ANALYSIS OF COMPETENCIES POSSESSED BY FIELD STAFF OF PRIVATE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SYSTEM IN PUNJAB, PAKISTAN*

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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in the Department of Agricultural Extension, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan during 2007. A sample of 408 farmers was selected randomly through multistage sampling from the Punjab. Data were collected through personal interviews following validated interview schedule. Competencies of extension field staff (EFS) of private agricultural extension system was measured on 4 points scale. On measuring scale, mean value of 1 represents great weakness, 2 represents weakness, 3 represents strength and 4 represents great strength of the system. Farmers rated overall competencies of EFS regarding knowledge, attitude and skills at the mean values of 2.09, 2.17 and 2.37 with standard deviations of 0.77, 0.84 and 0.88, respectively. This reflect the overall weaknesses of private extension system. Competency regarding attributes was rated at 2.70 with standard deviation 0.73, which reveals the trend toward strength of the system.

KEYWORDS: Extension activities; private sector; Punjab; Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally agricultural extension services have been the subject of provincial government in Pakistan. Various extension-cum-community development programmes like V-AID, BDS, IRDP, etc. were launched from time to time by Government of Pakistan to increase farm production and uplift of living standard of rural masses. These programmes met with partial success and abolished one after the other. Currently Farmer Field School (FFS) approach has been introduced in the Punjab as pilot project for transfer of latest agri-technology among farmers. However, there is a wave of privatization of agricultural extension system the world over. Politicians, extension specialists and industry experts have been advocating reconsidering for public extension delivery (2, 3) and traditional extension

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system in Pakistan also need to be improved (8, 10). Public extension system with its comparatively high cost is faced with a number of seemingly intractable problems that can only be remedied by a thorough overhauling; one of possible choice can be the privatization and commercialization (9). Due to financial constraints, many countries began to examine alternative structural arrangements, including feasibility of curtailing public sector extension expenditure, change in tax raising, charges for government extension services, commercialization and privatization (6). In Pakistan, role of private sector in agricultural extension was limited until 1988, when Government of Pakistan appointed a National Commission on Agriculture (NCA) to look into poor agricultural growth and make recommendations for strengthening agricultural sector. NCA (4) suggested the inclusion of private sector in reshaping agricultural extension. According to NCA report, the most important shift needed to encourage private sector for inputs supply under total package and not just sale of specific input. Similarly, companies selling insecticides could offer a total plant protection service, consisting of agronomic, biological and chemical protection (4).

In the push towards privatization, not only private business firms such as Syngenta have entered into extension services but also a multitude of NGOs (Agha Khan Rural Support Programme, National Rural Support Scheme and Punjab Rural Support Scheme) and farmer's cooperatives (Salt land Water Users Association) took initiatives in this respect. Private sector also provides advisory services to the farmers regarding plant protection measures, chemical weed control and seed treatment (1). However, private extension field staff (EFS) should be capable of training and motivating farmers for best use of resource available at the farmer's disposal. So there is need to develop a professional competency in private EFS (11).

Present study was designed to identify strengths and weaknesses of private extension system considering the competencies possessed by EFS.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in the Department of Agricultural Extension, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan during 2007. Three zones of Punjab province (cotton, rice and central mixed zone) were selected purposively. In these zones major crops are grown and private sector is actively engaged in providing extension services to their clients. Multistage sampling technique was used for selection of respondents. During first stage, three districts were selected, one from each zone by simple random sampling. During second stage, a sample of 408 respondents was selected

(136 from each zone) by simple random sampling. Sample size was determined by using Fitzgibbon table (5). The data were collected through personal interviews with the help of validated interview schedule. The data were analyzed by using computer software (i.e. SPSS) and interpreted. Competencies of extension field staff (EFS) was measured on 4 points scale. On measuring scale, mean value of 1 represents great weakness, 2 represents weakness, 3 represents strength and mean value of 4 represents great strength of the system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Narayana's Lotus Model (11) described four areas, i.e., knowledge, attitude, skills and attributes to develop competency among private extension professionals. To assess the professional competencies of private EFS Narayana's Lotus Model was adopted with some modifications. The respondents were asked about different aspects of the competency which are discussed as under:-

Knowledge

Knowledge competency of EFS was determined by asking five questions (Table 1). Mean values of response of respondents were slightly over 2 except marketing (1.76). Overall mean value of knowledge competency was 2.09 with standard deviation 0.77. It revealed that knowledge competency of EFS was rated as weak. This might be due to the fact that private sector employs fresh graduates having less exposure of field and practical knowledge.

Table 1. Frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation regarding competency of extension field staff concerning knowledge as strengths/weaknesses of private extension system as reported by the respondents.

EFS knowledge competency	Great weakness		Weakness		Strength		Great strength		Central tendency	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Mean	SD
Subject matter	48	18.5	127	48.8	74	28.5	11	2.18	2.18	0.78
Farming systems	49	18.8	126	48.5	74	28.5	11	2.18	2.18	0.78
Inputs	45	17.3	118	45.4	86	33.1	11	2.18	2.24	0.78
Farmers problems	59	22.7	132	50.8	58	22.3	11	2.18	2.08	0.78
Marketing	102	39.2	120	46.2	35	13.5	3	1.76	1.76	0.72
Overall knowledge mean									2.09	0.77

1= great weakness, 2 = weakness, 3 = strength, 4 = great strength

Attitude

Attitude competency of EFS was analyzed by asking three questions (Table 2). Mean values of response of respondents were slightly over 2. Overall mean value of attitude competency was 2.17 with standard deviation 0.84. It revealed that attitude of EFS of private sector was rated as weakness of system by respondents. Abbas (1) reported that farmers rated the interest of EFS towards farmer's problem with a mean value of 2.85 (between low and medium) with standard deviation of 0.81. He further suggested on behalf of 52 percent of respondents that private EFS should follow regularity and punctuality in their visits to guide the farmers. With respect to satisfaction, he reported that 20 and 15 percent of respondents were partially and fully satisfied, respectively.

Table 2. **Frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation regarding competency of extension field staff concerning attitude as strengths/weaknesses of private extension system as reported by the respondents.**

EFS attitude	Great weakness		Weakness		Strength		Great strength		Central tendency	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	M	SD
Serving clients	58	22.3	111	42.7	77	29.6	14	5.4	2.18	0.84
Field work	50	19.2	106	40.8	90	34.6	14	5.4	2.26	0.83
Problem solving	75	28.8	97	37.3	80	30.8	8	3.1	2.08	0.84
Overall attitude mean									2.17	0.84

Skills

Skills competency of EFS was determined by asking four questions (Table 3.). Mean values of response of respondents were slightly over 2 except diagnostic as skill sub area which was 2.75. The sole skill i.e. diagnostic was rated toward sphere of strength. Overall mean value of skill competency was 2.37 with standard deviation 0.88. It indicates to weakness of skill competency of EFS of private sector. Reddy and Rao (7) reported that professionalism relating to private extension field staff can be incorporated by enhancing competency of extension workers through training and replacing present unqualified field staff with well-qualified grass root level workers.

Attributes

Attributes competency of EFS was analyzed by asking four questions (Table 4.). Mean values of response of respondents regarding politeness and good conduct were slightly over 3 and mean values of empathy towards farmers

Table 3. **Frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation regarding competency of extension field staff concerning skills as strengths/weaknesses of private extension system as reported by the respondents.**

EFS skills	Great weakness		Weakness		Strength		Great strength		Central tendency	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	M	SD
Technological	44	16.9	110	42.3	86	33.1	20	7.7	2.32	0.84
Training	61	23.5	106	40.8	85	32.7	8	3.1	2.15	0.82
Diagnostic	33	12.7	63	24.2	100	38.5	64	24.6	2.75	0.97
Finding solution of problems	59	22.7	98	37.7	83	31.9	20	7.7	2.25	0.89
Overall skills mean									2.37	0.88

Table 4. **Frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation regarding competency of extension field staff concerning attributes as strengths/weaknesses of private extension system as reported by the respondents**

EFS attributes	Great weakness		Weakness		Strength		Great strength		Central tendency	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	M	SD
Politeness	7	2.7	9	3.5	161	61.9	83	31.9	3.23	0.64
Good conduct	3	1.2	13	5.0	164	63.1	80	30.8	3.23	0.59
Empathy towards farmers	60	23.1	109	41.9	67	25.8	24	9.2	2.21	0.90
Flexibility	54	20.8	129	49.6	63	24.2	14	5.4	2.14	0.80
Overall attributes mean									2.70	0.73

and flexibility slightly over 2. Overall mean value of attribute competency was 2.70 with standard deviation 0.73. This means that rated attributes competency of EFS of private sector extension was skewed toward strength of private extension system. Similar results were also reported by Abbas (1). Farmers rated these attributes (politeness and good conduct) at mean value of 4.26 (on scale of 5) with standard deviation of 0.68.

CONCLUSION

Private extension system was found to be weak with respect to professional competencies of extension field staff. There is need to strengthen the system by building competencies of extension field staff regarding knowledge, attitude and skills. Overall mean value of attribute competency was 2.70 which did not reflect the strength of system. Training of private extension staff should take into account for broad- based agricultural extension system to

induce greater professional competence in extension field staff to serve farmers better.

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