- www.assamagribusiness.nic.in/framework.doc

Photo gallery: visit- www.assamagribusiness.nic.in/pgallery.htm

Partners:

Farmers and Producer Organisations

Government of Assam

Departments- Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, Fishery, Sericulture, Industry and Commerce, Information Technology, Soil Conservation, Irrigation, Panchayat and Rural Development, Welfare Plain Tribes and Backward Classes, Minorities Welfare and Development and several others.

Government of India-

Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (NIC)

Ministry of Agriculture (SFAC)

North East Council (NERIWALM)

R & D and other Institutions:

Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) National Institutions

Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship, Guwahati

Financial Institutions:

NABARD Assam and RRBs

SBI Assam

Corporate:

Seeds / Pesticides/ Fertiliser / Farm Machinery and Implements Companies

(in process)

Community Information Centres: located in 219 Community Development Blocks.

Panchayat Raj Institutions and Civil Society: A number of NGOs.

Other partnerships:

Part of Open eNRICH – a joint initiative of NIC and OWSA

Mission 2007 Alliance under the chairmanship of Prof.M.S.Swaminathan.

<http://www.mission2007.org/mission2007/partners/list/>

ASHA as a Business:

Date of Launch of the ASHA service : 30th May 2005

Farmers enrolled as on 30th September 2005 (in 4 months) : >4000

User Fees collected by Community Information Centres : > 3 lakhs (+0.3 million)

Number of hits as on 30th September 2005 : > 41,000

Target to reach out to Farmers per CIC / annum : 3000-5000

In-house Details:

- ❖ Assam SFAC: is a Government of Assam registered Society under Registration of Societies Act, 1860 having a mission objective of “Maximization of Farmers' farm income with sustainability in Farmer-Government-Bank-Institution & Private (FGBIP) partnership in a business model and generation of more livelihood opportunities”. For details visit- www.assamagribusiness.nic.in.

Contact Address of Assam SFAC

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- ❖ ASHA Portal Administrator : Assam SFAC
- ❖ Server and Hosted by : NIC, MICT Government of India
- ❖ Content Development: Assam SFAC is coordinating the collection of relevant, need based and dynamic content, its validation, organization and web development.
- ❖ Connectivity:
The access points of ICT services are Community Information Centres (CICs) located in 219 Community Development Blocks. CIC Infrastructure comprise: 5 computer systems with printing facility, VSAT (for internet) and a TV in a weather proof civil structure located in Public Premises.
- ❖ Capacity building :
All the Agricultural functionaries right from the Directorate till the Field level Agricultural Development officers including Representatives of Civil society, Farm Entrepreneurs, Research Institutions and trading community are given one day orientation both theory and hands on session at State Level. Other line Department District and Field officers – Animal Husbandry, Fishery and Sericulture are given orientation at District NIC Centres / CICs.

Representatives of Local self Government (Panchayat Raj Institutions -PRI) are being given orientation at CICs itself. Community mobilization process is going on with the active involvement of Government functionaries; Civil Society (NGOs), PRIs and Entrepreneurs.

- ❖ Promotion / Marketing of initiative: is being undertaken through Mass media.

Unique features of ASHA web portal:

- ❖ Only portal in the country offering services on five sectors of farming under one umbrella.
- ❖ Perhaps the only web portal which brought most of GOI Ministries and State Government Departments related to Farm Sector on one platform- for the benefit of Farmers, Government Functionaries, NGOs, Corporate and others.
- ❖ Only portal offering most of the schemes of GOI and State Government, along with their guidelines.
- ❖ Only portal offering modern cultivation / management practices of a number of crops / animals / enterprises from various reliable sources.
- ❖ Only portal offering the comprehensive list of training institutions of Farm Sector in the Country while offering market information, Weather service and statistics in the state of Assam.
- ❖ The only portal offering wealth of information of Assam Farm Sector for the attention of corporate and to facilitate Agri-business in the state.
- ❖ Initiative with a comprehensive framework for implementation.

Feed back of ASHA –ICT based agribusiness services in the state of Assam:

1. The Farmers and Government Functionaries (who were other wise digitally illiterate, mostly) are showing much interest on this mode of hassle free extension and availing services and their response is growing with every day. Farmers are particularly very happy to access and avail scientific production practices, scheme guidelines, training details, market prices, weather, contact numbers, High Yielding varieties names and sources, expert advice etc with ease in place of earlier difficulties in finding to contact the local officials for the same information.

The farmer enrolment at CICs upon user fees payment is a clear demonstration of farmer's interest, Government functionaries and Civil Society involvement in community mobilisation and usefulness of ICT initiative.

2. Besides Farmers, other rural masses including local self Government Panchayat representatives are relating themselves with the benefits of Information and Communication Technology.
3. The posting of five sectors- Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, Fishery and Sericulture under one umbrella has tremendous impact and positive response among the farmers.
4. The scientific community (AAU) is finding it easy and effective to reach out to both Government functionaries and farmers simultaneously with almost no cost through this initiative, compared to resource intensive and adhoc conventional system of first training Departmental functionaries and then training the farmers.
5. There has been tremendous confidence building among the Government functionaries to update their knowledge on various spheres and current events in Agribusiness.
6. The CIC which used to be Youth Computer Literacy Centres have transformed into Community Knowledge centres and their infrastructure is being harnessed to their fullest potential for Farm prosperity, supporting rural economy. These CICs could attract the attention of administration and thus activated CIC management committees and local populace to improve their management and service delivery.
7. Agriculture Marketing network has been fully activated from its moribund status and increasingly realising its accountability and responsibility with growing awareness of Farmers and Traders.
8. Since the launch of ASHA- There is a visible necessity and importance being felt by Government Departments, Agricultural University, Institutions, Bankers, Civil Society, Traders and Farmers for close networking and synergy.
9. There is a growing Transparency in organisational structures and activities of Farm Sector related Departments- manpower in position till grassroots level along with their contact numbers, legislation, Success Stories, Trainings, activities etc.
10. Most important observation is a sense of ownership of this initiative by Farmers, Government, University, Finance Institutions, Civil Society, Traders

and others with their involvement in needs assessment, provision of local content (events, trainings, success stories, contact numbers etc) and feedback on regular basis.

Learning Points:

1. Promotion of Initiative.
2. Need to expedite the localisation of content.
3. Deficiency free ICT is basic requirement for reliable services.
4. Increased demand for ICT infrastructure, reliable connectivity and more capacities.
5. To expand the networking of knowledge based institutions and corporate.
6. Digitisation of knowledge by every institution requiring basic IT infrastructure support, is the basic necessity for timely and quality content development and the need for national standards / norms for sharing.
7. There is a very large hidden demand for relevant knowledge and information in the community not being addressed by field systems but is possible only with the ICT. Further the needs are changing with the change in socio-economic environment and concerns. This suggests a need to study the growing information needs of farmers, government functionaries, traders, Bankers and R & D institutions for farm prosperity on regular basis and accordingly work out content development.
8. Promotion of initiative is very essential for success.
9. CIC initiative is financially sustainable with adequate arrangements and initiative.
10. Given the magnitude of requirement there is a dire need for public – partnership in ICT.
11. The local self Governments and stakeholders should be members of CIC management committees.

ASHA Vision:

- To reach out to 3000- 5000 farmers per CIC.
- To develop content in local language on dynamic basis along with localisation.

- To develop an alliance / networking of institutions of content and technology of common interest and provision of services with regular technological updation.
- To provide services in partnership with Institutions and Corporate viz., Buy and Sell, Agri-Business, credit, insurance, distance learning, online bazaar, advertisements etc.
- To expand the services through Private Cybercafés / Computer Centres and proposed Common Service Centres & Village Knowledge Centres of Government of India.

Sustainability issues:

Connectivity: There is a need for strong and reliable technological backbone. In the field there is a growing demand for connectivity, ICT infrastructure and technology including language solutions.

Content and Services:

- ❖ Given the multitude of institutions and agencies and partners and the pace of changes consequent to globalization- there is a need for an institutional mechanism / consortium to identify institutions / sources and aggregate, process and share knowledge sector wise with the state which in turn make available the same at kiosk / CIC level dynamically.
- ❖ Simultaneously there is a need to support documentation and digitization of need based and relevant local content including validated and useful traditional knowledge. This requires support to PRIs / SHGs/Civil society.
- ❖ Localization of content in terms of language is a must.
- ❖ Constraint of financial Resources and Web & ICT services.

Care and support:

Institutionalization of CICs & Kiosks as official information delivery channels of all departments and of their schemes including that of bonafide corporate services will further consolidate the initiative. Judicious Integration of National e-Governance Plan, Right to Information Act, Technological changes and Public –Private Partnership into the concept, will automatically ensure financial sustainability.

Coordination: Management of initiative at local, district, state and national level.

Capacity Building: Decentralized Capacity building among Government functionaries, Civil Society, Traders, R & D scientists and mobilization of Farmers at regular intervals by having a concept of Master Trainers and **promotion of initiative** is very critical for the effectiveness, wider reach out of the benefits and for very success of initiative.
