Perceptions of Farmers Regarding Commercialization of Extension Services in Punjab, Pakistan

Muhammad Iqbal, Munir Ahmad, Shoukat Ali* and Izhar Ahmad**

Abstract

Privatization of extension services changes the ownership from public to private sector which is also facing so many other challenges. In the situation when economy of the country is sinking and public sector extension is facing financial constraints, commercialization of extension services is being suggested an option simultaneously keeping hold of the government extension system and also to generate profit. A study was conducted in the Institute of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development during the year 2015 to explore strengths and weaknesses of commercialization of agricultural extension services in the Punjab. District Sargodha was selected as study area from citrus growing areas of the Punjab. Multistage sampling technique was used for data collection. At first stage one district (district Sargodha) was selected purposively, at and second stage four tehsils (Silanwali, Kot Momin, Sargodha and Bhalwal) were selected randomly. In view the limitations of time and financial resources, a sample of 400 (100 from each tehsil) was drawn from the entire population using Fitz table for sample size. The results showed that about one-fifth of the respondents had full access to public sector advisory services while majority of selected citrus farmers had not adequate access to these services. Only one fifth of the respondents showed their satisfaction with the availability of these services. Higher farm output was ranked first among all the strengths of commercialization whereas financial burden on farmers was perceived as major weakness in commercialization. Among different strategies to reform agricultural extension services, structural issue was major constraint whereas policy and governance were found as the potential threats in the way of commercialization. It was suggested that commercialized extension services should be need oriented, cost effective, timely available and good governed.

Keywords: Commercialization; Extension Services; citrus growers, Pakistan.

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INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan, it is generally believed that the provision of agricultural extension services to the farming community is the core responsibility of government while in developed countries, the trend has been changed. Agricultural extension in developed countries is carried out with collaboration of private sector or it is totally privatized. In developing countries, agricultural extension system is under pressure due to many serious emerging issues like budgetary problems, cost effectiveness, lack of accountability parameters, lack of relevancy and poor governance. It is demanded by the international agencies to reform existing agricultural extension system by enhancing the role of private sector for delivering the extension services to the farmers (4, 5).

Public extension services system with its relatively high cost is facing ostensibly numeral intractable problems that can merely be remedied by a detailed overhauling. One of probable choices can be the privatization and commercialization (1, 14). Due to monetary constraints, many countries began to scrutinize alternative structural preparations including the viability of curtailing public sector extension expenses, alteration in tax raising, charges for government extension services, commercialization and privatization (8).

Commercialization of extension services of agriculture is certainly proficient and effective than public extension system. It is demand-driven instead of supply-driven. Moreover, it improves the quality of service due to healthy competition among commercial agencies. Flexible decision-making and programme implementation by commercial firms enhance the effectiveness. Commercial agency especially provides services in line with particular needs of the farmers. In privatization, ownership of the extension services changes from public to private sector. This is how the idea of commercialization appeared on the scene in present times. Commercialization is not just privatization. In commercialization, ownership does not change and is retained with govt. or semi-government organization and service is supplied on commercial foundations. In privatization, ownership is given into the hands of private agencies (11).

The rapidly developing inclination towards commercialization has given birth to severe debate which still remains doubtful. The people favouring commercialization, think to let the organizations develop into more independent, especially in situations when government funding is unable to provide sufficient funds. The people with opposite thoughts believe that this trend is against the social values as it greatly affects the working and output
of organizations (7). Commercialization does not mean only privatization. Infect commercialization, does not need to change its ownership. The government can also take the ownership under commercialization. Commercialization involves the revamping of a public enterprise and setting of commercial principles and methods of operation which include the fee structure, commercial performance objectives, accounting with the aim to make it feasible and potentially viable enterprise (2). The commercialization design will be anticipated to perform effectively in critical conditions and based on commercial basis and be capable to collect funds from capital markets without any government warranties. Such type of enterprises are more likely to expand the private sector measures in organizing their business, whereas the partial commercialization designated will raise sufficient profits to fulfil the operating expenses of the commercial organization (3). The present study was conducted to Know perceptions of farmers regarding the stress strengths and weaknesses of commercialization of extension services in Sargodha District.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study was conducted in the Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development during the year 2015. At first stage, one district (district Sargodha was selected purposively. At the second stage, four tehsil of districts Sargodha Silanwali, Kotmomin, Sargodha and Bhalwal were selected randomly. As it was extremely expensive to interview all the units of population. Due to time and financial constraints, a sample of 400 farmers (100 from each tehsil) was drawn from the entire population using Fitz-gibbon and Morris (1987) table.

Data were collected with the help of a well-structured interview schedule which was consisted of open and close ended questions. The instrument was reviewed by the members of supervisory committee of researchers. Once all the needed suggestions and recommendations were considered, the instrument was field tested for validity and reliability.

The collected data were accomplished by employing SPSS software (version 22.0). Descriptive statistics were used to calculate, interpret and discuss the results.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The data (Table 1) depicts that less than half (43.75%) of respondents had knowledge about commercialization of agricultural extension services,
whereas 56.25 percent of them replied negatively. It revealed that less than half of the selected citrus growers had knowledge about commercialization of agricultural extension services. Chuks (6) recommended that farmers’ knowledge of issues relating to privatization and commercialization should be enhanced through seminars and workshops organized by the appropriate extension agency.

Table 1. Respondents’ knowledge about commercialization of agricultural extension services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>43.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>56.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perception of farmers regarding strengths of commercialization of extension services.

The respondents were asked about strengths of commercialization of extension services and their responses. The results (Table 2) showed that statement commercialization would lead to higher farm output, was ranked first with mean 3.04 and weighted score 1218 followed by commercialization would lead to higher income (mean = 2.94, weighted score 1177) and help reduces government financial burden on agriculture (mean = 2.81, weighted score 1125) has highly qualified staff as compared to government extension workers (mean = 2.75, weighted score = 1098), make agricultural information delivery to become more effective (mean = 2.66, weighted score = 1063) and provide job opportunities to a large number of agri. graduates (mean = 2.60, weighted score = 1039) with 2nd to 6th positions respectively.

The statement that commercialization would enhances farmers’ knowledge base (mean = 2.49, weighted score = 996) attained 7th position followed by the statement commercialization would encourage competition among extension service providers (mean = 2.48, weighted score = 991), improve farmers’ management skills (mean = 2.47, weighted score = 990), ultimately lead to higher income (mean = 2.47, weighted score = 986), make it possible for more farmers to be reached (mean= 2.45, weighted score = 980) and it would provide an opportunity to the farmers to get information according to their choice (mean = 2.42, weighted score = 970), stood at 8th to 12th positions respectively. Similarly, statement commercialization would break the monopoly of public extension service (mean = 2.39, weighted score = 957), have higher credibility of information mean= (2.34, weighted score = 938), improve linkage between research and extension (mean = 2.33,
Farmer's perceptions regarding extension services commercialization

weighted score = 933), weakness availability of extension services for every farmer (mean 2.32, weighted score = 930), make easy accessibility for each farmer (mean = 2.31, weighted score 924), and it would provide opportunity for neglected areas of agricultural production to be attended (mean = 2.30, weighted score = 919) obtained 13th to 18 positions, respectively, increases priority areas of extension coverage (mean = 2.28, weighted score = 899) stood at 19th position.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their response regarding strengths of commercialization of extension services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commercialization would</th>
<th>Weighted score</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lead to higher farm output</td>
<td>1218</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ultimately lead to higher income</td>
<td>1177</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.371</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help reduce govt. financial burden on agriculture</td>
<td>1124</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.339</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have highly qualified staff as compared to government extension workers</td>
<td>1098</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.074</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make agricultural information delivery to become more effective</td>
<td>1063</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>1.307</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide job opportunities to a large number of agr. graduates</td>
<td>1039</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.097</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enhance farmers' knowledge base</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>1.023</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encourage competition among extension service providers</td>
<td>991</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>.965</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve farmers' management skills</td>
<td>986</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.038</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make extension services to be directed at specific needs of the people</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.059</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make it possible for more farmers to be reached</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.056</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide an opportunity to the farmers to get information according to their choice</td>
<td>970</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.180</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>break the monopoly of public extension service</td>
<td>957</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>.960</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have higher credibility of the information</td>
<td>938</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1.019</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve linkage between research and extension</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.175</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make easy availability of extension services for every farmer</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.078</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make easy accessibility for each farmer</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>1.083</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide opportunity for neglected areas of agricultural production to be attended to</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.260</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increase priority areas of extension coverage</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>1.058</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increase the quality of services by encouraging competition between service providers</td>
<td>899</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.140</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increase overall effectiveness of agr. extension services</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>.711</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whereas the statement ‘increase the quality of services by encouraging competition between service providers’ (mean = 2.25, weighted score = 899) and increase overall effectiveness of agr. extension services (mean = 2.19, weighted score = 876) ranked the lowest i.e. 20th to 21st positions, respectively. The findings of Maunder (12) and Ladel et al. (9) were also in line with these results indicating that commercialization of advisory services helps farming community via educational standard procedures, advanced farm practices and procedures, boosting up level of output level and earnings, making their level of life better and raise the societal and learning standards of farmers.

**Perception of farmers regarding weaknesses of commercialization of extension services.**

The respondents were also asked about weaknesses of commercialization of extension services. The data (Table 3) show that statement “commercialization would enhance financial burden on farmers” ranked 1st (mean 4.24 and weighted score 1697) on the basis of farmers response. The statements commercialization would lead to job insecurity among public extension workers (mean = 4.23, weighted score = 1691), would be more business oriented less serving (mean = 4.12, weighted score = 1647), and it would make agricultural extension services unaffordable by farmers (mean = 4.01, weighted score = 1603) attained ranked 2nd to 4th position respectively. These weaknesses fell in between agree and strongly agree categories but tended towards agree category.

The data further inculcated that weaknesses regarding commercialization would encourage exploitation of farmers (mean = 3.91, weighted score = 1565) extension service will pay attention only to increase the production without considering other factors such as environmental, social etc. (mean = 3.84, weighted score = 1537), commercialization would encourage income inequality (mean = 3.80, weighted score = 1520), commercialization would lead to poor capacity building (mean = 3.78, weighted score = 1514), farmers may have a doubt on sustaining of the commercialization (mean = 3.70, weighted score = 1481), farmer may lose their independency of decision making due to commercialized extension services (mean = 3.69, weighted score = 1476), commercialization would encourage foreign domination in the provision of extension services (mean = 3.68, weighted score = 1470) and commercialization would create hindrance to group extension service (mean = 3.41, weighted score = 1366) ranked 5th to 12th, respectively, however, weaknesses regarding ‘commercialization would promote corruption and
nepotism’ (mean = 3.08, weighted score = 1230) and Commercialization would increase the regional imbalance (mean = 2.77, weighted score = 1108) attained the lowest (13th and 14th) position.

Table 3. Distribution of the respondents according to their response regarding weaknesses of commercialization of extension services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaknesses of commercialization</th>
<th>Weighted score</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization would enhance financial burden on farmers</td>
<td>1697</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.383</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization would lead to job insecurity among public extension workers</td>
<td>1691</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.934</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization would be more business oriented less serving</td>
<td>1647</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>1.297</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization would make agricultural extension services unaffordable by farmers</td>
<td>1603</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>.677</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization would encourage exploitation of farmers</td>
<td>1565</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>1.218</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialized extension service will pay attention only to increase the production without considering other factors such as environmental, social etc.</td>
<td>1537</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.891</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization would encourage income inequality</td>
<td>1520</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.019</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization would lead to poor capacity building</td>
<td>1514</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>.825</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers may have a doubt on sustaining of the commercialization</td>
<td>1481</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>1.258</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer may lose their independency of decision marking due to commercialized extension services</td>
<td>1476</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>1.326</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization would encourage foreign domination in the provision of extension services</td>
<td>1470</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>1.203</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization would create hindrance to group extension service</td>
<td>1366</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>1.118</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization would promote corruption and nepotism</td>
<td>1230</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.073</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization would increase the regional imbalance</td>
<td>1108</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.098</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mahaliyanaarachchi (10) reported that due to squeezing, indispensable financial and human capital public agricultural extension system has assumed the form of an unproductive and hopeless system. It is being criticized for wasting of public wealth and property. Swanson and Rajalahti (17) also reported that one of the major reasons for weak connection among
public and private extension is the distinction among their financial system. Actually private extension is reliant on public extension for financial causes. Singh et al. (16) stated that participatory approaches will assist to have sturdy public-private linkage of agricultural extension.

**Strategies for reforming of agricultural extension services**

The respondents were further asked about strategies for reforming the agricultural extension services according to their response various strategies for reforming agricultural extension services were ranked (Table 4). It revealed that structure ranked first and that fell between agree to strongly agree categories but tended towards agree category (1689 and mean value 4.22). The policy also fell in between agree to strongly agree categories and tended towards agree category, attaining position (weighted score 1640 and mean value 4.10). Further, government and legal fell between somewhat agree to agree categories and were ranked 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} (weighted scores 1575, 1225 and mean values 3.94 and 3.06), respectively.

**Table 4. Distribution of the respondents regarding strategies for reforming of agricultural extension services.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for reforming of agricultural extension services</th>
<th>Weighted score</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>1689</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>.824</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>1640</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.088</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>1575</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.920</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>1225</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.802</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat agree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree 0 = Not applicable

Rivera (15) also stated that the international organizations and donor agencies have suggested the governments of developing countries to reform and modify their existing public sector structures with purpose-specific and need-specific approach. According to Prasad (13), in context of the governance, there are three types of possible; reforms one is the administrative reform which includes issues related to the people and processes. Second is the structural reform which is related to change in the structure and function of the department i.e. results of technological change. The Third is the legal reform i.e. change in the function of an institution as a result of policy changes affected by law or legislation.

**CONCLUSION**

It was concluded that nearly half of the respondents had knowledge about commercialization of agricultural extension services. The statement that
Commercialization would lead to get higher farm output was perceived as major strength of commercialization. It would lead to enhance financial burden on farmers, was identified as major flaw among all the weaknesses that might come in the way of commercialization. In order to reform agricultural extension services, structural issue was found major constraint alongwith other threats such as policy, governance and legal that might create hindrance in the way of commercialization. Hence it is recommended that commercialization would only be acceptable when these services would be cost effective, need oriented, timely available and good governed.

REFERENCES


Received: June 09, 2016 Accepted: August 18, 2016

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