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CONSTRAINTS IN UTILIZING RYTHU BHAROSA KENDRAS SERVICES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CORRELATES OF FARMERS' KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs), an innovative initiative launched by the Government of Andhra Pradesh in providing integrated platform to address the needs of the farmers at the village level. This study, conducted in 2022 in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, aimed to identify constraints faced by farmers in utilizing Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs) and analyze the relationship between their socio-economic characteristics and knowledge of RBK services. Using an ex-post facto research design, data were collected from 120 randomly selected farmers through a pre-tested structured schedule. Constraints were ranked using the Garrett ranking technique, and correlation analysis was performed using SPSS to explore relationships between socio-economic factors and knowledge levels. Key constraints identified included the unavailability of micronutrient fertilizers, inefficiencies in e-crop booking systems, and the lack of credit facilities for input purchases, delays in soil test reports and insufficient crop-specific advice from RBK staff. Correlation analysis revealed that education, extension contact, mass media exposure, and participation in training programs significantly enhanced farmers' knowledge of RBK services. The findings emphasized the need to enhance input supply, address operational inefficiencies, and strengthen advisory services to improve RBK effectiveness, with targeted education and extension efforts bridging knowledge gaps.

Keywords*: constraints, RBKs, socio-economic, knowledge*

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture serves as the foundation of the Indian economy, supporting the livelihoods of more than half the population and contributing significantly to the nation's economic stability. Despite its crucial role, Indian farmers face numerous challenges, including limited access to modern agricultural inputs, inadequate extension services, and fluctuating market conditions (Anuhya *et al*., 2022). These problems often result in suboptimal productivity and income instability, underscoring the need for effective support mechanisms. In response to these issues, the government of Andhra Pradesh established Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs) as a comprehensive solution to enhance agricultural support. As of May 30, 2020, a total of 10,641 Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs) have been established and are situated throughout the villages in the state (Babu *et al*., 2021; Saifuddin *et al*., 2022). These centres aim to centralize access to essential services, including quality seeds, fertilizers, soil testing, trainings to farmers, expert interactions through audio and video conferences, crop insurance technical advice, and procurement of market produce, (Saifuddin *et al*., 2024; Chowdary *et al*., 2022) thereby addressing the gaps identified in traditional extension models such as Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) and Agricultural Technology Management Agencies (ATMA). Unlike KVKs, which often focus on training and demonstrations, and ATMA, which offers decentralized support through district-level offices, RBKs consolidate these functions into a single, farmer-centric service centre. This integrated approach is intended to provide more streamlined and accessible support to farmers, potentially offering a more effective model for addressing their diverse needs (Reddy, 2020). Each RBK is staffed with qualified professionals tailored to the primary agricultural practices of the region. This includes Village Agricultural Assistants (VAAs), or Village Horticulture Assistants (VHAs), or Village Fisheries Assistants (VFAs), in addition to a Village Animal Husbandry Assistant (VAHA) to address animal health issues (Saifuddin *et al*., 2023). Indeed, the RBK model, recognized by the Centre for the UN Award, has been praised for revolutionizing the agriculture sector by comprehensively meeting farmers' needs from seed to sale (Anuhya *et al*., 2022).

Although RBKs are a commendable initiative at the village level, a thorough investigation of the constraints faced by farmers is necessary for their effective utilization. Despite the establishment of RBKs, however, the effective use of these centres by farmers remains a significant challenge.

Socio-economic factors, including education, income, landholding size, and exposure to information sources, have been recognized as key determinants influencing farmers' knowledge and ability to leverage such agricultural support systems. However, there is a paucity of empirical evidence on the specific constraints faced by farmers in utilizing RBK services and the role of socio-economic factors in shaping their knowledge of these offerings. Addressing these gaps is critical for enhancing the effectiveness of RBKs and ensuring their intended impact on agricultural development. Constraints such as lack of timely information, logistical barriers, and insufficient technical knowledge not only limit farmers' ability to access services but also hinder the realization of the full potential of RBKs. Furthermore, understanding how socio-economic factors correlate with farmers' knowledge can provide insights into targeted interventions that improve awareness and utilization of these services.

OBJECTIVES

(1) To elicit the constraints faced by the farmers in utilization of RBK services

(2) To analyze the relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of farmers and their knowledge of services rendered by RBKs

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in 2022 in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, utilizing an *ex-post facto* research design to investigate the constraints faced by farmers in the effective utilization of Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs) services. A multistage sampling approach, combining purposive and random sampling methods, was employed to select farmer respondents. Initially, East Godavari district was purposively selected due to its high number of RBKs. Within this district, three mandals were purposively chosen based on the concentration of RBKs. From each selected mandal, four villages were randomly sampled. In each village, ten beneficiary farmers were randomly selected, resulting in a total sample of 120 respondents. To identify the constraints impacting the effective use of RBK services, data was collected using a pre-tested structured schedule. The constraints were categorized into four main areas: resource availability and supply constraints, systemic constraints, financial and payment constraints, and technical and advisory services constraints. Respondents were asked to rank the constraints within each category according to their perceived severity and impact. The ranking data was then analyzed using the Garrett ranking technique, where each respondent's rank for a given constraint was converted into a percent position using a specified formula.

$$\text{Percent Position} = \frac{100\,(R_{ij}-0.5)}{N_J}$$

Where, R_{ij} = Rank given for the i^{th} attribute by j^{th} respondent

N_j = Number of attributes ranked by j^{th} respondent

Using Garrett's table, the percent positions were converted into scores. These scores were aggregated across all respondents to determine the total and mean scores for each constraint. This approach, as outlined by Deepika *et al*., (2024); Saifuddin *et al*., (2024) and Challa (2024) enabled the ranking of constraints based on their mean scores, with higher scores reflecting greater significance. This methodology facilitated a thorough evaluation of the constraints faced by farmers, offering a clear delineation of the most critical issues affecting the effective utilization of RBK services.

Furthermore, the study analyzed the relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of farmers and their knowledge of services rendered by RBKs. Empirical data were collected through personal interviews conducted using a structured interview schedule. Data analysis was performed using the 26th version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This software facilitated various statistical computations, including frequency distributions, percentage calculations, mean values, and correlation analysis. The use of SPSS enabled a systematic and detailed examination of the data, providing robust statistical inferences and insights into the relationships between the variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Constraints faced by the farmers in utilization of RBK services

Resource availability and supply constraints

The analysis of resource and supply constraints at Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs) is detailed in Table 1, based on Garret mean scores and their respective ranks. The non-availability of micronutrient fertilizers was identified as the most critical constraint, with a Garret Mean Score of 66.87, consistent with the findings of Anuhya *et al*., 2022. This high ranking likely reflects the fact that only macronutrient fertilizers are currently being supplied by the government to RBKs, despite technical staff's efforts to place indents based on farmer demands. Micronutrient fertilizers are crucial for optimal crop nutrition and yield enhancement. The absence of these essential inputs at RBKs underscores the severity of this constraint and its significant impact on agricultural productivity. The unavailability of pesticides at RBKs, with a Garret mean score of 55.46, was ranked second in significance. As RBKs are designed to

function as one-stop shops for the farming community, the availability of pesticides is a crucial component for effective pest management in agricultural fields. The absence of this essential input may undermine the credibility of RBKs among farmers and diminish trust in their services. This constraint highlights the urgent need for improved supply chain management and better stock availability at RBKs to ensure comprehensive support for farmers. The delay in the delivery of animal feed, with a Garret Mean score of 47.31, was identified as the third most significant constraint. This issue likely arises because animal feed is not readily available at RBKs and is only delivered following a farmer's order. Additionally, RBKs require a minimum bulk order from a group of farmers to facilitate delivery, making it challenging for individual farmers to receive timely feed supplies. This policy exacerbates delays and complicates access to animal feed, highlighting the need for more flexible delivery arrangements and improved inventory management to better serve individual farmers. Limited availability of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) kits, which received the lowest Garret mean score of 34.28 and was ranked fourth, represents a less severe but still impactful issue. IPM kits are important for effective pest management, and their limited supply can hinder the adoption of sustainable pest control practices. These results were consistent with those reported by Sarada *et al*., (2023); Reddy *et al.*, (2023).

Table 1: Resource availability and supply constraints faced by farmers in utilization of RBK services (n=120)

Sr. No.	Resource availability and supply constraints	Garret Mean Score	Rank
1	Non-availability of micronutrient fertilizers at RBK	66.87	I
2	Unavailability of pesticides at RBK	55.46	II
3	Limited number of IPM kits are available at RBK	34.28	IV
4	Delay in the delivery of animal feed after receiving orders from farmers	47.31	III

Systemic constraints

Table 2 revealed that the analysis of systemic constraints at Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs). The highest-ranked constraint in this category, with a Garret Mean Score of 55.57, is the discrepancies between old field survey records and e-Panta geo-coordinates, which complicate accurate e-crop booking. This issue highlights a significant challenge in integrating historical farmers field data with contemporary geospatial systems. The discrepancies not only hinder precise field mapping but also undermine the effectiveness of various support services provided by RBKs, emphasizing the need for an urgent resolution. The second most significant constraint, with a Garret Mean Score of 50.56, is the delay in Rythu Bharosa magazine issues for subscribing farmers. This delay can affect the timely dissemination of critical agricultural information and updates, potentially impacting farmers' decision-making and access to essential knowledge. Ensuring timely publication and distribution of the magazine is crucial for maintaining informed farming practices and enhancing the overall effectiveness of RBK services. The third most significant constraint, with a Garret mean score of 42.33, is the difficulty farmers face in meeting RBK's strict criteria for selling their produce. This issue arises because, after farmers' produce is procured at RBKs, it is sent to processors who re-evaluate the produce based on specific parameters. The price for the farmers' produce is then determined according to these parameters. Consequently, if the produce does not meet the required standards, it often results in a lower price, leading to dissatisfaction among farmers.

Table 2: Systemic constraints faced by farmers in utilization of RBK services (n=120)

Sr. No.	Systemic constraints	Garret Mean Score	Rank
1	Delay in Rythu Bharosa magazine issues for subscribing farmers	50.56	II
2	Discrepancies between old field survey records and e-Panta geo-coordinates complicate accurate e-crop booking	55.57	I
3	Farmers struggle to meet RBK's stringent criteria for selling produce	42.33	III

Financial and payment constraints

Table 3 provided a summary of the financial and payment constraints at Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs), as assessed by Garret mean scores and their corresponding ranks. The most significant constraint, with a Garret mean score of 64.32, is the lack of credit facilities for inputs, consistent with the findings of Madhuri *et al.,* (2024) This issue arises because, while farmers can obtain inputs on credit from local dealers, RBKs only offer inputs on immediate cash payments. Consequently, farmers show little interest in purchasing inputs from RBKs. Late settlement of payments for marketed produce was ranked second, with a Garret mean score of 54.40. Delays in payment can create significant financial difficulties for farmers, who rely on timely payments to manage their cash flow and meet operational

expenses. Such delays undermine farmers' financial stability and may lead to reduced trust in the RBK system. The third-ranked constraint, with a Garret mean score of 47.51, is the deduction of transportation costs from farmers' sales when selling to RBKs. Unlike transactions with local middlemen, who do not charge for transportation, RBKs deduct these costs from the proceeds of the produce. As a result, farmers feel dissatisfied with this service.

Table 3: Financial and payment constraints faced by farmers in utilization of RBK services (n=120)

Sr. No.	Financial and payment constraints	Garret Mean Score	Rank
1	Late settlement of payments for marketed produce	54.40	II
2	Inputs are not provided on a credit basis	64.32	I
3	Deducting transportation costs from farmers' produce sales when selling to RBKs	47.51	III

Technical and advisory services constraints

The examination of technical and advisory services constraints at Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs) is detailed in the table 4 that the foremost constraint, with a Garret mean score of 61.84, is the delay in receiving soil test reports**.** This problem primarily stems from the absence of on-site equipment at RBKs, which requires soil samples to be sent to block-level laboratories for testing. This process introduces delays, leading to prolonged waiting times for soil reports and diminishing farmer trust in the services offered by RBKs. Insufficient knowledge among technical staff regarding crop-specific advisory services was ranked second. This gap in expertise limits the ability of RBK staff to provide accurate, tailored advice to farmers, impacting their capacity to address specific crop-related challenges and optimize agricultural practices. The third-ranked constraint, with a Garret mean score of 47.31, is the occasional unavailability of the Village Animal Husbandry Assistant at RBKs during emergency situations. This constraint may be due to the engagement of village animal husbandry assistants in non-veterinary tasks like participation in survey The lack of immediate access to this critical support can result in inadequate management of livestock health during emergencies, emphasizing the need for consistent availability of veterinary assistance. The third-ranked constraint, with a Garret mean score of 47.31, is the occasional unavailability of the Village Animal Husbandry Assistant (VAHA) at RBKs during emergency situations. This issue may arise from VAHA involvement in non-veterinary activities, such as participation in surveys. The absence of timely veterinary support during emergencies can lead to suboptimal management of livestock health, underscoring the need for more consistent availability of veterinary assistance to address urgent animal health concerns effectively. Scheduling of training programs by RBK technical staff at times that are inconvenient for farmers was ranked fourth. This issue restricts farmers' access to educational resources and training, which are vital for improving agricultural practices and productivity. The fifth-ranked constraint, with a Garret mean score of 42.33, is the lack of weather and market-related information from RBK technical staff. The absence of timely and relevant information on weather conditions and market trends limits farmers' ability to make strategic decisions regarding their agricultural operations and market activities. These findings were in agreement with the results of Haritha *et al*., (2023), Behera *et al*., (2024), Madhuri *et al.,* (2024), Sanjay *et al*., (2024) and Thakor *et al*., (2024).

Table 4: Technical and advisory services constraints faced by farmers in utilization of RBK services (n=120)

Sr. No.	Technical and advisory services constraints	Garret Mean Score	Rank
1	Insufficient knowledge among technical staff regarding crop-specific advisory services	55.46	II
2	Lack of weather and market-related information from RBK technical staff	42.33	V
3	Delay in getting soil test reports	61.84	I
4	Occasional unavailability of the Village Animal Husbandry Assistant at RBKs during emergency situations	47.31	III
5	Conducting training programs by RBK technical staff at inconvenient times for farmers	44.08	IV

Relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of farmers and their knowledge of services rendered by RBKS

The correlation analysis presented in Table 5, revealed a positive and significant relationship between education (X2) and knowledge of RBK services ($r = 0.298$, $p < 0.01$). This finding underscores the critical role of education in enhancing farmers' knowledge on RBK services. Educated farmers are more likely to access, comprehend, and apply information about RBKs. Extension contact (X6) also showed a significant positive correlation with farmers' knowledge ($r = 0.254$, $p < 0.01$). Regular interaction with extension agents

like technical staff of RBK facilitates the dissemination of targeted information, enabling farmers to better utilize RBK services. This may be attributed to the strategic placement of RBKs and their technical staff at the village level (Saifuddin *et al*., 2024). These findings highlight the importance of strengthening extension systems to bridge knowledge gaps among farmers. A highly significant positive correlation was observed between mass media utilization (X7) and knowledge ($r = 0.316$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that exposure to mass media played a pivotal role in enhancing farmers' knowledge. Mass media platforms such as television, newspaper and mobile-based applications served as vital channels for disseminating information about RBK services (Saifuddin *et al.,* 2025). Furthermore, trainings undergone (X9) exhibited a positive and significant correlation with knowledge ($r = 0.284$, $p < 0.01$). This indicated that training programs play a crucial role in equipping farmers with the knowledge required to utilize RBK services effectively. Other variables such as age (X1), farming experience (X3), landholding (X4), cropping pattern (X5), and annual income (X8) did not show significant correlations with knowledge. This suggested that these factors may not directly influence the knowledge levels of farmers regarding RBK services in the study context. These findings were in accordance with the similar studies conducted by Lekha *et al.,* (2024); Anuhya *et al.,* (2022), Pratik and Vinaya (2021) and Saifuddin *et al.,* (2024).

Table 5 : (n=120)

Sr. No.	Variables	Correlation coefficient (r)	
X_1	**Age**	Pearson correlation	-0.115
		Significant(2-tailed)	0.211
X_2	**Education**	Pearson correlation	0.298**
		Significant(2-tailed)	0.001
X_3	**Farming experience**	Pearson correlation	-0.130
		Significant(2-tailed)	0.156
X_4	**Land holding**	Pearson correlation	0.156
		Significant(2-tailed)	0.089
X_5	**Cropping pattern**	Pearson correlation	0.142
		Significant(2-tailed)	0.121
X_6	**Extension contact**	Pearson correlation	0.254**
		Significant(2-tailed)	0.005
X_7	**Mass media utilization**	Pearson correlation	0.316**
		Significant(2-tailed)	0.000
X_8	**Annual income**	Pearson correlation	0.037
		Significant(2-tailed)	0.685
X_9	**Trainings undergone**	Pearson correlation	0.284**
		Significant(2-tailed)	0.005

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

CONCLUSION

The study identified significant constraints and socio-economic determinants influencing farmers' knowledge of Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs) services. The unavailability of micronutrient fertilizers and pesticides, systemic inefficiencies such as discrepancies in e-crop booking, and financial challenges like the lack of credit facilities for input purchase emerged as critical barriers. Additionally, delays in soil testing and insufficient crop-specific advisory services were significant technical constraints. The correlation analysis revealed that education, extension contact, mass media utilization, and training programs significantly enhanced farmers' knowledge of RBK services. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening the supply chain, improving technical advisory services, and addressing systemic and financial bottlenecks at RBKs. Enhancing extension systems, leveraging mass media, and designing targeted training programs can effectively bridge knowledge gaps and improve service utilization. Policymakers should focus on these areas to optimize RBK operations and support sustainable agricultural development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) Enhance the efficiency of e-crop booking systems by improving geospatial data accuracy and ensuring seamless integration of field records with digital platforms.

(2) Expand RBK advisory services through mobile applications, interactive voice response systems (IVRS),

and customized training modules in local languages to effectively reach remote farmers.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this research.

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