

PRIVATIZATION OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Structural and functional change in agricultural extension is important to meet the needs and challenges of the new millennium. The globalization and liberalization era has made people to rethink the role of public extension in developing countries. These include -

1. Fiscal crisis / financial burden on governments
2. Disappointing (non-accountability) public extension services
3. Opportunities and challenges of agriculture in GATT.

In this existing climate, privatizing the public extension service has come as an alternative to public extension service. Therefore, in the coming years, experimentation and implementation of privatization might flourish in many developing countries. (Saravanan and Shivalinge Gowda, 1999).

Concept of Privatization

Bloome (1993) indicated that, private extension involves personnel in the private sector which delivers advisory services in the area of agriculture and is seen as an alternative to public extension. Whereas, Van den Ban and Hawkins (1996) state that, farmers are expected to share the responsibility for this service and pay all or part of the cost.

Saravanan and Shivalinge gouda (1999) operationalised 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 and it can be viewed as supplementary or alternative to public extension services."

A case study of private agricultural consultancy in Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu

In the recent years, farmers are slowly shifting from subsistence farming to commercial farming in order to maximize their profit. Commercialization of agriculture hastened the emergence of private consultancy in mid 1990s. In the present globalization and liberalization era, plant breeders rights, patents rights to specific technologies has drawn the attention of private sector in to agricultural extension service. Most of the consultancy are non registered, mostly run by single technical person, covering small area, mainly concentrating on all aspects of horticulture crops, especially project appraisal, production packages, land purchase, seed production, input management, information management, propagation, packages and irrigation management (Drip and sprinkler irrigation), disease and pest control measures, seed production in field crops. Mostly non agricultural sector people and few big farmers are main clients of private consultancy. Private constancy for research information mainly relies on agricultural university and mass media. Almost all constancy agencies are widely using personal contacts and telephone communication (Saravanan, 1999a).

Maiden research results indicated that, overwhelming majority of progressive

farmers, scientists had favourable attitude. Good number of scientists preferred privatization in all the crops, all the farmers categories and in all the agro-climatic regions. However, considerable proportion of scientists preferred privatization only for commercial horticultural crops and only to large farmers. Majority of the scientists perceived desirable consequences through privatization, Overwhelming majority of scientists agreed that the effect of privatization of agricultural extension service increases accountability of extension personnel to farmers, increases production of commercial agricultural crops, ensures quality extension service, increases extension workers professionalism, creates additional income to farmers, enhance farmers commitment to extension service. Majority of the scientists disagreed with the perceived implications that privatization leads to less contact between farmers and extension personnel, decreases the food grain production, limited educational role, human Resource Development will be sidelined and feed back to public research system will be reduced (Saravanan et al, 1999)

Expected elements in privatization of agricultural extension service

- Extension personnel : High accountability to farmers highly motivated Well trained, professional competency
- Farmer : Highly committed to extension service, Highly careful in selecting extension agent and technology.
- Technologies : Location specific and client specific Demand driven, Economically viable (highly profitable)
- Target graced : Only those who can pay, Commercial big farmers
- Offerings : Profit oriented, Farmers need based

- Methods : Personal communication, Low with group and mass communication channels
- Objectives : Profit maximization, Efficiency
- Extension service : Economic input that generates new income (Saravanan and Shivalinge gowda, 2000)

Strategies for privatization in India

****Gradual withdrawal of public extension system***

Gradual withdrawal can be done in two ways: Area wise and or commodity wise. Areas having favorable environment like high soil fertility, high irrigation potential, satisfactory infrastructure facilities and commercial cropped area. Commodities which provide high profit to farmers in such cases extension service responsibility can be given to private sector.

****Giving partnership rights and more responsibility to private sector and NGO's***

Private sector and NGO's are entering in a big way in recent years to provide agricultural constancy. They may be given more responsibility in agricultural technology transfer.

****Creating and strengthening farmers groups and cooperatives***

Through farmers groups, cooperatives, extension agents are appointed and cost will be shared by members. For this purpose, existing village co-operatives, clubs, mahila mandals and water management committees are used.

****Introducing share cropping system***

Extension agents are provided with remuneration in the form of share crop. It will increase the extension personnel's accountability and commitment to the service (Saravanan, 1999 b).