

## STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF EXTENSION SYSTEM AS PERCEIVED EXTENSION FIELD STAFF

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### ABSTRACT

Major modifications in the nation building departments were launched in Pakistan through the Devolution Plan 2000 promulgated by the then military regime. In the agriculture sector, changes were introduced in 2001 to replace the existing Training & Visit (T&V) system. The training sessions arranged by extension workers in the decentralized system are similar to the ones arranged in the T&V system. The difference is that in the T&V system, there were fortnightly training sessions but under the current approach only two to three training sessions are arranged in a crop season. Another difference is that under T&V the Field Assistants were front line extension workers whereas in the decentralized system AOs are the extension workers. Another major difference of both approaches is that under T&V approach, extension was centrally managed by the Director General, Agriculture (Ext & AR) at the provincial headquarters level whereas presently extension is decentralized and locally managed by District Officer of Agriculture (DOAs) at district level who is answerable to Executive District Officer of Agriculture (EDO). In previous system, the Extension Field Staff (EFS) followed fortnightly schedule to provide the information to contact farmers (CFs) who were supposed to pass on the same to non contact farmers (NCFs). Furthermore, decision-making under T&V system was done at central level. Whereas, in the present system, the EFS are conducting crop-wise trainings for the dissemination of agricultural information and decision-making is done at district level. The role of CFs has been abolished in the present system. So, keeping in view the change made under decentralized extension system, the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary system were assessed. The population of the study consisted of change agents and their supervisory staff working in Faisalabad district. The data were collected by using "survey" method. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. It was concluded that information reaches farmers,, access to information by farmers also increased under decentralized extension system. The decentralized extension system offers more feedback on farmers' problems to Extension field Staff (EFS). However, respondents were very concerned about the appreciation / reward criteria for good extension worker. It is recommended that a strong reward system should be in placed for increasing efficiency. The data regarding the weaknesses show that work load of EFS is increased and extension system lacks single line command tended toward agree category.

**Key Words:** Decentralized extension system, Training sessions, Strengths and weaknesses of the system, Training and visit, Decision making

**Citation:** Ashraf, I., S. Muhammad, K. Mahmood, M. Idrees and N. Shah. 2009. Strength and weaknesses of extension system as perceived extension field staff. Sarhad J. Agric. 25(1): 131-134.

### INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan, decentralized extension system was introduced in 2001 to replace a so called T&V system. Though the current system of extension in the Punjab, Pakistan, is a modified version of T&V system and is claimed to be a refined one, it is still top-down, autocratic, and has many limitations (Ali *et al.* 2003). It is argued that public sector agricultural extension is characterized by poorly motivated staff, a preponderance of non-extension duties, inadequate operational funds, lack of relevant technology, top-down planning, centralized management, and a general absence of accountability (Antholt, 1994). Decentralization of extension services may be undertaken with a view to improving their relevance, responsiveness and cost-effectiveness (Smith, 2001). Based on the traditional linear approach, these programmes have met with limited success and were abandoned one after another. At present, agricultural extension is modeled around a training and visit system, which relies on contact farmers to diffuse technical information to surrounding farmers (Davidson *et al.* 2000). The decentralization has not yet shown any

considerable change in the efficiency of extension service. The extension service still remains inefficient, top-down, autocratic, big farmer oriented, ignoring the gender equality issue, and ignoring youth as partners (Farooq and Ishaq, 2005, Khushk and Memon, 2004). Bajwa (2004) argues that public sector in Pakistan has certain strengths and weaknesses. The public sector extension services do not reach the bulk of the small farmers due to poorly motivated staff, inadequate operational funds, lack of relevant technology, top-down planning, centralized management, and weak accountability system. The training sessions arranged by extension workers in the decentralized system are similar to the ones arranged in the T&V system. The difference is that in T&V system there were fortnightly training sessions but under the current approach only two to three training sessions are arranged in a crop season. Another difference is that under T&V the FAs were front line extension workers whereas in the decentralized system AOs are the extension workers. Another major difference of both approaches is that under T&V approach extension was centrally managed by the Director General Agriculture (Ext & AR) at the provincial headquarters level whereas presently extension is decentralized and locally managed by DOA at district level who is answerable to EDOA. In previous system, the EFS followed fortnightly schedule to provide the information to contact farmers (CFs) who were supposed to pass on the same to non contact farmers (NCFs). Furthermore, decision-making under T&V system was done at central level. Whereas, in present system, the EFS are conducting crop-wise trainings for the dissemination of agricultural information and decision-making is done at district level. The role of CFs has been abolished in the present system. Farooq and Ishaq (2005) pointed out that the people responsible at district level for implementing agricultural activities are not yet fully conversant with the philosophy, rationale and operational strategies of the decentralized extension system; as a result, the district instead of being a fully functional focal point for programme planning has become isolated entity. They further argued that Pakistan is faced with the problem of theoretical models, which do not fit into the local situations with special reference to farmers' organizations, extension infrastructure and available human and financial resources. Khushk and Memon (2004) found that 86% of the EFS of Agriculture Department reported that there was no change in transport facility, while at some places this has been decreased after devolution. The agriculture and deputy district officers are not involved in financial transaction and only the EDO and district officers deal in financial matters. Funds have been reduced by 25 to 30%. Before devolution quarterly budget were received but now these are on monthly basis which creates problems in utilizing under different heads. It has also weakened the morale and motivation of agriculture officers and staff. Majority (82%) of the extension agents perceived improvement in overall performance of the agricultural extension. Whereas, majority (72%) of the farmers have not reported any change in the overall performance of the agriculture extension after devolution. So, keeping in view the change made under decentralized extension system, the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary system were assessed.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The population of the study consisted of change agents and their supervisory staff working in Faisalabad district. It was decided to take all the EFS in the selected five tehsils. There were 19 Agricultural Officer (AOs) and 7 supervisory staff making 26 organizational staff members. The organizational setup at the district level comprises; one each of EDO (Executive District Officer) and DOA (District Officer Agriculture); 5 DDAOs (Deputy District Officers); 19 AOs (Agriculture Officers) and 137 FAs (Field Assistants). The data were collected by using "survey" method. The validity of the data collection instrument was checked with the help of experts in the Department of Agricultural Extension, University of Agriculture Faisalabad. After making necessary amendments, the researcher proceeded to the study area for pre-testing. A test or scale is reliable if it yields the same results when repeated measurements are taken of the same subjects under the same conditions (Farooq, 2001). An instrument cannot be valid if it is not reliable. Therefore, in order to check the reliability of the instrument test/retest method was used. All the farmer respondents who were interviewed at the time of pre-testing of the instrument were again interviewed by using the same instrument after a 20 day interval. Field workers of tehsil "Toba Tek Singh" (one of adjacent tehsil of the study area) were selected for pre-testing the instrument. The data were collected by the researcher himself with the help of valid, reliable and pre-tested interview schedule. The researcher attended weekly training session of EFS and collected the relevant information through face to face interviews. The data were analyzed through computer soft ware of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In order to determine the relative ranking of the strengths and weaknesses, the rank orders were calculated on the basis of relative score computed by multiplying score value allotted to each category of scale with the frequency counts. Data obtained in this way are presented in Table I. There were twenty-four (24) statements in total, out of which 18 (eighteen) highlighted strengths with 6 (six) being weaknesses. All statements relating to

strength and weakness were distributed randomly in the interview schedule for making the instrument unbiased. The rank order, mean and standard deviation were calculated to assess the respondents' perceptions regarding decentralized extension system. The rank orders were calculated based on relative score i.e. highest score means having rank order 1 and lowest score having rank order 18 for strengths and highest score having rank order 1 and the lowest score having rank order 6 for weaknesses.

The statements like "information reaches in time to the farmers, farmers' access to information is increased under decentralized extension system, it offers more feedback on farmers' problems to EFS" were ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> with highest mean values 4.12, 3.99 and 3.74 respectively. The possible reason/s for this perception may be that, under the new system, the activities of EFS are monitored by high authorities, which was lacking in case of T&V system (Muhammad, 2001). The statements like efficiency of EFS is increased, farmers are actively involved in conducting extension activities, local control of extension system has become strong, communication of EFS with farmers has become more effective, extension programmes have become need-oriented and compatibility of extension messages with farmers' needs is increased were inclined towards agree category with mean values between 3.74 and 3.53 and were ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> respectively. However, the statements such as extension has become more demand-driven, farmers take more interest in extension activities, farmers are actively involved in planning extension activities, it offers more feedback of farmers' problems to researchers, farmers have become more cooperative and it provides sufficient professional training to EFS, tended toward undecided category with mean values between 3.48 and 3.29 respectively. Furthermore, coordination between extension and input supplying agencies is improved and availability of needed facilities to EFS fell in between disagree and undecided categories but tended more toward disagreement to the statement with mean values of 2.44 and 2.07 and were ranked 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> respectively. However, appreciation/reward of good worker came in between strongly disagree and disagree categories but tended more toward the disagree category and was ranked at the bottom, with mean value of 1.68. In this context Shearer, (1987) reported that extension workers in developing countries respond positively to recognition, praise, and reward similar to those in developed countries.

**Table I. Rank order, means and standard deviation of respondents' perceptions about decentralized extension system in the Punjab in terms of its strengths and weaknesses**

Strengths	Rank Order	Score	Mean (X)	SD
Information reaches in time to the farmers	1	672	4.12	0.97
Farmers' access to information is increased	2	651	3.99	0.78
It offers more feedback of farmers' problems to EFS	3	610	3.74	0.74
Efficiency of EFS is increased	4	604	3.70	0.95
Farmers are actively involved in conducting extension activities	5	601	3.68	0.97
Local control of extension system has become strong	6	596	3.65	0.90
Communication of EFS with farmers has become more effective	7	586	3.59	0.97
Extension programmes have become need-oriented	8	581	3.56	1.11
Compatibility of extension messages with farmers' needs is increased	9	576	3.53	0.94
Extension has become more demand-driven	10	568	3.48	1.12
Farmers take more interest in extension activities	11	553	3.39	0.99
Farmers are actively involved in planning extension activities	11	553	3.39	1.06
It offers more feedback of farmers' problems to researchers	12	550	3.37	1.01
Farmers have become more cooperative	13	545	3.34	0.93
It provides sufficient professional training to EFS	14	537	3.29	1.08
Coordination between extension and input supply agencies is improved	15	398	2.44	1.23
Needed facilities are made available to EFS	16	339	2.07	1.00
It offers appreciation/reward for good workers	17	275	1.68	0.96

The data in Table II regarding the weaknesses show that the statements like work load of EFS is increased and extension system lacks single line command came in between undecided and agree categories but tended toward agree category and were ranked 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> respectively. The devolution in Pakistan has increased the burden of paper work between the AO, DOA, EDOA, District Coordination Officer (DCO) and the D.G. (Ext. & AR ) and double chain command (Farooq and Ishaq, 2005, Khushk and Memon, 2004). Whereas control of extension system from the center has become weak and placed in undecided category and was ranked as 3<sup>rd</sup>. Furthermore, the statements like extension has become expensive, interference of district administration and politicians is increased, fell in between disagree and undecided categories but tended toward undecided category and were ranked 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, respectively.

**Table II. Rank order, means and standard deviation of respondents' perceptions about decentralized extension system in the Punjab in terms of its weaknesses**

Weaknesses	Rank Order	Score	Mean (X)	SD
Work load of EFS is increased	1	639	3.92	0.96
Extension system lacks single line command	2	590	3.61	1.21
Control of extension system from the center has become weak	3	490	3.00	1.06
Extension has become expensive	4	469	2.87	1.31
Interference of district administration in official matters is increased	5	434	2.66	1.19
Interference of politicians in official matters is increased	6	423	2.59	1.33

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that many of the strengths of the present system are not properly handled and these need to be reconsidered in order to improve the system. Notable examples include the fact that extension has become more demand-driven, farmers take more interest in extension activities, farmers are actively involved in planning extension activities, it offers more feedback of farmers' problems to researchers, farmers have become more cooperative and it provides sufficient professional training to EFS and appreciation/reward of good worker. Furthermore, the weaknesses of the system such as work load of EFS is increased and extension system lacks single line command need to be given due attention for enhancing effectiveness of the system.

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