

Original Research Article

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SWOT Analysis of Public Agricultural Extension Service Providers in Andhra Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

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Major strengths of public extension service providers such as; infrastructural facilities like buildings, mobility and transport facilities, finance and materials resources, organizational structural aspects like recruitment and selection procedures, functional linkages with other organizations and institutions were few to say. Weaknesses said to be inadequate lab equipments, inadequate demo farms, large area to cover for extension activities, frequent change in administration etc. The main opportunities would be sale of seed, plant material and products, coordination with other departments, mass media utilization, large network etc. The major threat to the organization was changing government policies.

Introduction

Various pluralities inherent in extension make it difficult to assess the performance of extension. Being a fence sitter, extension by virtue of its role in development and also because of its innate pluralities often fails to produce tangible evidences of its efficiency and effectiveness. This is precisely why extension has always been amenable for debate and criticism. One must realize that

extension alone cannot do anything as it depends for its very existence on at least two partners: the innovation system (research system and even the indigenous knowledge system) and the recipient system (rural and farm families). The other two partners of rural and agricultural development gamut like the government, market and input systems significantly influence its performance. Many observers are concerned that extension is not doing enough, not doing it well, and is not

always relevant. In developing countries, bureaucratic inefficiency and poor programme design and implementation have led to poor performance and incoherent links with client farmers and the research sector. Support for extension declined in the 1980s and donors were unwilling to fund large-scale public sector recurrent expenditures, which led to further under-financing, staffing shortages, and contraction of extension services. As they seek solutions, policy makers must confront clashing views of what extension should do, and choose among a number of extension priorities, products, mandates, and models. Seagers and Kaimwitz (1989) reviewed the survey data from 18 countries on research-extension links which show that researchers frequently view extension workers as ineffective. They blame the problem on inadequate education and training, poor incentives and high staff turnover. Extension workers on the other hand do not question the technical competence of researchers but often question the relevance of their research as well as their commitment to communicating its results to users i.e. both extension workers and farmers. Rivera (1991) stated that public sector extension was criticized for not doing enough, not doing it well, and for not being relevant. Such government failures were attributed to bureaucratic inefficiencies and poor formulation and/or implementation of extension programs, with the result that public agricultural extension programs frequently performed poorly, were inadequately funded, and/or lacked a coherent linkage with its clients (farmers) and with its information suppliers (the research sector). Ameer (1994) stated that 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 programmes mostly imposed on farmers. Swanson (1996) elucidated that the multiplicity of institutions involved in extension operates with little or no coordination. A serious institutional constraint is the lack of strong research extension linkages, particularly at district level. Hansra and Adhiguru (1998) revealed that current extension system transferring technologies are not economically viable, not operationally feasible, not suitable, not matching with the farmers' needs and not compatible with farmers' over all farming system. Samanta (1999) found that major problems faced by agricultural extension today in most of the developing countries are lack of functional linkages and coordination among the various development departments and agencies, which are essential for the total development of agriculture. Saravanan *et al.*, (1999) reported that scientists had great agreement with statements like privatization increases the accountability of extension personnel to farmers, enhances production of commercial crops, ensures quality extension service, increases professionalism, fetches greater additional income to farmers and enhances the farmers commitment to extension service. Suresh and Devaraja (1999) reported that staff strength in developmental departments is awfully inadequate considering the enormous size of the client systems. Field extension staff strength and its ratio to number of horticultural farm families to be covered in Karnataka runs to 1: 2000. Ahmed *et al.*, (2000) mentioned that poorly motivated staff, multiple non- extension duties, inadequate operational funds, lack of relevant technology, top-down planning, centralized management and a general lack of accountability in the public sector are the main reasons to fail to serve the needy farmers. Chandra Sekara (2001) elucidated that few weaknesses of public extension

system are: inability to reach all the farmers, all the time due to extension worker: farmer (1:1000), out of 1,10,000 extension staff, only around 20 percent are graduates, and present mainstream extension provides advice and support only on technology propelled production concerns etc. Davidson *et al.*, ., (2001) expressed that the public extension sector has consistently failed to deal with the site-specific needs and problems of farmers. Rao and Rao (2002) found the potentials of Agricultural Extension Scientists through perceived strengths like job commitment and positiveness; weakness like no exposure to IT and less professional interaction, opportunities like creativity and team spirit; and threats, feeling of transfer at any time and poor recognition. Sulaiman (2002) expressed that inability of the line departments (especially the DoA) to deliver results was because of their; (i) strictly enforced hierarchies, (ii) inappropriate reward structures (iii) lack of accountability to clients (iv) weak partnerships with allied organizations (v) limited expertise (vi) diminishing operational support (vii) poor technical back ground (viii) irregular visits (ix) service is preoccupied with the implementation of public sector schemes linked to subsidies and subsidized inputs (x) lack of financial resources lead into the underutilization of existing facilities and personnel (xi) more remote and difficult areas with considerable difficulty in recruiting and retaining field staff and these areas often have large numbers of vacancies and frequent staff turnover. Reddy and Singh (2004) identified strengths and weaknesses of public and private extension systems. Public system had strong network and wide reach, cover broad spectrum of agriculture, but weaknesses like; lack of coordination among technology transfer systems, narrow focus, lack of farmer focus and feedback, inadequate technical capacity within the extension system, need for intensifying farmer training, weak research-

extension-farmer-market linkages, poor communication capacity and inadequate operating resources and financial sustainability. Whereas private extension system had better quality service for high value crops, mostly in irrigated geography on payment basis. Weaknesses like limited reach in terms of farmers and crops, inadequate net work and poor farmers not covered. Arunachalam and Ashok Kumar (2005) stated that the bureaucratic, hierarchical approach, lack of accountability to clients, weak partnerships with allied organizations and limited expertise weakened the public sector extension system. Ashok Kumar *et al.*, ., (2005) stated that only 30-40% research has been transferred to the end users (farmers). Rest 60-70 % research done by the research scientists in the SAUs or ICAR institutes is laying in the labs /library/research journals. There may be so many reasons for not transferring the technologies to the farmers. Status differences between extension scientists and research scientists are one of them. Three components, status, money and fame contribute to motivate a person to work with great interest. Unfortunately, the agriculture extension system does not fulfill even any one of them. The extension scientists who are known as extension workers are facing inferiority complex. Bheemappa (2005) expressed that some of the weaknesses in present public agricultural extension system are unable to meet the changing demands of the farming community, trapped as it is outdated, centralized, top down institutional arrangements and human resources, lacking in skills and capacities. Kalimuthu and Anita Jhamtani (2005) mentioned that the present system is ineffective to meet the emerging situation, owing to inadequacy of finance and skill, lack of commercial and market orientation, narrow focus, insensitivity to pressing needs of farmers, lack of competition, poor linkage etc. Manoharan (2005) mentioned that strengths

of public extension system is that it takes effort in implementing government programmes and policies, developing weaker sections and empowering rural people including farmers. But it pays little attention for commercialization of farms. Whereas voluntary agencies efficiently carry out the programmes by adopting participative methods. They encourage farmers' participation. While private extension attempting for commercial farming, pays little efforts on low input and sustainable farming. They have no programmes for environment protection and resource conservation.

Prabhu Kumar (2005) stated that too often research and extension have become top-down, bureaucratic organizations that are not receptive or responsive to the needs of farmers. However, to become demand driven, research and extension organizations, directors, specialists and other research and extension personnel must be listening to what farmers are communicating through both informal and formal linkage mechanisms. Usharani and Selvarani (2005) expressed that insufficiency of extension workers, weak inter and intra functional linkage between various participating organization, inadequate operational funds and confusions in defining the role of extension in the current scenario are some of the constraints faced by the public system on implementing the innovations in extension services.

Materials and Methods

General objective

To study the public, private, and NGOs as agricultural extension service providers in Andhra Pradesh.

Specific objective

To analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of public agricultural

extension system Exploratory and descriptive research design, sampling procedure was adopted for conducting the study. All the middle level public extension service providers who have been working in the selected four villages were selected purposively. In each district, 15 extension functionaries were selected, thus making a total of 45 as a sample.

Results and Discussion

The results showed that major strengths of public extension service providers such as; infrastructural facilities like buildings, mobility and transport facilities, finance and materials resources, organizational structural aspects like recruitment and selection procedures, functional linkages with other organizations and institutions were few to say. Weaknesses said to be inadequate lab equipments, inadequate demo farms, large area to cover for extension activities, frequent change in administration etc. The main opportunities would be sale of seed, plant material and products, coordination with other departments, mass media utilization, large network etc. The major threat to the organization was changing government policies.

The results can be interpreted as the major strengths of public extension service providers such as; having sufficient infrastructural facilities like buildings, mobility and transport facilities, finance and materials resources, organizational structural aspects like fair recruitment and selection procedures, having good functional linkages with other organizations and institutions, conducting training programmes regularly when ever need arises, clear communication pattern. In respect to organization climate, conducive working environment, satisfactory job position, farmers felt public extension services more credible and accepting the services and advice, extension functionaries having required levels of knowledge and

skills at their work, control mechanisms considered as not that much stringent but

timely and genuine one, sufficient salary and enough retirement benefits.

Table.1

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Buildings Mobility and Transport facilities Finance and Materials Recruitment and selection procedures Functional linkages with organizations and institutions Communication pattern Knowledge and skill levels of extension functionaries Training programmes Salary and retirement benefits Working environment Job satisfaction Farmers acceptance Control mechanisms	Inadequate lab equipments Inadequate demo farms Inadequate staff Location of the organization Jurisdiction of large extension work Frequent change in administration Lack of clarity in Job chart/job specifications Lack of coordination with other departments Prolonged decision making process Improper leadership Inadequate feedback mechanism Lack of commitment and accountability Change in promotional policies Insufficient Incentives and awards Insufficient human relations Inefficient monitoring and evaluation
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Sale of seed, plant material and products Technical manpower/ human resources Coordination with other departments Mass media utilization Multidisciplinary approach Policy support Large net work	Change in Government policies

Weaknesses said to be lab equipments not sufficient because more concentration on extension activities than the research, inadequate demo farms, larger area to be covered for extension activities, frequent changes in administration lead to the less control over extension functionaries and lot of adjustment problems aroused, locality of the

organizations at some places not convenient to cover the entire prescribed area to be covered, unclear job specifications/chart end up in conflict situations, improper coordination with other departments made them unable to reach the goals and objective in prescribed manner and up to the mark, delayed and prolonged decision making as

well as improper leadership lead to the waste of time and resources, lack of commitment and accountability due to the lethargic nature of employees and unquestionable job position, insufficient feedback causes improper decisions and ultimately failure of the programmes, unclear and change in promotional policies causes lot of confusion among the employees, insufficient and irregular incentives and awards made extension functionaries less motivate. And also weaknesses like lack of adequate incentives to attract and retain good extension functionaries in the villages and indifferent attitudes of the field level functionaries towards extension work were demotivating them. Human relations also not that much congenial and warm, inspite of regular monitoring and evaluations there is a gap need to be filled. Ahmed *et al.*, (2000) mentioned that poorly motivated staff, multiple non-extension duties, inadequate operational funds, lack of relevant technology, top-down planning, centralized management and a general lack of accountability in the public sector are the main reasons to fail to serve the needy farmers.

Immediate opportunities would be sale of seed, plant material and products, recruiting sufficient number of staff, coordination with other departments, mass media utilization, multidisciplinary approach while providing the extension services, take advantages and support from the government policies, large net work of government could be utilized for efficient and effective management of extension services.

The major threats to the organization were changing government policies and same policies with changing names causes lot of confusion among extension functionaries, administrators and finally clientele groups. Sulaiman (2002) expressed that service is

preoccupied with the implementation of public sector schemes linked to subsidies and subsidized inputs.

In conclusion, frequently changing policies on agriculture provides a great opportunity rather than a threat to the extension functionaries. Under these circumstances, up scaling technical competencies through relevant trainings could make more effective in delivering extension services with an accountability and commitment. Besides this there should be always proper feedback mechanisms provide a basis to evaluate the extension work is being done and one's own self.

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