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Job Competence and Job Performance of the Extension Personnel of the Department of Agriculture in Tripura State of North-East India

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ABSTRACT

The main concern in human resource development in agricultural extension organization is the improvement in the performance of the extension personnel. For enhancing the competence and performance of the extension personnel it is very important to delineate the factors responsible for it along with the level of job competence and performance. A study was conducted in Tripura state of north-east India and data was collected from eighty extension personnel [40 Agriculture Officers (AOs) and 40 Village Level Workers (VLWs)] by using structure interview schedule. The findings of the study indicated that most of the AOs had high level of job competence whereas; most of the VLWs had medium level of job competence. AOs had expressed high level of job performance whereas, VLWs had medium level of job performance.

Keywords: Agriculture Officers (AOs), Village Level Workers (VLWs), Job Competence, Job Performance, Tripura

Management of human resources involves several important and complex issues in the form of multidimensional reaction involving employees' perception of the organization climate, their personality background, the objective realization of organizational culture, leadership systems and intergroup relationship. This concept has changed drastically since the days of scientific management (Heyel, 1973). The main concern in the human resource management is the improvement in the performance of the people working in the organization with a view of increasing their efficiency through motivation. To enhance the competence and performance of the extension personnel it is important to know their level of competence and performance to delineate the factors responsible for it. In most of the public sector organization the competence and performance of the staff is

assessed mostly to fulfill the organizational goals such as promotions, transfers and for determining the training needs. Unless the employees are well informed about their performance and also their strong and weak points, it's very difficult for them to improve their level of performance (Mishra, 2005). Moreover agricultural extension organizations need personnel who have characteristics such as performance initiations, better human relations, human and moral commitments, keenness on job and development of services, nonstop endeavors to perform one's duties and vocation. Waldman and Spanhler (1989) indicated that part of an organization's overall effectiveness is influenced by the job knowledge and skills possessed by the employees. Extension agents and specialists needs skill and competence to design, implement and evaluate educational programs for farmers. Lack of proper balance between technical and professional competencies in staff has been identified as a common problem in the extension services of developing countries (Bradfield, 1966; Maunder, 1972; Easter, 1985). Randavay and Vaughn, 1991 and Najjingo and McCaslin, 1991 had identified professional competencies needed by extension personnel in various countries. They indicated that extension agents in developing countries should have professional competence in the areas of administration, program planning and execution evaluation, communications, teaching and extension methods and understanding human behaviour.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reddy (1990) reported that a majority of the AO's (66.11%) were grouped under the category of medium level of job competence. The 18.13% of AO's were in high and 15.56% were in low category of job competence. Saravanan (2003) revealed that a majority of the extension personnel (56.67%) in the Raita Samparka Kendras (Farm Communication Centers) expressed low job competence; followed by medium (26.67%) and high (16.67%) level of job competence.

Mishra *et al.,* (2006) reported that the overall job performance of the Extension Officers was medium (75.41%), whereas it was also indicated that job performance of man (74.29%) and women (76.92%) was medium. Slightly higher percentage of women officers were in high performance category compared to man, which was due to the reason that women have joined the organization recently and are a little enthusiastic in performing their job. Rezaei *et al*., (2010) in Iran indicated that almost half of the respondents (50.7%) were under intermediate level of job performance, whereas 38.8% under high and 10.4% were under low level of job performance category. Reddy (1990) reported that 63.33% of the Agriculture Officers working under Training and Visit System in Andhra Pradesh belonged to the medium category of job performance; whereas 20% belonged to the high and 16.67% belonged to low performance category. Sunil (1991) revealed that a majority (71.85%) of the agricultural assistants belonged to medium job performance category; while only 13.59% of the agricultural assistants came under

low and high job performance category. Rath (1992) reported that 78% of the Subject Matter Specialists under Training and Visit system in Orissa were medium job performance category; while 21% were in high job performance category and only 1% of the Subject Matter Specialists were in low job performance category. Prabhakar (1994) reported that only 40% of the Horticultural Assistants in Karnataka were in high performance category as against 60% in low category. Manjunath *et al.,* (1996) observed that the agricultural assistants were more or less evenly distributed in high (48.33%) and low (51.67%) level of job performance category. Sunil and Sundaraswamy (1996) reported that a majority (71.85%) of the agricultural assistants were in medium job performance category as compared to low (13.80%) and high (14.6%) level of performance category. Jaiswal *et al.,* (1997) indicated that 59% of the Rural Extension Officer in Maharastra belonged to medium category of job performance; followed by 22% in low and 19% in the high job performance category. Halkatti and Sunderaswamy (1998) revealed that 71.85% of the Agricultural Assistants working under Training and Visit system belonged to medium job performance category; while 13.59% and 14.56% of them belonged to low and high job performance category. Prabhakar *et al.,* (1998) reported that a majority (60%) of Horticultural Assistants in Karnataka were under low performance category; while remaining 40% were under high performance category. Manjula (2000) indicated that more than one-third of AAOs belonged to medium job performance category; while one-third (34%) of them were high performance category. Saravanan (2003) reported that 71.67% of extension personnel of Raita Samparka Kendras (Farm Communication Centers) had low level of job performance; followed by high (16.67%) and low (11.67%) level of job performance. Mishra (2005) in Karnataka state reported that only 9.84% were in high job performance category, a majority (75.41%) belonged to medium and remaining 14.75% of the Extension Officers were in low performance category. Sandika (2006) in Karnataka state reported that 55% of the respondents belonged to medium level of job performance category; while 12% and 33% of them belonged to low and high level of job performance category, respectively. Kiran (2007) reported that a majority of the scientists (55%) belonged to medium level of job performance category; followed by 30% of the respondents belonged to high level of job performance category and 15% of them belong to low level of job performance category.

From the above review it can be seen that majority of the respondents were under medium and low level of job competence category and majority of the respondent falls under medium level of job performance category.

With this background it was felt necessary to assess the job competencies and job performance of the extension personnel of the Department of Agriculture (DoA) in Tripura state of North-East India.

METHODOLOGY

The research study was conducted in all four districts of Tripura *i.e.* West Tripura district, South Tripura district, North Tripura district and Dhalai district.

Tripura is one of the remotest states in North-East region having a total area of 10, 492 Sq. Km. and International Border with Bangladesh is 856 km. The 60% of the area is hilly terrain, 60% forest, 52.76% forest cover, 39% reserve forest and 25% net shown area. The average land holding is 0.58 hectare. Temperature varies between 10 to 35oC and average annual rainfall is 2100 mm. Total population of Tripura was almost 3.7 million (2011 census). The main crops are rice, wheat, sugarcane, cotton, jute, mesta, pulses, oil seed, potato, maize and other fruit crops like mango, pineapple, orange, jackfruit, coconut and summer and winter vegetables (Source: http://www.agritripura.in/Agriculture/Pages/agri.htm).

The economy of Tripura is primarily agrarian. The Agriculture sector contributes about 51% of total employment in the state and about 28% of the State Domestic Product (SDP). About 70% of the total population of the state is dependent on Agriculture. Nevertheless, the rapid growth of population and limited irrigation facilities has made the state still a food deficit state.

Based on the random sampling method a total of 80 extension personnel [40 Agriculture Officers (AOs) and 40 Village Level Workers (VLWs)] that is 10 numbers of AOs and 10 numbers of VLWs were selected from each district.

MEASUREMENT OF THE VARIABLES

There was two dependent variables, job competence and job performance for the study and 12 independent variables selected for the study *i.e.* education level, experience in extension work, job autonomy, perceived workload, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, accountability to clientele, organizational climate, guidance and supervision, facilities and resources, communication and perceived problems.

JOB COMPETENCE

Job competence was operationalized as "sufficiency or adequacy of the abilities or qualities possessed by a job incumbent which aid him in achieving the intended results" (Reddy, 1990). There were ten dimensions in the job competence scale developed by Reddy (1990) *viz.,* technical knowledge, guidance, communication ability, adaptability, self development, creativity, empathy, mental agility, initiative and judgment.

The scale contained 60 items on three point continuum of responses such as great deal, to some extent and not at all and the weightages given for scoring were 2, 1

and 0, respectively. The range of score that could be possible on the scale in case of each respondent was a maximum of 120 and minimum of 0.

Further the respondents were categorized into three categories taking mean and standard deviation as measures of check.

Job Competence

Sl. No.	Category	Job Competence Score
1	Low < Mean ± ½ SD	Up to 78.26
2	Medium = Mean ± ½ SD	78.27 to 89.31
3	High > Mean + ½ SD	89.32 and above

Job Performance

The job performance of extension personnel was operationalized as "the degree to which an extension personnel accomplishes the tasks assigned to him in terms of quality and quantity" (Reddy, 1990).

Job performance of extension personnel was measured (qualitative aspects) using seven components *viz*., planning, education, supply and service, supervision, co-ordination, office work and evaluation. Seventy-three job performance items were administered on three point continuum *viz.,* most efficient, efficient and not efficient with a score of 2, 1 and 0, respectively. The scores ranging from zero to 146 formed the lowest and highest scores possible on the scale. Then the respondents were categorized in to three groups based on mean and standard deviation.

Sl. No.	Category	Job Performance Score
1	Low < Mean - ½ SD	Up to 60.37
2	Medium = Mean ± ½ SD	60.38 to 71.25
3	High > Mean + ½ SD	71.26 and above

EXTENSION PERSONNEL'S CHARACTERISTICS

To quantify the extension personnel's characteristics, standard measurement tools such as; scales, index and structured schedule have been used. Personnel interview method was employed for collection of data. To find out the association between job competence, job performance and extension personnel's characteristics, chi-square test was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Job Competence

Most of the AOs had high level of job competence. This is due to the fact that they are having good knowledge on recent technology, good communication ability,

more opportunity for self-development, empathy for farmers, they can initiate what they want, they gave proper guidance to the subordinates, they were having good technical knowledge and had opportunity for creative thinking. The AOs used simple language while writing, spoke in an understandable way, wrote message clearly and convincingly, allowed others to give their ideas, sustained interest all through the work. They were interested in acquiring new skills, interested to go for higher studies, willing to undergo in-service training, keen to know solutions to field problems, keen to gain subject matter related work, regular in reading periodicals of professional interest, appreciate others opinion, understood others problems to help them out, appreciated good qualities in others, understood reasons for subordinates failure and wrong doing of a superior.

The VLWs had medium level of job competence which is due to most of them do not have any subordinates, they were more experienced after working in same village for long time and they could communicate easily with the farmers as they belonged from the same area. They could initiate work, had good technical

Table 1: Job Competence Category of the Extension Personnel

Sl. No.	Category	AOs (n=40)		VLWs (n=40)	
		Mean Score	Per cent	Mean Score	Per cent
1	Low (Up to 78.26)	72.62	28.13	69.38	25.00
2	Medium (78.27 to 89.31)	88.33	25.00	80.33	40.63
3	High (89.32 and above)	101.09	46.88	91.43	34.38

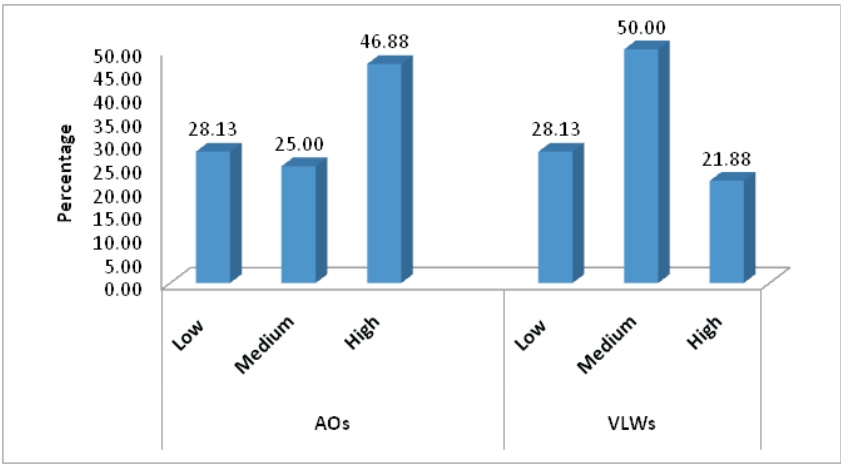

Fig. 1: Job competence category of the extension personnel

knowledge and empathy for people. VLWs used appropriate channel to convey messages, initiated necessary action on time, encouraged farmers to cooperate in implementing extension programme, did their duties sincerely, encouraged subordinates to work hard, knew the important varieties suitable for the area, knew about better seed selection, they also knew about trends in marketing and had adequate knowledge about recent farming technologies.

The result was in line with Reddy (1990) as he concluded that a majority of the AOs were grouped under medium level of job competence as in the case of VLWs in the present study.

Table 2: Item wise calculated mean score and index of the job competence sub-items

Sl. No.	Job Competence Statements	AOs			VLWs		
		Mean score	Index	Rank	Mean score	Index	Rank
1	Communicative ability	9.53	79.41	I	10.34	86.20	I
2	Self development	9.53	79.41	II	7.97	66.41	VI
3	Empathy	9.21	76.72	III	8.19	68.23	V
4	Initiative	8.97	74.75	IV	8.84	73.70	II
5	Guidance	8.71	72.55	V	5.84	48.70	X
6	Judgment	8.56	71.32	VI	7.63	63.54	VIII
7	Technical knowledge	8.29	69.12	VII	8.81	73.44	III
8	Adaptability	8.00	66.67	VIII	7.16	59.64	IX
9	Creativity	7.71	64.22	IX	7.91	65.89	VII
10	Mental agility	7.74	64.46	X	8.66	72.14	IV

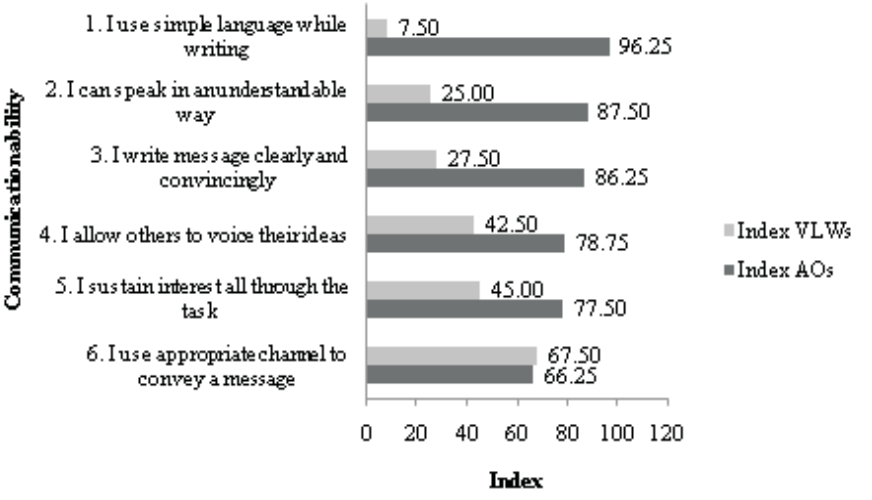

Fig. 2: Item wise index of communication ability items

The overall communication ability of the VLWs was better than the AOs as maximum of the VLWs used to be posted in their native area only. But the language used by the AOs while writing and speaking was simple for a general population whereas, the language used by the VLWs was easily understandable for the people of a particular area only.

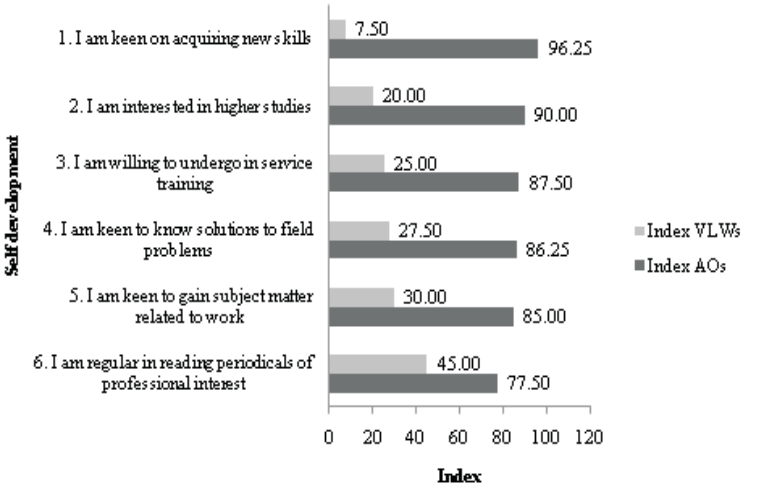

Fig. 3 Item wise index of self-development items

The opportunity and interest for self-development was higher for the AOs than the VLWs. The AOs were very much interested in acquiring knowledge related to agriculture and allied development and they used to spend more time for their self-development than the VLWs.

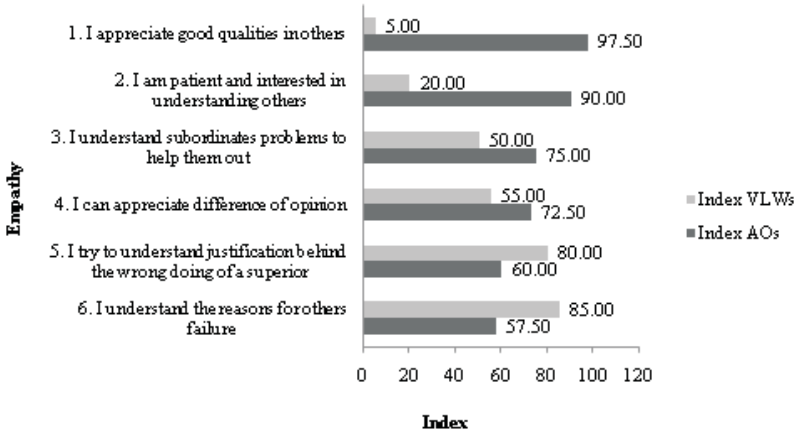

Fig. 4: Item wise index of empathy items

The AOs were more empathetic than the VLWs while judging others. The AOs used to think of all the possible alternatives before making decision on others behavior. But the VLWs were more empathetic to their superior and understand the behavior of the supervisor properly.

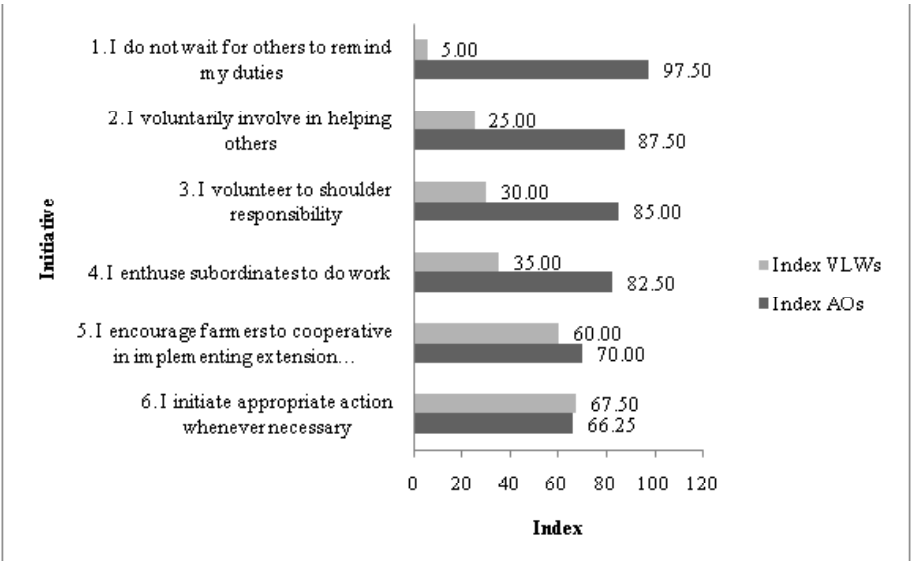

Fig. 5: Item wise index of initiative items

According to the VLWs, they took more initiative than the AOs while working in the department. But the voluntarily work was more from the AOs side than the VLWs. As most of the VLWs work in their native village, they were more successful in initiating new work in the village for large scale adoption.

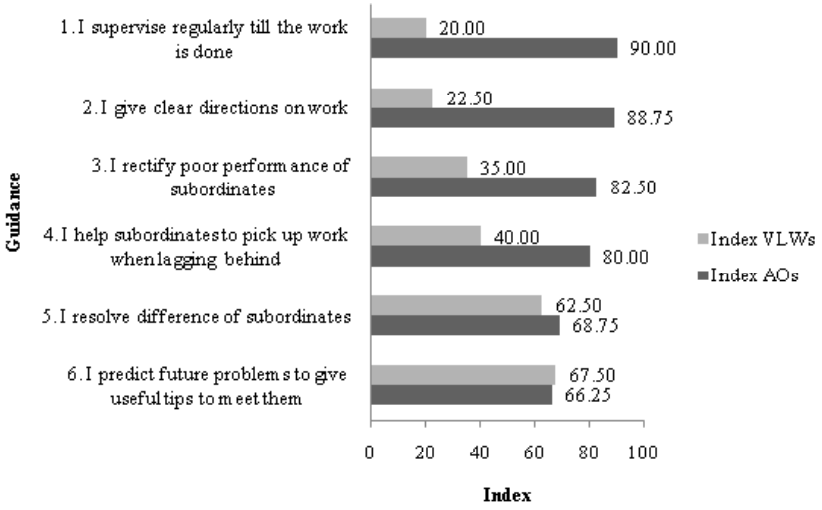

Fig. 6: Item wise index of guidance items

Most of the VLWs did not have any subordinates. But the AOs were the immediate supervisor of the VLWs. The AOs were good guide for the VLWs for giving timely and useful advice/ suggestion for agricultural development of the area. The AOs always guide the VLWs for better performance.

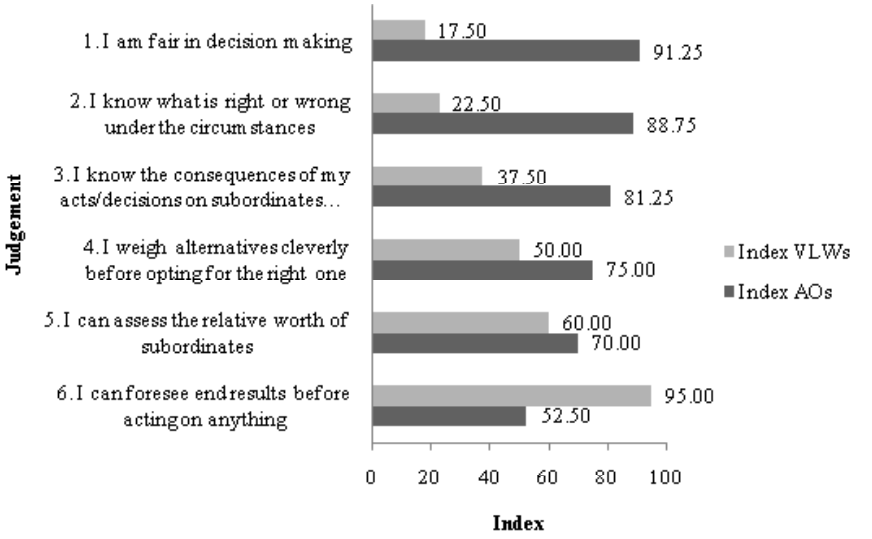

Fig. 7: Item wise index of judgment items

The judging capacities of the AOs were better than the VLWs as they were highly educated and had more knowledge about agriculture. The AOs always took appropriate decision after properly judging the circumstances and could predict the future consequences. The AOs also could foresee the potentiality of a subordinate.

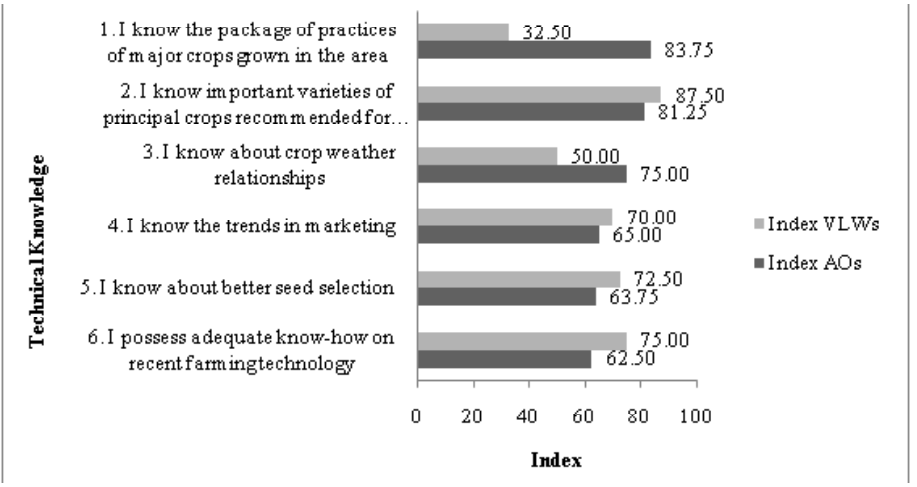

Fig. 8: Item wise index of technical knowledge.

According to the VLWs, they had more technical knowledge about agriculture in a particular area than the AOs as they were more experienced than AOs and working in the same area for a longer period of time. The VLWs were familiar with the day to day activities for agriculture, cropping pattern and upcoming event for cultivation in that area.

Fig. 9: Item wise index of adaptability items

The AOs had better adaptability than the VLWs as most of the AOs were posted in a new place, but most of the VLWs used to get posted in their native village/ town. As the AOs know it will be difficult for them to get posting in the native area they could managed to adjust themselves to a new situation and with new people in a better way than the VLWs.

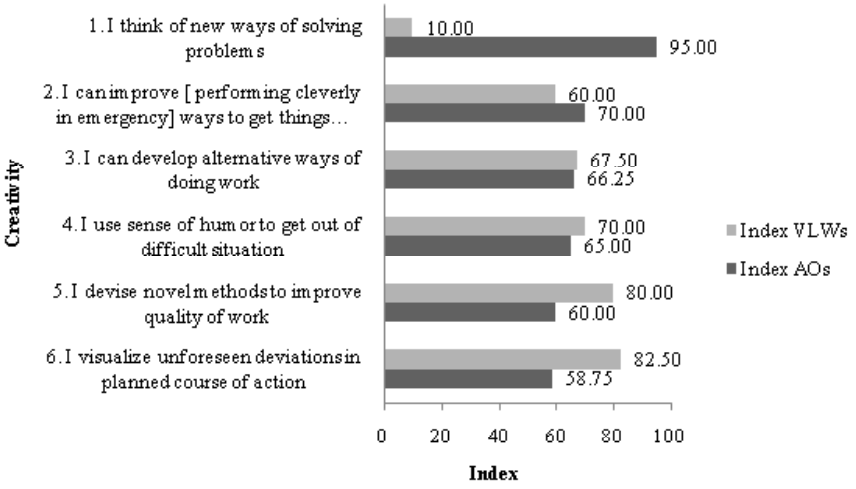

Fig. 10: Item wise index of creativity items

The VLWs thinks themselves more creative than the AOs as they were expert in handling difficult situation in their area. They always think of improvement of the quality of work and alternative solution to problems appeared while working.

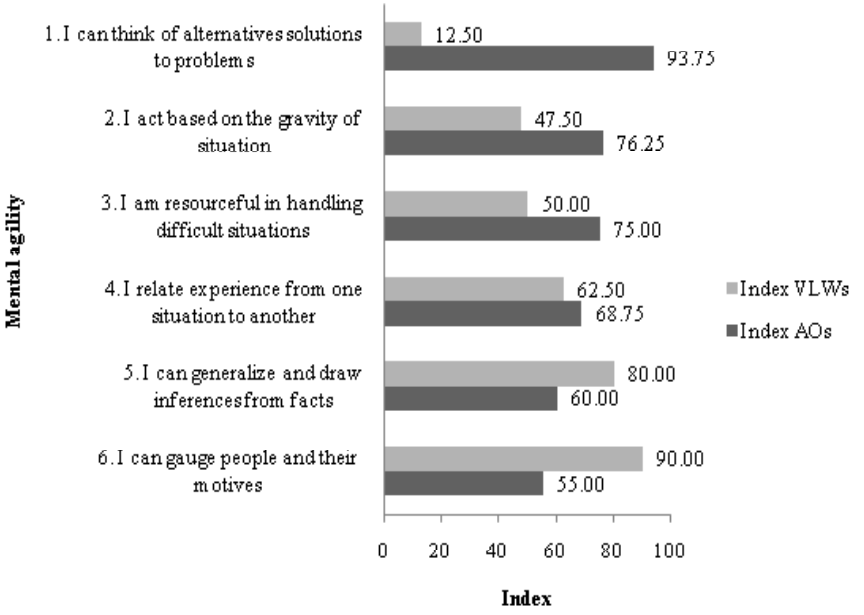

Fig. 11: Item wise index of mental agility items

The VLWs were mentally stronger than the AOs while handling a situation as they could encourage and motivate people in a direction they wish and also could use their experience for solving problems. But the AOs could use their brain, available resources and also experiences for finding alternative solution to the problems appeared.

JOB PERFORMANCE

Agriculture Officers had expressed high level of job performance because of more activities in the areas of planning, supply and service, supervision and co-operation, but less activities in the areas of planning and evaluation. The AOs conducted group meetings, demonstrated skill to farmers, solved field problems, conducted need based training for farmers, and gave technical advice to the subordinates. They also attended official meetings regularly, ensured subordinates to report on time, submited routine reports to superiors, maintained tour dairy, maintained office records and register up to date, reported on the coverage crops under high yielding varieties, evaluated the success of group meetings, exhibition, field days *etc*., took care on the usage of inputs by farmers.

VLWs had medium level of job performance which is due to limited activities in the areas of planning, education, supply and service, supervision, co-operation, official work and evaluation. VLWs were expert in conduction field days, contacted farmers on their farms and homes for transfer of technology, convinced farmers about the results of farm trials and discussed field problems to farmers. They also asked help from other development departments whenever necessary, involved farmers in extension work by consulting panchayats, reported on the stock position of inputs available with different agencies, prepared proposal for needed inputs and gave explanation to the supervisors for failure in the work.

The result was in agreement with Reddy (1990), Sunil (1991), Rath (1992), Sunil and Sundaraswamy (1996), Jaiswal *et al.,* (1997), Halkatti and Sunderaswamy (1998), Manjula (2000), Sandika (2006) and Kiran (2007). Reddy (1990) reported that majority of the Agriculture Officers working under Training and Visit System in Andhra Pradesh belongs to medium category of job performance. Rath (1992) reported majority of the Subject Matter Specialists under Training and Visit system in Orissa were medium job performance category. Sunil and Sundaraswamy (1996) reported that majority of the agricultural assistants were in medium job performance category. Jaiswal *et al.,* (1997) reported majority of the Rural Extension Officers in Maharashtra belonged to medium category of job performance. Halkatti and Sunderaswamy (1998) revealed that majority of the Agricultural Assistant working under Training and Visit system belonged to medium job performance category. Manjula (2000) indicated that more than one-third of AAO belonged to medium job performance category. Sandika (2006) in Karnataka state reported that majority of the respondents belonged to medium level of job performance and Kiran (2007) reported that majority of the scientists (55%) belonged to medium level of job performance category as in the case of VLWs in the present study. Whereas, Prabhakar (1994) reported that 40% of the Horticultural Assistants were in high performance category, Manjunath *et al.,* (1996) observed that the agricultural assistants were more or less evenly distributed in high and low job performance category as in the case of AOs in the present study.

Table 3: Job Performance Category of the Extension Personnel

Sl. No.	Category	AOs (n=40)		VLWs (n=40)	
		Mean Score	Per cent	Mean Score	Per cent
1	Low (Up to 60.37)	56.67	34.38	52.67	31.25
2	Medium (60.38 to 71.25)	70.25	25.00	63.40	37.50
3	High (71.26 and above)	87.67	40.63	72.00	31.25

Table 4: Item wise calculated mean score and index of the job performance sub-items

Sl. No.	Job Performance Statements	AOs			VLWs		
		Mean score	Index	Rank	Mean score	Index	Rank
1	Education	12.88	71.57	I	13.44	74.65	I
2	Office work	12.35	68.63	II	10.31	57.29	III
3	Evaluation	6.71	67.06	III	4.75	47.50	VI
4	Planning	9.76	61.03	IV	8.78	54.88	IV
5	Co-operation	8.53	60.92	V	8.59	61.38	II
6	Supervision	6.97	58.09	VI	5.94	49.48	V
7	Supply and services	11.76	49.02	VII	10.81	45.05	VII

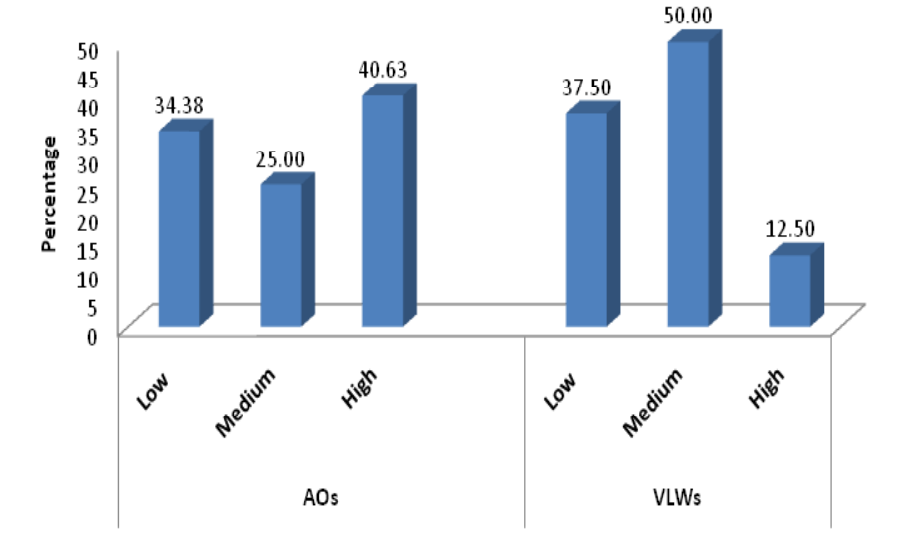

Fig. 12: Job Performance Category of the Extension personnel

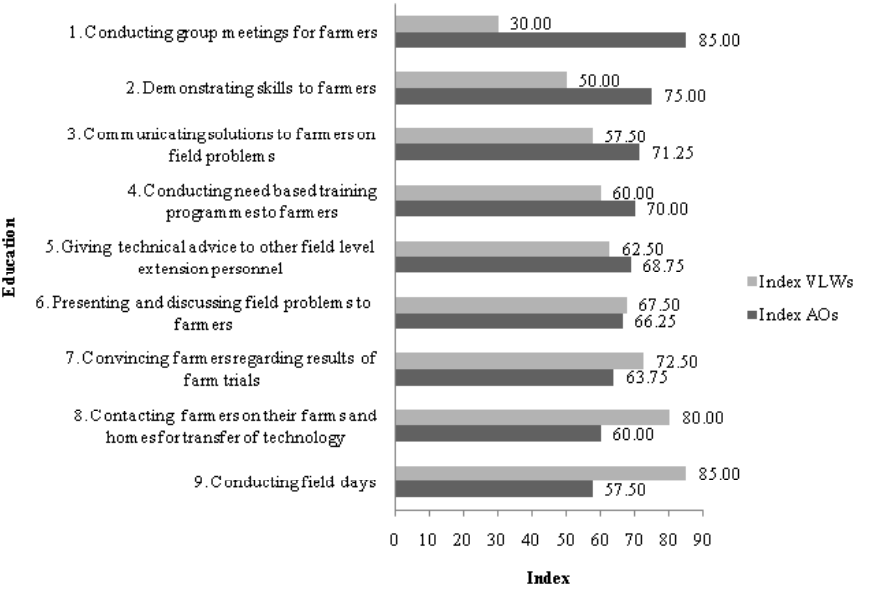

Fig. 13: Item wise index of education items

The AOs were more competent in giving theoretical knowledge to the farmers, whereas the VLWs were more expert in discussing practical field problems to the farmers. The AOs also gave technical advice to the VLWs.

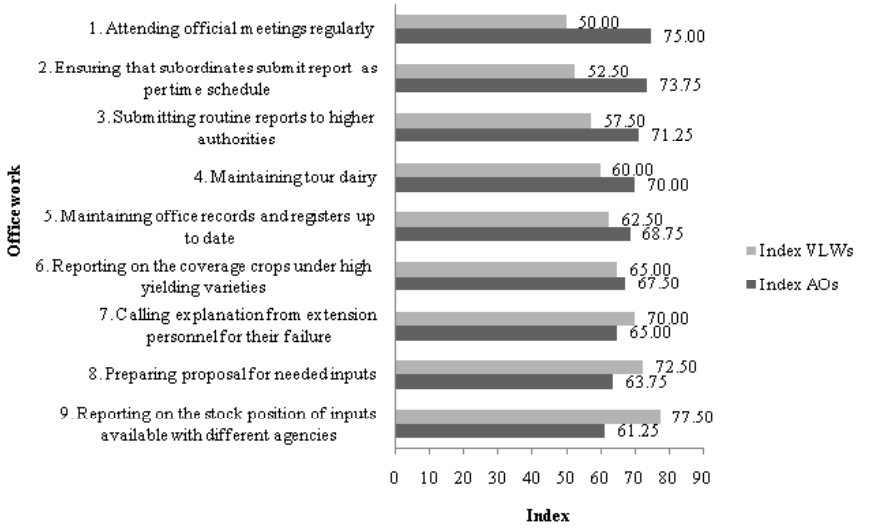

Fig. 14: Item wise index of office work items

Almost all the office work was handled by the AOs only and the VLWs used to be busy with field work most of the time. The AOs maintained continuous communication with the higher officials as well as with the VLWs. But the input requirement and availability was always reported by the VLWs.

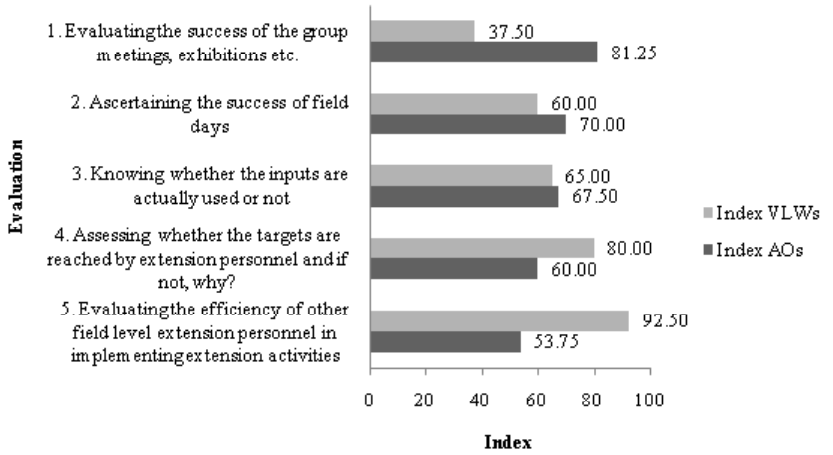

Fig. 15: Item wise index of evaluation items

Most of the evaluation work was looked after by the AOs along with the higher officials. The AOs always evaluate the success of the different programme conducted by the department and its staff. They also evaluate the usage of distributed inputs and performance of the subordinates.

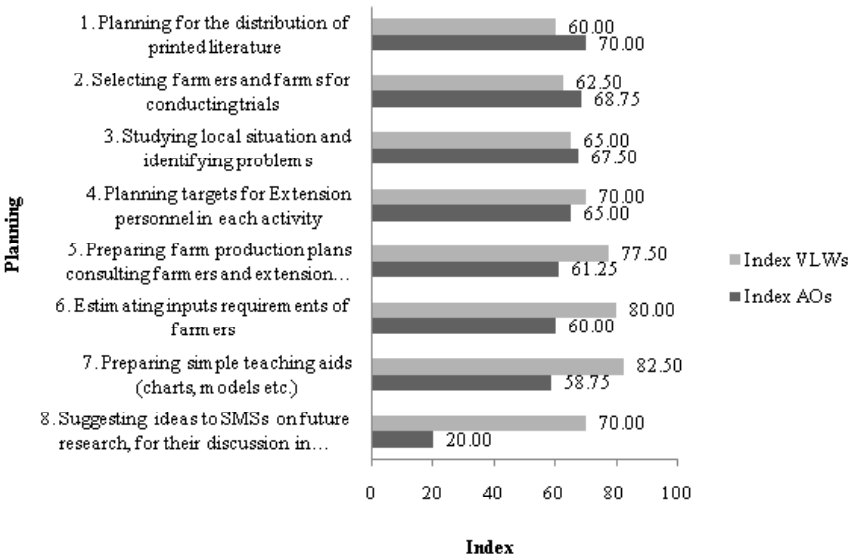

Fig. 16: Item wise index of planning items

Though AOs get preference for planning in the department, both AOs and VLWs put their ideas for better planning and proper implementation of programme. The VLWs were more competent in planning for inputs and preparing teaching aids in local languages and also preparing farm production plan.

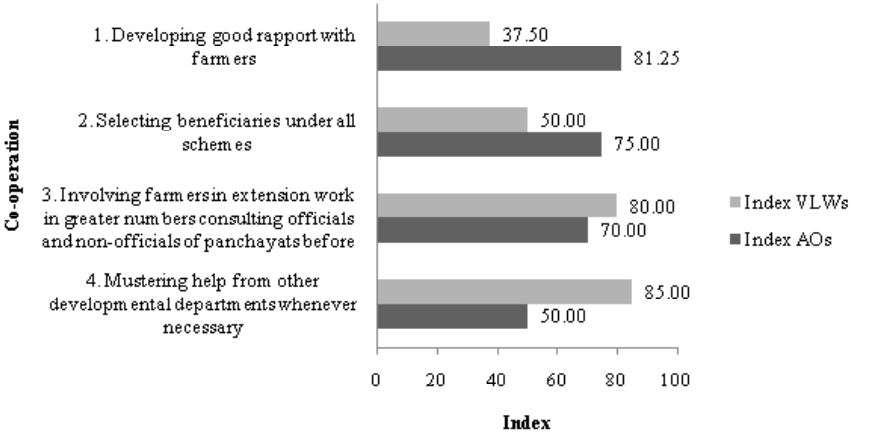

Fig. 17: Item wise index of co-operation items

The VLWs were more co-operative than the AOs as most of them are working in their native area and well known by the people of that area. They also had good relationship with the panchayats and other developing department in that area. The AOs are competent in rapport building with mass population and selection of beneficiaries under different programmes.

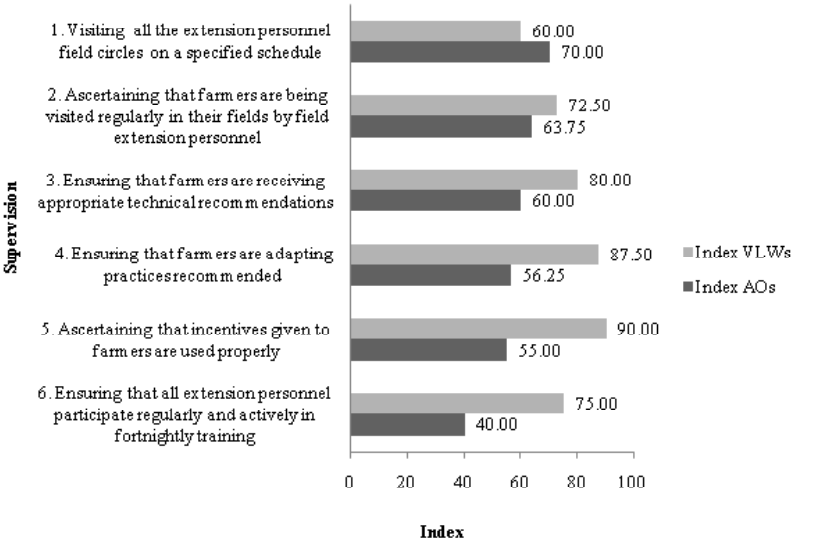

Fig. 18: Item wise index of supervision items

The VLWs keep regular contact with the farmers for supervising their day to day activities. They provide regular technical advice to the farmers and ensure proper utilization of supplied inputs. They also helped other extension personnel to get training and encourage farmers for adopting recommended agricultural practices. The AOs supervise the working of the VLWs.

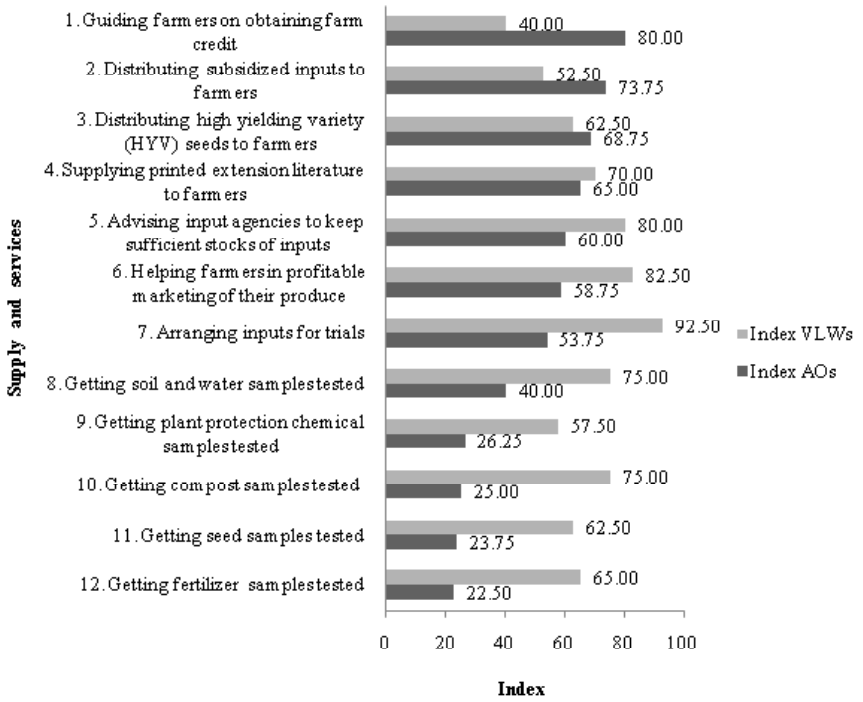

Fig. 19: Item wise index of supply and services items

Both AOs as well as VLWs were involved in the supply of inputs to farmers and helped them for getting inputs in time. They also guide farmers for getting farm credit, proper marketing of produce and testing of soil, water, fertilizers, seeds and plant protection chemical. The AOs and VLWs always give advice to the farmers related to agriculture and allied activities. They always were ready to solve the field problems of the farmers and giving suggestion for increasing farm production.

"Association between job competence, job performance and personal, psychological and organizational characteristics of the extension personnel"

It can be seen from the Table 5 revealed that there was significant association between AOs job competence and organizational commitment, accountability to clientele; whereas there was significant association between VLWs job competence and job performance, organizational commitment, accountability to

clientele. VLWs were more competent to perform the jobs at grass root level then the AOs. Organizational commitment and accountability to clientele are the main characteristic of extension personnel to perform their job more competently. A committed person is more competent for better job performance. Whereas when clientele accountability of an extension person is more, he also will be competent enough for better performance.

Table 5: Association between job competence and other characteristics of the AOs and VLWs

Sl. No.	Characteristics	Chi-square value	
		AOs (n=40)	VLWs (n=40)
1	Education level	3.17	5.45
2	Experience in extension work	4.84	5.77
3	Job performance	8.04	33.42*
4	Job autonomy	9.03	4.68
5	Perceived workload	2.38	3.94
6	Job satisfaction	6.14	4.25
7	Organizational commitment	11.53*	9.75*
8	Accountability to clientele	9.85*	11.93*
9	Organizational climate	5.57	3.83
10	Guidance and supervision	6.01	6.06
11	Facilities and resources	6.75	3.53
12	Communication	8.58	4.10
13	Problems	7.55	7.96

* Significant at 5% level

Table 6 showed that there was significant association between AOs job performance and education level, job competence, guidance and supervision; whereas, there was significant association between VLWs job performance and job competence, organizational commitment, accountability to clientele, organizational climate and problems. More educated person know more about the recent technologies which affects the job performance. AOs are more educated then the VLWs and are good performer of their job. Guidance and supervision from the higher ups was favourable and on-time for the AOs, which affected their job performance. The information and guidance from the higher officials encourages the AOs to perform better. A competent person can always perform well. AOs as well as VLWs were competent enough that they can perform their job effectively. As the organizational commitment and accountability to clientele of VLWs was more, their job performance was good as compare to the AOs. The organizational climate also was favourable for the VLWs as most of them were posted in their native village, which affects their job performance. Problems faced by the VLWs also influence their job performance than the AOs.

Table 6: Association between job performance and other characteristics of the AOs and VLWs

Sl. No.	Characteristics	Chi-square value	
		AOs (n=40)	VLWs (n=40)
1	Education level	11.49*	7.12
2	Experience in extension work	2.32	4.78
3	Job competence	11.11*	33.75*
4	Job autonomy	3.79	1.03
5	Perceived workload	5.65	9.34
6	Job satisfaction	7.31	6.88
7	Organizational commitment	9.02	11.67*
8	Accountability to clientele	5.29	21.05*
9	Organizational climate	1.96	10.46*
10	Guidance and supervision	10.58*	5.13
11	Facilities and resources	8.33	5.04
12	Communication	9.40	3.35
13	Problems	3.48	9.71*

* Significant at 5% level

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicated that AOs had high level job competence for good communication ability, facility for self-development, empathy for farmers, initiative for new work, guidance for the subordinates and good judgment as well as job performance for higher education, regular office work, correct evaluation, preparing plan for work and co-operation with others. VLWs had medium level of job competence because of limited activities in the guidance of others, adaptability to new environment, making judgment and creativity in new work. The VLWs also had medium level of job performance because of less activity in the supply and services, evaluation of work, supervision, planning and office work. The job competence and job performance for AOs still needs to be improved but for VLWs, it is urgency.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Encouragement of in-service training for both VLWs and AOs.
- Provide with professional diploma course especially for VLWs.
- The education level should be more for the VLWs.
- The facilities for self-development should be encouraged.
- Timely supply of input should be encouraged by the department.
- Encouragement of farmer's specific services.

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