

PRIVATIZATION OF EXTENSION : MERITS AND DEMERITS

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Agriculture is the backbone of India's economy, it provides livelihood to about 64 per cent of the country's working force, contributes nearly 26 per cent of national income and accounts for about 18 per cent share in India's exports. It has the full responsibility to double the present food-production level by 2010 to meet the requirements of ever increasing population. Nutritional security is the next most important dimension, which needs the attention of extension workers simultaneously. Besides, it is essential to prepare the farmers to face the challenges of implication of World Trade Organisation on Indian Agriculture. The extension focus would be on quality, cost of production, value addition, market led extension and cyber application in agriculture. These challenges require the modification in the role of present extension. The process of changing roles and additional responsibility, limitations of resources in public extension has created the gap. This space created by public extension is getting filled up by private extension.

Concept of Private Extension/Privatization—The definition of Agricultural Extension varies from simple transfer of information to facilitating the process of total human development. The services are mainly funded and delivered by government in Indian context. But there are private players who also fund and/or deliver extension services. This process of funding and delivering extension services by private individual or organisation is called private extension. Bloome (1993)

indicated that, private extension involves personnel in the private sector that delivers advisory services in the area of agriculture and is seen as an alternative to public extension. Whereas, Ven den Ban and Hawkins (1996) stated that, farmers are expected to share the responsibility for this service and pay all or part of the cost. Saravanan and Shivalinge Gowda (2000) who operationalised privatization in the following manner, "Privatization of agricultural extension service refers to the services rendered in the area of agriculture and allied aspects by extension personnel working in private agencies or organizations for which farmers are expected to pay a fee (or free) and it can be revived as supplementary or alternative to public extension services".

These concepts about the privatization emphasizes three aspects, they are:

1. It involves extension personnel from private agency/organisation.
2. Clients are expected to pay the service fee (private extension may not expect fee from clients e.g. NGOs).
3. Act as supplementary or alternative to public extension service.

Need of Privatization—With the coming up of World Trade Organisation the problems and challenges become sharper and extension personnel will have to equip themselves to meet these challenges more promptly. There will be increasing specialization in farm technology and therefore they have to keep

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themselves upto date with respect to these trends and evolve matching extension technologies and methods for taking the same to farmers field.

Private extension services are required to guide the farmers for adopting the farming methods according to the market needs and reduce the losses occurring in marketing. The availability of appropriate and effective marketing extension service is essential for developing farming as it provides signals for their intensification improvement and diversification. This service is being provided in different forms and magnitudes in different countries of the world.

Private marketing extension should help farmers to supply the produce at right time, right place, right ways, right quantity and right quality looking to the demands of markets. Unless farmers are able to achieve these, they will be encountering innumerable marketing problems. We should evolve solutions to solve the problems of marketing extension like conceptual constraints, organizational constraints, and implementation constraints so that the emerging challenges can be met. There should be provision for market opportunity information, including price information, technology transfer, forward and backward linkages for increasing market access to farmers and institutional set up for marketing extension.

Marketing is crucial for ensuring balanced and continuing development of sustainable agriculture. Through the government and the private sector have made substantial investments in the development of infrastructure and facilities for marketing of agricultural produce, the development of the agricultural marketing system is far below the desired level. Therefore, the need of a private institution to take care of the variety specilized and needs of marketing was realised which

would carry out economic and technical feasibility studies and cost benefit analysis in respect of investment made by government and public in agricultural marketing.

According to Proost and Roling (1992) the major reasons of privatization are (i) to cut down government expenses, (ii) to get rid of an embarrassment to extension education; a public service with increasing inconsistent task promoting farmers' interests and for introducing stringent environment policies at the same time. A desired consequence of privatization in the expected increase of the influence of farmers in the extension organisation.

Prime objective of private extension mainly concern with maximum possible profit to the clients through advisory services. Because their remuneration obviously linked with increased income of the farmers.

Reasons Behind the Privatization Issue :

(A) Financial Burden on Government-

First and foremost reason behind the privatization is declining trend in government expenditure for extension in several countries over the last decade. Financial burden of governments have forced to make sharp reduction in the budget of public extension programmes.

(B) Disappointing Performance of Public Extension Service-Impact of public extension system in agricultural development is generally disappointing, ineffective extension work, transfer of technologies are not economically viable, not matching with farmers needs, little consideration for cost-effectiveness, less competent extension personnel with no accountability to farmers, bureaucratic nature and target oriented programme mostly imposed on farmers. Moreover, public extension alone will never answer the entire demand of farming community.

(C) Commercialization of Agriculture–

In recent past most of the developing countries including Indian agriculture are shifting from mere subsistence level to commercialized agribusiness. Above all, challenges and opportunities of globalization and liberalization era demand effective alternative extension approach. Growing commercial and specialized nature of agriculture will demand quick and technically sound advice, based on scientific analysis with appropriate marketing information. Existing public extension system is not capable of meeting these challenges.

Merits of Privatization :

1. Extension generate new income, extension become economic input.
2. Provides demand-driven service.
3. Increases the voice of farmers in the extension service.
4. Extension service become more cost effective with efficient and quality service.
5. Privatization complement or supplement the efforts of public extension.
6. Extension personnel become more client accountable.
7. Private extension increases staff professionalism.
8. Clients (farmers) are more committed to service.
9. Private extension concentrates big and progressive farmers and areas having favourable environment.
10. Private extension is less education oriented and more commercial in nature.
11. Private extension don't concentrate only on food grain production but will promote crop diversification.

Factors for Privatization of Agricultural Extension Service in India–The following factors have to be considered for privatization of agricultural extension service in India.

1. Types of crops cultivated throughout the country.
2. Socio-economic strata differences among the farming community viz. tenancy, ownership, leased, small, marginal, medium and large farmers categories.
3. Entirely drastic agro-climatic variation along and across the length and breadth of the country.
4. Different approaches followed in various developing and developed countries and their utility possibilities in our country, environment etc.
5. Changes in rainfall pattern, vagaries of monsoon, floods, cyclone etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Extension activity to be promoted linking the employment for unemployed Graduate, PG as well as retired experience personnel from Department of Agriculture, Agro.-Input-Industry, provision for registration and financial backup. Agriculture Graduation may be made mandatory.
2. Extension technique duly approved by Agriculture Department only will be allowed.
3. Reasonable rates must be charged to the farmers.
4. Agricultural extension system must conserve the natural resource system and preserve ecological balance.
5. Both Central and State Government should come out explicit policy guidelines specifying the role of private agencies in Agriculture.

Demerits of Privatization of Extension Service :

The chain reaction of social change creates consequences in different direction. It is difficult to have planned change when basic

factors are not homogenous. It is presumed that the consequences of privatization of extension service will lead to the following :

- Social distance
- Social conflict
- Social disequilibrium
- Higher gap between have and have not
- Side lining coming of farmers
- Selectiveness of technologies for adoption.
- Commercialization with human value
- Shortage if essential food grain required at rural village level.
- With temptation to act as middleman rather than food producers.

CONCLUSION

The private extension has various merits

along its' demerits and considering the importance of privatization of extension or private extension in present situation, it requires proper regulations for better acceptance of the advantages of private extension. In this aspect, both central and state Government should come out suitable policy guidelines specifying the role of private agencies in agriculture. Private extension should develop a well trained and equipped force of marketing personnel to generate and disseminate knowledge through promotion of applied research on various aspects of agricultural marketing management and policy formulations. Private agencies survival depends upon nature of their performance, So, they try to become more efficient and effective in providing services.

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