

## Punjab Farmers Need Timely Nudges, Not Just Awareness, to Stop Stubble Burning: CEEW Study

**New Delhi, 16 June 2026:** Punjab's crop residue management communication efforts need to move beyond one-size-fits-all awareness campaigns and adopt behaviourally informed communication strategies to convert awareness into sustained no-burn practices, according to a new independent study by the **Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) released today.**

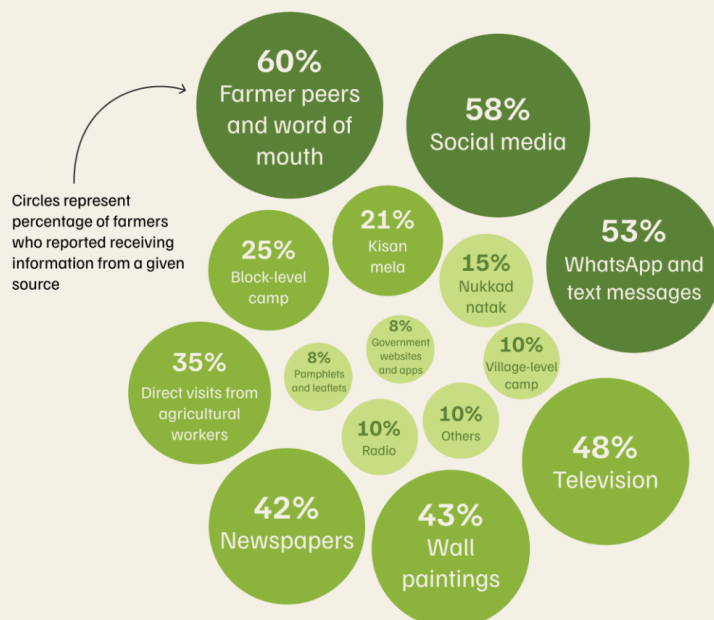
The CEEW study, **Behaviour Change Approaches to Tackle Stubble Burning at Scale**, finds that while reported crop residue burning incidents have declined since 2022, evolving burning patterns and satellite-detection limitations mean fire counts must be interpreted alongside farmer behaviour, timing of burning, and on-ground adoption of alternatives. Based on a **primary, non-representative survey of 102 farmers**, focus group discussions, and consultations with government officials across four districts of Punjab, CEEW finds that, beyond information gaps, behavioural barriers such as mistrust, social norms, and practical barriers such as financial considerations continue to shape farmers' decisions. Many of these barriers can be addressed through effective, contextual communications.

The study assesses the effectiveness and reach of current Information Education and Communication (IEC) activities and offers targeted recommendations to bridge the gap between information provision and behaviour change. The findings are categorised using a 4C framework — **coverage, clarity, credibility, and conversion**. It finds that 78 per cent of surveyed farmers were unaware of training schedules, and 63 per cent did not receive information when they needed it most. Although 63 per cent of surveyed farmers had moved away from complete burning, 31 per cent continued to partially burn their fields, showing that awareness and machinery access alone may not be sufficient.

**Prarthana Borah, Fellow, CEEW, said:** "Punjab has made important progress in reducing reported stubble-burning incidents, but sustaining this progress will require moving from broad awareness campaigns to more targeted behaviour change. Our study shows that farmers are not short of intent; many already disapprove of burning and are trying alternatives. The challenge is to reach them at the right time, through trusted messengers, with practical guidance that addresses real concerns such as pest attacks, machine use, costs, and narrow harvesting windows."

**Farmers trust people more than pamphlets:** The CEEW study finds that the surveyed farmers most commonly receive crop residue management information through farmer peers or word of mouth, followed by social media and WhatsApp or mobile messages. In contrast, traditional channels such as pamphlets, leaflets, government websites, and mobile applications have much lower reach. Direct engagement remains the most trusted source. Agriculture extension officers were trusted by 62 per cent of surveyed farmers, followed by fellow farmers. This suggests that digital outreach can expand coverage, but in-person communication is critical for credibility.

**Word of mouth, social media** are the most common ways surveyed farmers received crop residue management information



Note: Results from a survey of 102 farmers in Punjab, where multiple communication channels could be selected.  
Source: Behaviour Change Approaches to Tackle Stubble Burning at Scale (2026)

**Training must become more practical:** Farmers who attended training sessions described them as largely lecture-based and lacking hands-on field demonstrations. The study notes that field demonstrations accounted for only 6.59 per cent of the IEC outlay in Punjab in 2024–25, even though practical exposure is critical to building confidence in using new machinery.

Informal rental systems are also playing a major role in adoption. Among surveyed farmers renting machinery, 56 per cent relied on fellow farmers, while 34 per cent used formal Custom Hiring Centres. This indicates that peer-to-peer machinery access is already a key driver of conversion.

**Timing and message design need improvement:** About 63 per cent of surveyed farmers said they did not receive information when they needed it. Nearly 30 per cent identified the pre-harvest period as the ideal time to receive communication, but campaigns are rarely concentrated in this window. The study also finds that farmers prefer simple, low-text materials with one or two clear messages. Further, farmers also noted they are more motivated by practical agronomic benefits such as improved soil health and yield.

**Pest fears are driving partial burning:** The CEEW study identifies “partial burners” as a key group for immediate behaviour change. These are farmers who already use crop residue management machinery but still burn some residue due to concerns such as pest attacks. Among surveyed farmers who burn residue partially or completely, 67 per cent cited pest attacks as a key reason. However, more than half had never personally witnessed such attacks and were relying on often exaggerated peer narratives. The study suggests that targeted technical reassurance and field demonstrations could help address these fears.

**Kurinji Kemanth, Programme Lead, CEEW, said:** “The study shows that information must be timely, local, trusted, and action-oriented. Behaviour change communication can help bridge the gap between knowing about alternatives and confidently using them. Punjab’s flexi-fund provisions under the CRM scheme offer an opportunity to pilot such targeted strategies.”

### Recommendations

The CEEW study recommends that Punjab build upon its IEC activities and introduce a dedicated Behaviour Change Communication strategy under the CRM scheme. The study recommends that a unified, behaviourally informed CRB campaign be piloted in select districts before scaling statewide. A campaign should integrate four components: redirecting resources towards farmers’ preferred channels (direct extension visits and social media); simplifying messages by segmenting farmer archetype, with partial burners as the immediate priority; shift social norms and target identity (shift narrative from compliance to pride); and lastly shift focus from activity counts (outputs) to behavioural outcomes (outcomes) providing a feedback loop for continuous improvement. Finally, under CRM operational guidelines, states can allocate up to 25 per cent of total budgets as flexi-funds for sub-schemes, components, or innovations, a portion of which can be used for pilot studies of behaviour change communication under IEC activities.

Read the full study, **Behaviour Change Approaches to Tackle Stubble Burning at Scale: Reimagining Crop Residue Management** by Arvind Kumar, Ayushman Saboo, Navjot Singh Sarao, and Kurinji Kemanth, [here](#).

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### About CEEW

The Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) — a homegrown institution with headquarters in New Delhi — is among the **world’s leading climate think tanks**. The Council is also often ranked among the **world’s best-managed and independent think tanks**. It uses data, integrated analysis, and strategic outreach to explain — and change — the use, reuse, and misuse of resources. It prides itself on the independence of its high-quality research and strives to **impact sustainable development at scale** in India and the Global South. In over 15 years of operation, CEEW has impacted over 400 million lives and engaged with over 20 state governments. Follow us on X (formerly Twitter) [@CEEWIndia](#) or on LinkedIn for the latest updates.