

# Krishi Vigyan Kendra: a frontline ICAR organisation and its constraints

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## Abstract

Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) play a pivotal role in connecting agricultural research and the farming community in India. Yet, KVK employees face serious challenges that affect their efficiency and morale. Key issues include significant staffing shortages, with reports indicating a 30% vacancy rate, which impairs KVK operations. Disparities in pay between ICAR and non-ICAR KVKs foster dissatisfaction among staff, leading to protests advocating for equitable compensation and transparent pension contributions. Additionally, unequal service conditions limit career advancement, particularly for those in non-ICAR institutions, resulting in varied promotional opportunities and recognition standards. Funding limitations further hinder KVK operations, with inadequate resources affecting training, infrastructure, and farmer engagement. The excessive administrative workload distracts staff from essential fieldwork, while gaps in training and technological resources impede effective extension services. Local political pressures complicate operations, as staff encounter pressures to prioritize certain communities, compromising neutrality. Psychological strain from demanding conditions contributes to low morale and job instability, especially in non-governmental organizations. Gender issues also persist, impacting female extension agents' mobility and the adequacy of support for women farmers. Ultimately, these systemic challenges detract from KVK's mission to provide reliable services, adversely affecting program outcomes and eroding farmer confidence in agricultural extension efforts.

**Key Words:** Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Pay disparity, Staff shortage, funding limitations

## Introduction

Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) serve as India's primary agricultural extension institutions, acting as a vital link between agricultural research entities, primarily the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and State Agricultural Universities, and the farming community. They conduct practical demonstrations, field trials, training sessions for farmers, provide advisories, and engage in local problem-solving; in essence, they are crucial for enhancing rural livelihoods and facilitating the adoption of crop innovations.

However, employees at KVKs, including scientists, subject-matter experts, technical staff, and support personnel, frequently report a multitude of structural, managerial, and operational challenges that hinder their effectiveness and contribute to workforce demoralisation. This article delves into these issues comprehensively, draws upon recent evidence and reports, and proposes actionable reforms.

### 1. Staffing shortfalls and imbalanced staffing patterns

A significant challenge currently confronting KVKs is persistent understaffing. Numerous official evaluations and media articles have highlighted substantial vacancy rates in authorised positions, which directly impair the KVKs' capacity to implement farmer-oriented programs, oversee on-farm trials, and ensure service continuity. For instance, a parliamentary review conducted in 2025 raised alarms regarding an approximate 30% shortfall in staff, adversely impacting the core functions of KVKs, and noted the existence of thousands of unfilled positions throughout the network. This deficiency is particularly pronounced in technical and support roles, resulting in existing personnel being overburdened and programs being inadequately addressed.

The significance of this issue lies in the fact that KVK operations are labour- and time-intensive; activities such as field demonstrations, timely crop advisories, addressing pest or disease outbreaks, and providing hands-on training for farmers necessitate a physical presence on-site. The existing vacancies compel staff to assume multiple responsibilities, diminish the frequency of village-level interventions, and undermine follow-up efforts, which are critical for the successful adoption of new agricultural practices.

## 2. Pay equity, allowances, and pension issues

Discrepancies in compensation and allowances — between KVKs managed by ICAR and those operated by state universities, NGOs, or state departments — remain a continual source of dissatisfaction. Employees of non-ICAR KVKs have consistently voiced their concerns regarding perceived inequitable pay structures and inconsistent terms of service. There have been coordinated protests and delegations directed at political leaders advocating for pay equity, the restoration or prompt disbursement of allowances (such as medical and transport), and transparency regarding employer contributions to pension schemes like the National Pension System (NPS). These issues extend beyond mere financial compensation; they encompass dignity, employee retention, and the capacity to strategize long-term careers in agricultural extension. (Global Agriculture 2024)

Practical implications: Inconsistent or delayed compensation and reductions in allowances lead to the departure of experienced personnel, diminish morale, and complicate the recruitment of qualified candidates for these often remote and demanding positions.

## 3. Disparate service conditions and career advancement

Inextricably linked to compensation concerns are the unequal service regulations and restricted career advancement opportunities. KVKs are operated by a diverse array of institutions — including ICAR institutes, State Agricultural Universities (SAUs), NGOs, and state departments, resulting in significant variations in employees' service conditions based on the hosting institution. This variability creates disparities in promotional opportunities, leave policies, pension and retirement benefits, and performance evaluation methods. Staff members at non-ICAR KVKs often report experiencing slower promotion rates, a lack of transparent appraisal systems, and limited professional acknowledgement, even when engaged in comparable work. The perceived lack of a cohesive human resources framework hinders mobility between KVKs and affects long-term employee retention.

4. Funding limitations and infrastructure deficiencies: Operational budgets for numerous KVKs are minimal and erratic. Although central schemes provide financial resources for KVK operations, local execution uncovers deficiencies: inadequate funding for demonstrations, inputs for farmer training, transportation (vehicles), and upkeep of demonstration plots. The Annual Report and scheme allocations indicate funding commitments; however, at the grassroots level, many KVKs report challenges regarding the timely disbursement and adequacy of funds. This situation compels staff to reduce farmer-facing activities or rely on sporadic local resources. (Annual Report 2023-24 Department Of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare Ministry Of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare Government Of India). Physical infrastructure presents another significant challenge: insufficient office space, absence of well-equipped training facilities, subpar demonstration farm amenities, and inadequate staff housing in remote areas. Lacking these essential elements, it becomes challenging to conduct sustained extension activities, organize district-level training sessions, or deliver quality frontline advisory services.

5. Overwhelming administrative workload and reporting demands: KVK personnel often mention administrative burdens — an excess of reports, monitoring formats, and paperwork — that detracts from field operations. While accountability is crucial, an excessive focus on reporting (sometimes involving redundant formats across different agencies) consumes time that could be better spent on designing demonstrations, visiting farmers, and conducting follow-ups. Academic research and KVK staff surveys identify "excessive report writing" as a significant administrative obstacle (Panda et al., 2025).

The repercussions include diminished farmer contact hours, postponed extension activities, and staff fatigue. Simplifying reporting templates and transitioning to integrated digital reporting tools (with sufficient training and offline functionality for areas with low connectivity) would assist in reclaiming valuable field time.

6. Gaps in training and insufficient opportunities for professional growth: KVK personnel are anticipated to serve as the local knowledge base for farmers, covering a wide range of topics from seed selection and integrated pest management to farm mechanization and value chains. However, staff frequently express concerns regarding the scarcity of opportunities to enhance their technical knowledge, participate in exposure visits, or receive training on contemporary extension methodologies and digital advisory tools. The rapid advancement of agricultural innovation (including climate-resilient varieties, natural farming techniques, and precision agriculture tools) necessitates ongoing education; when this does not occur, the extension advice provided may become outdated or less credible. Research has identified the "lack of opportunities for knowledge enhancement" as a persistent limitation (Panda et al., 2025). Prioritizing regular, structured capacity-building initiatives, which encompass exchange visits to research stations and practical training on the latest technologies, is essential.

7. Constraints in technical resources: teaching materials, laboratory facilities, and ICT: Effective extension services require high-quality demonstration materials and suitable teaching aids. Surveys indicate that certain KVKs are deficient in appropriate teaching aids, or that staff members lack confidence in utilising advanced audiovisual or ICT resources. Additionally, restricted access to fundamental laboratory facilities (for soil testing, seed health assessments, or soil nutrient analysis) hampers the KVK's capacity to deliver actionable, science-based advice at the village level. In instances where digital advisories are implemented, inadequate internet connectivity and the absence of user-friendly interfaces in local languages diminish their effectiveness (Kumar and Singh 2023).

8. Governance challenges: political influence and local interference: Due to their position at the intersection of communities and public institutions, KVKs often encounter local political pressures. Staff may experience pressure to prioritize demonstrations or inputs for particular villages or groups, or to alter the selection of beneficiaries to align with local interests. Such interference compromises technical neutrality and presents ethical dilemmas for staff attempting to adhere to scientific selection criteria. Various reports and academic studies have highlighted cases where local political pressure complicates the operations of KVKs (Panda et al., 2025). Implementing transparent beneficiary selection processes, establishing clear guidelines for local political engagement, and providing secure channels for staff to voice grievances can mitigate these pressures.

9. Psychological strain, job instability, and morale: The interplay of demanding workloads, inconsistent pay and allowances, ambiguous career trajectories, and sporadic public criticism generates stress and negatively impacts staff morale. Job instability is especially evident in KVKs operated by non-governmental organizations or partner agencies, where service regulations and continuity are contingent upon project cycles. High staff turnover diminishes institutional memory; remaining personnel are burdened with increased workloads and mentoring responsibilities for new hires. Diminished morale also stifles innovation and reduces the willingness to explore new methods that could benefit farmers.

10. Gender issues and social barriers: The composition of KVK staff and the gendered dynamics of extension services necessitate careful consideration. Female extension agents frequently encounter challenges related to safety, mobility, and societal limitations when attempting to engage with specific groups of farmers or accessing remote villages. Concurrently, women farmers may be inadequately supported if there is a shortage of female KVK staff or if the training programs and locations are not designed with gender considerations in mind. Implementing secure travel arrangements, gender-sensitive programming, and focused recruitment strategies can enhance outreach and inclusivity.

11. Disparities between ICAR and non-ICAR KVKs: A persistent issue highlighted in media coverage and staff demonstrations is the disparity in service regulations, compensation, and advancement opportunities between KVKs that are directly overseen by ICAR and those managed by alternative organizations (such as SAUs, NGOs, and state departments). These differences contribute to a perception of inequity and diminish unity within the KVK network. Recent protests have seen thousands of employees from non-ICAR KVKs drawing attention to wage and benefit discrepancies and advocating for standardization. (Global Agriculture 2024)

12. Effects on program results and farmer confidence: All of these staffing issues have direct consequences for farmers. A decrease in person-hours in the field, inconsistent advisory services, inadequate follow-up on demonstrations, and a reduction in high-quality training opportunities hinder technology adoption. In certain regions, farmers might begin to distrust KVKs as dependable advisors and may seek assistance from private sources that could lack scientific validity.

Consequently, enhancing the KVK workforce has a compounding effect: improved staff conditions — including increased personnel, enhanced training, equitable compensation, and stable budgets — lead to more robust rural outcomes.

Recommendations — pathways to progress

1. Prioritize the filling of sanctioned positions. A focused recruitment initiative, complete with clear timelines, aimed at filling technical and support staff roles would significantly enhance outreach capabilities. The parliamentary review's identification of numerous vacancies indicates an urgent requirement for action (Sanjeeb Mukherjee 2025).
2. Standardize service conditions and ensure pay equity. The government, ICAR, and state stakeholders ought to collaborate towards establishing a unified minimum service framework, ensuring that employees performing similar tasks receive equivalent salaries, allowances, and pension contributions. This approach will mitigate protests and alleviate retention challenges. (Global Agriculture 2024)
3. Ensure stable and predictable funding alongside improved infrastructure. Timely disbursement of funds should be guaranteed, with a portion allocated for local infrastructure needs (such as training facilities, maintenance of demonstration plots, and basic laboratory kits). Annual plans must incorporate maintenance budgets to prevent program reductions (Annual Report 2023-24 Department Of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare Ministry Of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare Government Of India).
4. Alleviate the reporting burden and invest in digital solutions. Simplify monitoring formats, implement a cohesive digital reporting system with offline capabilities, and provide training for staff to utilize these tools, thereby allowing more time for field engagement.
5. Implement structured and ongoing capacity-building initiatives. Develop a compulsory continuing education schedule that includes exposure visits and in-service training on innovative technologies and extension methodologies. Offer certified professional development pathways that contribute to promotion criteria.
6. Safeguard institutional autonomy and protect against inappropriate local interference. Establish clear standard operating procedures for beneficiary selection and a grievance redressal system for staff to uphold technical integrity.
7. Prioritize staff welfare and mental health. Introduce counseling services, ensure prompt payment of salaries and allowances, and establish transparent promotion processes to enhance morale.
8. Develop gender-sensitive policies. Increase the recruitment of female staff, provide secure transportation and housing, and design training schedules and venues that facilitate the participation of women farmers.

## Conclusion

Krishi Vigyan Kendras occupy a strategic place in India's agricultural ecosystem. Their effectiveness depends not just on good programme design at the top but on motivated, well-supported employees working in villages. Today's problems — staffing shortages, pay and pension worries, unequal service conditions, funding and infrastructural gaps, administrative overload, and training deficits — are solvable with political will and focused administrative reforms. Addressing these issues is not merely an employee welfare task; it is an investment in agriculture's resilience, farmer incomes and rural prosperity.

If policymakers, ICAR, state governments and KVK host institutions treat the KVK workforce as a strategic asset and act decisively on staffing, pay parity, funding predictability and professional development, KVKs can regain the bandwidth to deliver high-quality, science-backed extension to millions of Indian farmers.

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