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Reaching out

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A farmer of Uthamarkovil carrying saplings crop at fields. Photo: B.Velankanni Raj

The Hindu

Doordarshan's DD Kisan is the public broadcaster's bid to engage with the heart of India – its villages

Agriculture and the rural community, the backbone of our country, has suffered severely due the vagaries of nature, poverty, illiteracy and corruption. What could be more telling than the suicides committed by several farmers in the wake of indebtedness and failure of crops? Irrespective of party affiliations, public figures were and are seized of this grave looming danger. The recent announcement by the Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar about the launch of a 24x7 Hindi channel “DD Kisan” is but a small step in the direction of alleviating the problems of rural masses.

Though termed part of the election promises of the Bharatiya Janata Party, this initiative provides a chance for Doordarshan (DD) to adopt measures and means to evolve and adapt to the new changing media space which has modified with the deluge of multiple channels in all genres.

“Besides hardcore information to the kisan, this channel will disseminate knowledge about all other allied subjects to empower him and his family,” states Vijayalaxmi Chhabra, DD’s Director-General (DG), on the objective of the new satellite channel which will be available on DTH. The channel proposes to not limit itself to farming but to go further to inform the rural denizens about economics, banking, agronomy, technology, education and much more — a virtual package for their uplift. The idea is to impact all aspects of villagers’ life to ensure that future generations have a head start like their urban counterparts.

“The focus is not only on the farmer and hardcore agricultural programmes but also on resources which complement and supplement welfare of all the rural sections, including landless labour, small and big landholders, and those engaged in other occupations,” adds Shivaji Fulsundar, Deputy Director General, DD Kisan.

With infrastructure already in place, the launch looks to be a smooth affair as it is based on in-house research and inputs from regional and local units of DD. “We have the in-house knowledge, experience and qualified personnel and are connected on a continuous basis to the grassroots level, with interaction up to district level and beyond,” explains the DG.

Slotting DD Kisan as an edutainment channel, the DG says the presentation, aesthetics, look and feel of the channel will force the non-rural segment to watch it, thereby generating a wide viewership. She hopes this will attract those not concerned with agriculture and the rural sector, like multinationals, corporates and well-known brands, to advertise on the channel. Meanwhile she is banking on agro-based and dependent business segments as the primary advertisers (pesticide, insecticide and fertilizer manufacturers, etc). The entertainment aspect of DD Kisan will comprise serials and films embedded with messages for rural development, folk dances, folk music, coverage of village fairs and carnivals, a recipe to provide the much needed respite to rural people.

Apart from in-house programmes, keeping in mind the requirement of software for 24 hours, the channel will outsource programmes. There will be six to eight hour loops for repeating the shows for those who may have missed them.

The finalisation of programmes and slots is being worked out and Shivaji provides a glimpse. There will be a news section related to agriculture but also including general news, interaction and discussion with researchers and leaders in farming and allied segments, stories of successful use of novel and technology by farmers and others — such as the greenhouse agriculture method or drip irrigation, detailed dissemination of Government schemes targeted at rural areas and the science behind miracles.

Besides these, on the anvil are a news magazine programme inviting stories, pictures and experiences from farmers, phone-in programmes on agriculture and on animal husbandry, environmental issues from the local to the global scale, rural sports, research centres dedicated to agriculture and other allied fields.

Non-committal about the date, DD sources say the channel will be launched most probably next year and claim that the work is underway on a “war-footing”. Remarks the DG, “It is a challenging task as DD Kisan is a niche channel, but I am sure we will succeed.”

Keeping in mind the performance track record of DD in its ventures to counter the onslaught of private channels and the slow and grinding preparation on its part for DD Kisan, the viewers and taxpayers indeed need to keep their fingers crossed.

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