

FINANCIAL EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING – PROJECT APART

A program for Digital Financial Inclusion of Agribusiness Community in Assam

Introduction

There has been a constant need to “add value and improve the resilience of selected agriculture value chains focusing on smallholder farmers and agro-entrepreneurs in districts of Assam” towards agribusiness and rural transformation. And in this, one key area identified is facilitating access to and responsible use of financial services by the farmers’ community in key-value chains including agriculture & horticulture, livestock, fishery, handloom & textiles, and dairy.



Reports and studies have identified that there is a lack of access, demand and uptake, and responsible use of financial services by the greater farming community in Assam, thereby hindering the better management capacity of their cash flows.

The Background

Keeping the above need in mind, the Assam Rural Infrastructure and Agricultural Services Society (ARIAS), Govt. Of Assam, has assigned a consortium of organisations led by the New Delhi-based Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) and Fair Climate Fund, along with the Indian Institute of Bank Management (IIBM) and the Council for Social and Digital Development (CSDD), to implement the project on 'Financial Education and Counselling' (FEC) under the Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project (APART).

The Objective

The objective of this assignment is to reach out to 2, 50,000 farm businesses and entrepreneurs with financial inclusion and services with the innovative design and development of an Information Communication Technology (ICT) based Financial Education Counselling (FEC) program for target beneficiaries to contribute to enhancing their financial inclusion, defined as their access to and prudent use of appropriate financial services.

USP of the project:

- (i) The FEC program has been specifically designed to facilitate access to and responsible use of financial services by the farmers community in key value chains including agriculture & horticulture, livestock, fishery, silk-handloom & textiles and dairy, represented through Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs), Farmers Producer Companies (FPCs), Dairy Cooperative Societies (DCSs), Farmers Producers Organizations (FPOs) and others;
- (ii) Use of integrated Information Communication Technology (ICT) based on Simple – Holistic- Accessible – Ready – Progressive (SHARP) strategy to engage the farm stakeholders, led by the farm communities.

Methodology

FEC program will reach out to 24 districts of Assam covering 2,50,000 APART beneficiaries. The four key components of FEC delivery model will be integrated

to respond to the financial education needs of the group of farmers. These key components are discussed below: -

i) Bittiya Sakhi: The first component includes the ICT based e-learning module through which all the resources and knowledge related to financial education will be disseminated.

ii) Bittiya Sahayak: The second component is the Physical support that will be provided on ground by Bittiya Sahayak or counsellor. Bittiya Sahayak will be local resource person, appointed from local community in each district. Every district will have two or more than two Sahayaks depending on the number of APART beneficiaries present in each district.

iii) Bittiya khetu: The third component will be a call center that will allow farmers to get quick resolution to any doubt or query, that they might have regarding FEC. The call center will also gather feedback on the program.

iv) Bittiya Sewa kendra: The fourth component is Bittiya Sewa kendra. It will be a one stop resource center that will facilitate financial learning and access to the farmer groups. These centers will be equipped with necessary ICT tools with the support of DEF.

Other than above mentioned methodology **sms, farmer's workshop** and **Stakeholder's group discussions** will be important tools used in the program.
