

Short Communication

Perceptions of Organizational Staff of Top-Down and Participatory Agriculture Extension Systems in Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The present study was designed to find out the perceptions of organizational staff (OS) regarding the need for paradigm shift from top-down to participatory extension in the governmental agricultural extension system. The study was conducted in the Faisalabad district. The total population of OS in the top-down extension system in Faisalabad was 26 at the time of the study. The sample derived from this given population was 25. The population of OS of participatory extension system working in Faisalabad district was 30 and the sample drawn was 28. Data was collected through structured interview schedule, the collected data were analyzed to draw conclusions and to make pertinent recommendations. The data analyzed depicted the perceptions of the OS of both TDES and PES systems regarding the level to which they were agreed or dis-agreed to the 17 positively stated and 15 negatively stated statements regarding TDES system in the Punjab. It was generally concluded that OS of TDES were in strong support of TDES, whereas the OS of PES rated very low to the positive worded statements of TDES.

Key Words: Extension system; Strengths; Weaknesses; Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Development of agricultural sector had received high priority in the national development plan because of its significant contribution to the overall development of the country. Keeping in view the need for a rapid and sustainable breakthrough in agricultural productivity, accelerated government interventions and efforts are underway. These efforts include subsidies on distribution of essential farm inputs coupled with interest free and soft interest rate credits to needy growers, support prices, development of farm infrastructures i.e. farm to market roads, water reservoirs and distribution system; and farm machinery units, etc. But in spite of all these concerted efforts agricultural development in the country could not cope with the international agricultural standards (Hashmi, 2002). Simultaneously stakeholders have lot of complaints and waiting for the prompt solutions to their agro-related problems. In this scenario, agricultural extension has a challenging role, which demands an effective agricultural extension strategy to be implemented in the form of a comprehensive system, which potentially can meet those challenges. It can, therefore, be assumed that the scope and importance of agriculture sector can be achieved by the application of packages of the latest agricultural technology, which is of course the need of the day. An effective agricultural extension strategy is therefore, highly

imperative for the province to help meet rapidly increasing requirements for agricultural commodities. This will be possible only if farmers participate in planning and implementation of extension programs at the grass root level through an effective agricultural extension service.

Currently there are two types of extension systems running parallel to each other for the up-lift of rural areas in the Punjab province, the Participatory Extension System (PES) and the Top-Down Extension System (TDES). The former is running by the private sector under the control of non-governmental organization namely Punjab Rural Support Program (PRSP). The former is running under the umbrella of public sector i.e. Department of Agriculture, Government of the Punjab. In 1988 Government of the Punjab initiated a program of poverty reduction and as result the Punjab Rural Support Program (PRSP) came into being (PRSP, 2002). It is based on the principles of development. These principles purely concentrates on the need for self-development through the promotion of such type of activities as the organization to harness the potential of the people through their sincere and genuine leaders, the discipline of saving to generate own capital and up-grading of human skills. In Punjab the Department of Agriculture, Government of the Punjab is mainly responsible for the agricultural extension work. This department was taken as TDES. There is a Directorate General of Agriculture (Ext. & AR) at the provincial headquarter in the city of Lahore. The directorate general is responsible for the transfer of

agricultural technology to farmers in the Punjab. This is achieved through personal/group contacts, demonstration of new technology at farmers' fields, print and the electronic media etc. Its' functions include regulating of pesticide and fertilizer business, testing of research findings through adaptive research under local conditions; and dissemination of agricultural information to farmers. The directorate also acts as a bridge between the farmers and the agriculture researchers by gathering feedback from the farmers and communicating it to the researchers. It also struggles to increase agricultural production for fulfilling local requirements as well as surplus production for foreign exchange through dissemination of latest production technology among farming community (Govt. of Pakistan, 2001).

As a result of the overall globalization process the government of Pakistan implemented its "Devolution Plan" on August 14, 2001. This has resulted in decentralization of agricultural extension in decision making from provincial headquarter level to the district level. This decentralization has yet not shown any considerable change in the efficiency of extension service, the extension still remains top-down and autocratic in decision-making (Govt. of Pakistan, 2001). No consideration has yet been given to involve local farmers in planning extension activities and contributing budget share at district or sub-district level. A modified version of (T & V) system was implemented (Govt. of the Punjab, 1999). The present agricultural extension system run by the governmental department of agriculture in the Punjab province involves extension work through Extension Field Schools (EFS). The public sector agricultural extension system in the Punjab is still, even after the implementation of the devolution plan, top-down, hierarchical, and autocratic in decision-making and management, inefficient, supply oriented rather than demand oriented and subject to heavy criticism. The budget is also under pressure and it is becoming more difficult for the government to meet the expenses.

The private sector has demonstrated its resilience and strength in pioneering new production technologies and providing goods and services to farmers through the use of participatory approach. It is assumed that an effort to revive the efficiency of public sector can be done in a way that the public sector extension service should be build on lines on which the private sector extension is working as this might be a productive effort.

This study was designed to contribute for the solution of above-mentioned problem. In this situation where there is considerable rationale that participatory NGOs are performing extension tasks in a much better way than the public extension system, this study was planned to find out the perceptions of OS of both the systems regarding the need for paradigm shift from top-down to participatory extension in the governmental agricultural extension system.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the Faisalabad district, where Punjab Rural Support Program (PRSP) was working side by side with the government extension wing for the uplift of rural areas using participatory approach. Therefore it was considered quite logical to find out the perceptions of change agents of Top-Down Extension System (TDES) i.e. the Department of Agriculture (Ext.) Government of the Punjab; change agents of the participatory extension system (PES) i.e. PRSP; extension supervisory staff of both the systems regarding the need for paradigm shift in the governmental agricultural extension system, which is labeled as TDES.

The population of this study consisted of all 26 OS members (Change agents & their supervisors) of the public i.e. TDES; thirty (30) OS members (social organizers + supervisors) of the Punjab Rural Support Program taken as PES. The required samples were calculated by using "Table for Determining Sampling Size from a Given Population" developed by (Fitzgibbon *et al.*, 1987). The total population of organizational staff (OS) (change agents & their supervisors) in the top-down extension system in Faisalabad was 26 at the time of the study. The sample derived from this given population was 25. On the other hand the same table was also used to draw the sample from the given population of OS (change agents & supervisors) of the PRSP's participatory extension system working in Faisalabad district. The size of the population was 30 and the sample drawn was 28. Data were collected through structured interview schedule based on review of relevant literature, personal insights of the researcher and qualitative field interviews especially the focus group interviews. In designing the instrument, the objectives of the study were kept in view. The instrument comprised two sections. Section "A" contained information related to biographical information; Section "B" comprised information related to study objectives. In order to collect the required information, an interview schedule was developed. To check the validity of the interview schedule, it was pre-tested on 20 OS and necessary amendments were made in the light of pre-testing experience before finalizing the schedule. The questions were asked in local language of the respondents. The data were analyzed to draw conclusions and to make pertinent recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table I indicates data regarding the perceptions of the organizational staff of both TDES and PES system regarding the level to which they agreed or disagreed to the 17 positively stated statements; whereas, the data presented in Table II indicate their perceptions regarding 15 negatively stated statements.

According to the perceptions of the organizational staff of TDES the positive statements (Table I), which received a mean of 3.75 or higher were: (i) It applies a demand driven approach to achieve its objectives (ii) this system has the potential to give voice and understanding to the farmers through, which they can put pressure on other concerned agencies, (iii) in this system the agenda of extension meetings originate from farmers, (iv) this system provides an effective way for improving knowledge of the extension staff, (v) in this system the extension workers feel comfortable in performing their professional duties, (vi) this system provides an effective way for improving skills of the

extension staff, (vii) in this system the group approach generally offers more reflective learning environment, (viii) this system involves participatory action, and (ix) in this system the operational area of an extension worker is optimum. There was no statement, which received a mean below 1.75.

According to the perceptions of the organizational staff (OS) of PES related to the positive statements the only statement, which received a mean above 3.75, was:

In this system developmental decisions are generally based on group discussions. The statements, which received mean below 1.75, were: (i) In this system the agenda of

Table I. Rank orders, means and standard deviations of the perceptions of OS of TDES and PES regarding the strengths and weaknesses of top-down extension system. Responses to Positive statements

Statement	Organizational Staff (OS)								
	OS of TDES N=25			OS of PES N=28			Combined view of the OS of both systems		
	R	M	SD	R	M	SD	R	M	SD
In this system, developmental decisions are generally based on mutual group discussion	11	3.64	0.86	1	4.00	0.72	1	3.82	0.79
It applies a demand driven approach to achieve its objectives	3	4.16	0.62	7	2.07	0.53	2	3.11	0.57
This system has the potential to give voice and understanding to the farmers through which they can put pressure on other concerned agencies	4	4.04	0.78	5	2.10	0.49	3	3.07	0.63
In this system the agenda of extension meetings originate from farmers	1	4.28	0.84	14	1.67	0.77	4	2.97	0.80
This system provide an effective way for improving knowledge of the extension staff	7	3.80	0.70	4	2.14	0.44	5	2.97	0.57
In this system the extension workers feel comfortable in performing their professional duties	6	3.88	0.72	8	2.03	0.50	6	2.95	0.61
This system provide an effective way for improving skills of the extension staff	5	4.00	0.70	11	1.89	0.56	7	2.94	0.63
In this system the group approach generally offers more reflective learning environment	9	3.72	0.67	6	2.10	0.41	8	2.91	0.54
This system involves Participatory group action	8	3.80	0.70	12	1.89	0.56	9	2.84	0.63
This system provide an effective way for improving discipline of the extension staff	10	3.68	0.80	9	2.00	0.66	10	2.84	0.73
In this system, the operational area of an ext. worker is optimum	2	4.24	0.59	17	1.29	0.56	11	2.76	0.57
It is a farmer friendly System	14	2.96	0.88	2	2.39	0.83	12	2.67	0.85
This system provides greater chance to the farmers for sharing their problems and experience	13	3.56	0.86	15	1.67	0.86	13	2.61	0.86
Extension workers win respect and appreciation in this system	12	3.60	0.70	16	1.57	0.69	14	2.58	0.69
It uses the problem solving approach	15	2.68	0.62	10	1.96	0.42	15	2.30	0.32
In this system mostly groups are heterogeneous in terms of members' interests, beliefs, problem	17	2.44	0.91	3	2.17	0.66	16	2.30	0.78
In this system wide range of issues may emerge when farmers sit together	16	2.68	0.85	13	1.78	0.87	17	2.23	0.86

Table II. Rank orders, means and standard deviations of the perceptions of OS of TDES and PES regarding the strengths and weaknesses of top-down extension system. Responses to Negative statements

Statement	Organizational Staff (OS)								
	OS of TDES N= 25			OS of PES N= 28			Combined view of the OS of both systems		
	R	M	SD	R	M	SD	R	M	SD
Message delivery becomes boring for both the farmers an extension staff due to repetition of messages for long period of time	1	4.08	0.49	10	4.00	0.72	1	4.04	0.60
It is labor intensive Involving many extension worker	3	4.04	0.53	11	3.92	0.71	2	3.98	0.62
There is weak monitoring system of extension staff	4	3.72	0.73	3	4.25	0.58	3	3.98	0.65
This system emphasizes on the top-down mode of dissemination of innovation	5	3.68	0.85	4	4.17	0.47	4	3.92	0.66
This system lacks residential facilities for the extension staff working in remote areas	2	4.04	0.67	15	3.78	0.83	5	3.91	0.75
This system has been criticized on the basis of likely selfish behavior of contact farmer	6	3.40	0.70	12	3.92	0.76	6	3.66	0.73
In this system there is lack of proper planning	7	3.12	0.83	5	4.03	0.63	7	3.57	0.73
In this system there is less provision of developing research-extension linkages	8	3.12	0.83	6	4.03	0.69	8	3.57	0.76
In this system there is lack of proper evaluation	9	3.12	0.83	7	4.03	0.74	9	3.57	0.78
In this system all the members of farming community are not given equal treatment	11	2.76	1.09	2	4.25	0.92	10	3.50	1.00
This system is not properly implemented	10	3.00	0.76	13	3.89	0.73	11	3.44	0.74
In this system the ext. workers contact Only rich, educated and influential clients	12	2.36	1.03	1	4.32	0.77	12	3.34	0.90
It is often regarded as very expensive system	13	2.16	0.89	8	4.03	0.69	13	3.09	0.79
Small and needy farmers are neglected in this system	15	2.00	0.91	9	4.03	0.74	14	3.01	0.82
Importance is only given to the dissemination of messages rather than making farmers understand these messages	14	2.12	0.66	14	3.82	0.66	15	2.97	0.66

extension meetings originate from farmers, (ii) in this system the operational area of an extension worker is optimum, (iii) this system provides chances to the farmers for sharing their problems and experiences, and (iv) extension workers win respect and appreciation in this system.

According to collective perceptions of the OS of TDES and PES the only statement, which received a mean above 3.75, was: In this system developmental decisions are generally based on group discussions. There was no statement, which received mean below 1.75.

The data presented in Table II depict the perceptions of the organizational staff (OS) of the TDES and PES regarding negatively stated statements. The statements, which received a mean above 3.75 as perceived by the OS of TDES regarding the TDES were: (i) Message delivery becomes boring for both the farmers and extension staff due to repetition of messages for long period of time, (ii) it is labor intensive involving many extension workers, (iii) there is weak monitoring system of extension staff, and (iv) this system lacks residential facilities for the extension staff working in remote areas. There was no statement, which received a mean below 1.75 as perceived by the OS of TDES regarding negative statements related to TDES.

The organizational staff (OS) of PES perceived the statements in some-what different style. According to their perceptions it was found that all negative statements regarding the Top-down extension system received means above 3.75, which shows that OS of Participatory extension system strongly agreed to the negative aspect of TDES, which shows the weaknesses of TDES. Some of the important statements as perceived by the OS of PES, which received mean above, 3.75 were: (i) There is weak monitoring system of extension staff, (ii) message delivery becomes boring for both the farmers and extension staff due to repetition of messages for long period of time, and (iii) it is labor intensive involving many extension workers.

There was no statement, which received the mean below 1.75. It shows that the OS of PES did not disagree to the negative aspect of TDES.

According to the combined perceptions of the organizational staff of TDES and PES the following statements received a mean above 3.75: (i) Message delivery becomes boring for extension staff due to repetition of messages for long period of time, (ii) it is labor intensive involving many extension workers, (iii) there is weak monitoring system of extension staff, (iv) this system emphasizes on the top-down mode of dissemination of innovation, and (v) this system lacks residential facilities for the extension staff working in remote areas. According to combined perceptions of the OS of both TDES and PES there was no statement, which received a mean below 1.75.

CONCLUSIONS

From the above discussion, following conclusion were made:

- i) The organizational staff of TDES was in strong favor of their system therefore, any effort to shift the paradigm from Top-Down to participatory extension will be strongly criticized by them.
- ii) The OS of the PES were in strong favor of their system, therefore they strongly advocate the need of shifting the paradigm not in only private sector but also in Public sector too i.e. Department of Agricultural Extension, Govt. of the Punjab.
- iii) The combine perceptions of OS of both the systems depict the situation in which the TDES was not a favorable and appreciable system by the farming community especially in terms of farmer participation.
- iv) The TDES system strongly lacks coordination between farmers', researchers and extension.
- v) The flow of feedback in case of farmers in PES is stronger and effective as compared to TDES.
- vi) It was generally perceived in majority by the OS of PES that in PES, decisions are generally based upon group participation.
- vii) The paradigm shift from the top-down to participatory extension could only be made if the OS of TDES are provided training at the government level regarding participatory mode of working in the field of Agricultural Extension.

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