

Study of Strategies of Agricultural Extension Privatization in Mazandaran Province, Iran

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the strategy of extension privatization in Mazandaran province. The methodological approach in this study was description-correlative. The target population in the study was the agricultural experts in the Mazandaran, Iran. Experts were selected by using randomized sampling method 154. Validity of the instrument was established using a panel of experts consisting of senior faculty members in agricultural extension at Sari University. Further, the questionnaire was validated by agricultural specialists and experts' Mazandaran province. A reliability analysis was conducted, Cronbach alpha value being reported to be 88 percent. Findings reveal that strategies of client-based extension system, allocating subsidies to the farmers; document guidance and contract system are one to four priorities respectively. Between mean rank of strategies of allocating subsidies to the farmers and contracting extension are significant differences in relation to gender. Among mean rank of strategies of client-based extension system, farmers' extension organizations and contracting extension in relation to education level and Among mean rank of strategies of to extension based on commission, allocating subsidies to the farmers and private consultants in relation to employment place are significant differences.

Keywords: Privatization of Extension, Strategy, Experts, Mazandaran

Introduction

Nowadays, state agricultural extension has been placed in a completely different position, which can be regarded as the ending of a main period in its quite short story according to some experts in this field of study. Anyhow, this is a fact that the role of state agricultural extension has been changing and it has been evaluated and tested again. With respect to the essence of these factors and those which have played a significant role in causing these revolutions, different approaches and interpretations have been suggested. However, according to Hosseini (1998), it can be regarded as true that two major factors pave the way to look for some private extension alternatives at the present situation. First, the necessity of satisfying the various needs of a growing agricultural population, the majority of whom are effectively barred from receiving extension services (coverage issue). Second, a serious limitation of financial resources, facilities, equipments and the personnel of organizations and institutions related to state or public extension (resource issue). In spite of the fact that the agricultural sector has focused a lot of its attention on creating employment opportunities, producing income, and satisfying the needs of a society and has invested a large sum of money by means of public assistance, we cannot observe a significant growth in agricultural sector in relation to productivity and production. Therefore, the agricultural extension services which have been carried out by public section have widely been criticized due to its inability in doing the assigned tasks and lack of cost effectiveness and efficiency, making it necessary to bring about some changes such as structural modification, decentralization, and privatization at the present situation for the purpose of agricultural extension (Rivera, 1993). Private extension refers to the presented services in the area of agriculture and its related aspects which are introduced by extension employees in public or private

organizations and they ask farmers to pay the charges for the presented services. In addition, these services can be regarded as a complementary tool or a substitute for public extension services (Saravanan, 2001).

There are several reasons behind privatizing agricultural extension including the occurrence of financial crisis, a reduction in the economic budget of the governments, a weak performance of some public or state extension plans, the agricultural reliance on more specialized knowledge and technology, an enhancement of the quality of extension services, and a decline in the government's expenses (Saravanan et al, 2002; Rivera and Cary, 1997). Furthermore, the privatization of agricultural extension is necessary to decrease the amount of money spent by the government, to increase the efficiency of extension services, to decentralize and increase the extender's auditing and the competency of research system (Chandra and Shekara, 2001).

According to Farrokhi (2001), the most important purposes followed by privatizing agricultural extension in Iran are as follows:

- An increase in educational coverage of extension services by implementing private extension organizations without paying any money on the part of the government
- The creation of a revolution in public extension and an increase in its efficiency through competition with the private extension
- The provision of different opportunities for different groups of farmers, whether minor or major owner, to participate in extension activities
- An increase in the effectiveness of extension plans by selecting the best possible extension system

There are some positive and negative consequences behind privatizing the extension. As far as the positive consequences are concerned, we can refer to a decrease in economic load of the government, a promotion in efficiency and the quality of extension services for the purpose of the farmers' satisfaction, an increase in the sense of responsibility and commitment on the part of extenders and finally the creation of a competition in research system (Saravanan et al, 2002).

Regarding the negative consequences of extension privatization, we can refer to a decline in the connection between different organizations and farmers during exchanging agricultural information and others, more attention to economic organizations of major owners and lack of attention to those owners possessing a small piece of land, a reduction in emphasizing the usefulness of governmental information and lastly a change in people's standpoint about considering knowledge as something which can be sold and bought (Rivera and Cary, 1997). In addition, according to Satapathy and Mangaraj (2001), the extension privatization causes an increase in social gap and behaviors, lack of social balance, an emphasis on selective technologies for acceptance, the commercialization of human values and the marginalization of farmers.

Shivalinge Gowda and Saravana (2001) did a research entitled "the approach and performance of agricultural specialists with regard to privatizing agricultural extension services". They came to this conclusion that 50% of specialists have favorite attitude, 22.5 % very favorable attitude and 27.5% unfavorable attitude toward privatization.

In another research which was done by Hachinal et al (2001), the privatization of extension services and the extension employees' attitude and performance was put under investigation. They concluded that 35% of extension employees have favorable attitude, 31.67 % very favorable attitude and 33.33 % unfavorable attitude toward privatization.

In their research "rural poverty and privatization", Haji Mir Rahimi and Karimi (1995), resulted that extension privatization should be limited to those places or regions whose farmers have had economic potentialities and have discovered the importance of the role of information in enhancing production. By considering these circumstances, the extension privatization system can be efficient and practical in increasing production, which is regarded as one of the purposes of extension in developing countries.

Another research was done Hosseini in 1998. He studied "the new global trends in privatization and a reduction in agricultural extension cost". He came to this conclusion that, according to Iran's policy, privatization can be taken into account as the strengthener of public extension system and as the current financial focus on poor farmers and strategic products in relation to a specific group of commercial farmers and some distinguished products.

Finally, Khatonabadi (1998) did a research entitled "the study of effective variables in extension privatization in Isfahan Province". He reached to this conclusion that large and medium farmers, based on the piece of land they possess and their annual income, have experienced more motivation in paying the cost of essential extension services in comparison to small farmers. This tendency has practically been more than others in the fields of plant protection and veterinary practice.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- Determining the background characteristics of the participants in this research
- Prioritizing financing strategies for the purpose of agricultural extension privatization in the study area
- Comparing strategies in relation to the independent variables of the study in order to find the important factors in privatizing agricultural extension

Materials and Methods

The correlation and descriptive method have been utilized in this research because it pays attention to the description of variables, on one hand, and it determines the amount and the kind of relationship between the dependant and independent variables, on the other hand. Two hundred and fifty four extension experts of Manzandaran Province were selected as the statistical population. Stratified random sampling was used for the purpose of this study. The population includes 16 towns of Manzandaran Province and the cooperating management of extension network of the province. Because, the statistical population was heterogeneous, and their variances were high, So we chosen 154 of 254 peoples. Kukran formula was used for selecting the sample, finally, 154 samples were chosen for data collection. This sample was divided among them according to the magnitude of every class. In order to better understand the procedure for obtaining the appropriate sample, the following calculations have been done:

$$n = \frac{Nt^2s^2}{Nd^2 + t^2s^2}$$

N: the population (all extension experts)

n : the sample (the extension sample selected among the population)

t : the level of confidence

S2 : the highest amount of variance obtained from the preliminary test

d : accuracy degree

$$n = \frac{254 \times 3.84 \times 0.256}{254 \times (0.05)^2 + 3.84 \times 0.256} \quad n = 154 \text{ (Mansorfar, 1998)}$$

To determine the validity of the research instruments and variance for the purpose of sampling, the preliminary test was taken. In this test, the questionnaire was given to 15 extension experts in Manzandaran province. After data collection, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was obtained for each variable by SPSS software. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all variables which had a rating scale was 88%. In this research, eleven strategies of agricultural extension privatization as the dependent variable in relation to the independent variables including gender, the occupational position, and field of study, the level of education, age and the experts' experience were investigated.

Results and Discussion

The demographics

Background information about the participants was collected by background questionnaire. Regarding the average age of the participants (42.4) and their experiences in extension activities (14.8 years), we can find out that most of the participants are middle-aged and experienced. Most of them are male and they have B.A. degree, mainly in the field of farming.

Strategies of agricultural extension privatization

To determine the strategies of agricultural extension privatization, eleven strategies including a five-choice Likert scale was presented. The range of scoring is as follows: 1: very low, 2: low, 3 = moderate, 4 = high, 5 = very high. The following table indicates the mean, standard deviation, variation coefficient and the rank of each strategy among the respondents. Accordingly, client– based extension system; allocating subsidies to the farmers, document guidance, contracting extension, share system, commodity-based extension as the first to sixth strategy in relation to agricultural extension privatization were identified.

Table 1. The given priority to Strategies of agricultural extension privatization according to extension experts

*Strategy	Mean	SD	Coefficient of Variation	Rank
Client– Based extension system	3.58	0.92	0.257	1
Allocating subsidies to the farmers	3.70	1.03	0.278	2
Document guidance	3.47	1.01	0.290	3
Contracting extension	3.56	1.07	0.300	4
Share system	3.32	1.10	0.329	5
Commodity-Based extension	3.20	1.06	0.329	6
Input-Supply system	3.19	1.08	0.338	7
Farmers' extension organizations	3.08	1.04	0.338	8
Extension based on commission	2.92	1.11	0.382	9
Cost recovering	2.77	1.13	0.407	10
Private consultants	2.79	1.20	0.431	11

*Five-point Likert scale: 1=very low, 2=low, 3= moderate, 4= high, 5= very high

Table 2 compares the strategies of agricultural extension privatization in relation to sex and occupational position. The results indicate that there is a significant difference between male and female experts in the rank average of some strategies including allocating subsidies to the farmers and contracting extension. Also, there isn't a significant difference between rank averages of strategies related occupational position of the experts. Based on the result of this study, the ladies have more inclination toward privatizing extension and they regard it as positive.

Table 2. the comparison of strategies of agricultural extension privatization in relation to sex and occupational position

Strategy	Sex		Occupational position	
	Mann-Whitney test	Sig	Mann-Whitney test	Sig
Client– Based extension system	835.5	0.546	1713	0.531
Allocating subsidies to the farmers	609.5	0.023*	1651	0.307
Document guidance	924	0.966	1530.5	0.105
Contracting extension	527.5	0.004**	1815.5	0.847
Share system	718.5	0.135	1808	0.818
Commodity-Based extension	677.5	0.074	1561.5	0.143
Input-Supply system	651	0.230	1731	0.654
Farmers' extension organizations	732	0.570	1788.5	0.880
Extension based on commission	807	0.387	1833	0.917
Cost recovering	767.5	0.253	1816.5	0.852
Private consultants	855	0.600	1767	0.667

*p<0.05

**p<0.01

Table 3 compares the strategies of agricultural extension privatization in relation to their level of

reported to be more in the fields of botany and veterinary. In addition, Shahbani (1998) did a research entitled "the study of possibility of agricultural extension privatization according to officials, extenders, and farmers in Shahriar city". Forty two percent of participants had positive evaluation toward the future of extension with regard to privatization and 34.5% of them believed that a combination of private and state or governmental extension is the most appropriate resource of presenting services. Further, Separian (2002) studied the possibility of privatizing extension activities in animal affairs from the viewpoint of experts and concluded that a rather positive approach has taken place in animal affairs with respect to extension privatization. In addition, as far as the methods of privatization is concerned, he drew this conclusion that the establishment of some offices of extension educational services and the launch of some bases for counseling services have been

regarded as

some appropriate and useful methods.

Lastly, there was a negative significant relationship between age and strategies of client- based extension system, contracting extension, farmers' extension organizations at the level of 0.05. In other words, the younger experts were more familiar with these strategies. Also there was a positive correlation between experience of the experts and strategy of contracting extension at level 0.05 of significance. In other words, experimented were more interested in privatization in relation to contracting extension.

1-Authorities to provide solutions to farmers' empowered by extension privatization

2- It is suggested that in Joibar and Babolsar townships, solution-based services can be salary, also giving subsidies to farmers in the Noshahr and Ramsar townships is a good suggestion, in Chalous and Joibar is the best choice can be selected by private advisers.

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