

PERCEPTION OF FARMERS INTEREST GROUPS (FIGs) OF NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY PROJECT ABOUT PRIVATE EXTENSION SERVICES : A MICRO STUDY IN AHMEDNAGAR DISTRICT OF MAHARASTRA

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No extension system is best for all the places or even for the different stages of development. We have to modify the existing extension system programmes according to the changing needs and resources available with the extension organisations and their beneficiaries. In the present era of economic liberalization and globalisation, we have started talking of private extension.

The word 'privatize' is defined as transfer from state ownership to private ownership (Oxford Dictionary). Savas (1987) stated that the word has acquired a broad meaning as it has now come to symbolize a new way of looking at society's needs and a rethinking of the role of Government in fulfilling these needs. It means relying more on societies', private institutions and less on Government. Hence Savas (1987) defined privatization as the act of reducing the role of Government or increasing the role of private sector in an activity or in the ownership of assets.

Under the Indian context, the crucial issues to be looked into are, the ability of the farmers to pay for extension services and to demarcate the benefits of extension as private and public. In different parts of the country, especially in areas growing commercial crops, the big farmers are receiving advice and other extension services from private consultancy firms. But this is not the case in respect of the farmers from dryland and rainfed regions, having subsistence farming. It was thought necessary to understand the opinion of

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such farmers about privatisation of extension. Therefore, the present study was undertaken with the following specific objectives.

1. To seek the opinion of the farmers about private extension.
2. To understand the willingness of the farmers about sharing the cost of extension.

Methodology

Area of study

The study was conducted in the Sangamner tahsil of Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra State.

Sampling procedure

Selection of tahsil

Sangamner tahsil of Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra State was selected randomly.

Selection of Farmers Interest Groups (FIG)

The list of FIGs was obtained from ATMA office, Ahmednagar and five FIGs were selected, randomly.

Selection of the respondents

Lists of the farmers in the selected FIGs were obtained from the ATMA office. From each selected FIG, ten farmers were selected randomly. Thus, a sample of 50 farmers was selected.

Data collection

Designing of the interview schedule

An interview schedule based on the objectives of study was prepared for data collection.

Data collection

Data were collected by personally interviewing the selected respondents. The data were analysed by simple statistical tools such as frequency and percentages.

Findings

The findings of the study are presented below:

Opinion of the farmers about private extension:

The data regarding opinion of the farmers about private extension are presented in Table. 1.

Table 1 Opinion of the farmers about possibility of private extension

Sl.No.	Response	Farmers (n=50)	
		Number	Percentage
1	In favour	18	36.00
2	Not in favour	32	64.00
Total		50	100.00

It is revealed that majority (64.00 per cent) of the respondents were 'not in favour' of private extension, while 36.00 per cent of respondents were 'in favour' of private extension.

Expected methods of private extension by the farmers:

The expectations of those farmers who were in favour of private extension, about methods of private extension are shown in Table. 2.

Of the respondents who were in favour of private extension, majority (72.22 per cent) stated that 'services for soil, water and plant analysis at reasonable prices' was one of the expected methods of private extension. 'Demonstrations on farmers fields' and 'visits to successful farmers from and outside the village' were other two methods of private extension services as perceived by 55.55 per cent and 50.00 per cent of the farmers, respectively. Less than

Table2 : Methods of private extension services as perceived by the farmers

Sl.No.	Response	Farmers (n=18)	
		Number	Percentage
1.	Services for soil, water and plant analysis at reasonable prices	13	72.22
2.	Demonstrations on farmer's field	10	55.55
3	Visits to successful farmers from and outside the village	9	50.00
4	Video films	7	38.88

two - fifth (38.88 per cent) of the farmers reported that 'video films' should be one of the methods of private extension services, as perceived by them.

Reasons for not favouring private extension:

The data related to the reasons put forth by the farmers for not believing in the success of private extension are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Reasons for not believing in the success of private extension services

Sl. No.	Reasons	Farmers (n=32)	
		Number	Percentage
1	Focus on big farmers and negligence towards small and marginal farmers	24	75.00
2	Emphasis mainly on irrigated area and less interest in dryland/rainfed areas	23	71.87
3	Non-availability of expertise in all crops	19	59.37
4	Emphasis on the cash crops and negligence towards the food crops	12	37.50
5	Inadequate staff	9	28.12

The data presented in Table 3 revealed that of the farmers who were not in favour of private extension service, majority (75.00 per cent) feared that 'private extension focuses on big farmers and neglects small and marginal farmers', whereas 71.87 per cent of these farmers expressed that 'private extension gives emphasis mainly on irrigated area and is less interested in dryland/rainfed area'. Slightly less than three fifth (59.37 per cent) of the respondents were of the opinion that 'non-availability of expertise in all the crops with private consultant' was the reason for not believing in the success of private extension. 'More emphasis of private extension on the cash crops and negligence towards food crops' and 'adequate staff with private consultants' were the reasons quoted by 37.50 per cent and 28.12 per cent of the farmers, respectively for not believing in the success of private extension.

Willingness to share the cost of extension:

The categorisation of the farmers based on their willingness to share the cost of extension is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Farmers' willingness to share the cost of private extension services

Sl. No.	Responses	Respondents (n=50)	
		Number	Percentage
1	Willing	15	30.00
2	Not willing	35	70.00
Total		50	100.00

It is evident that (Table 4) 30.00 per cent farmers were 'willing', while 70.00 per cent farmers were 'not willing' to share the cost of extension services.

Extent of share of cost of private extension services acceptable to farmers:

The data regarding the extent of share of cost of private extension services acceptable to farmers are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Distribution of farmers according to extent of share of cost of private extension services accepted by them

Sl. No.	Response	Willing Respondents (n=15)	
		Number	Percentage
1	10%	2	13.33
2	25%	1	6.66
3	30%	8	53.33
4	50%	4	26.68
Total		15	100.00

It is manifested from the Table 5 that, of the respondents who were willing to share the cost of private extension, 53.33 per cent and 26.68 per cent of were willing to share '30.00 per cent' and '50.00 per cent' cost of private extension services, respectively. However, 13.33 per cent and 6.66 per cent of the respondents were willing to share '10.00 per cent' and '25.00 per cent' of the cost of private extension.

Expectations of farmers about sharing the cost of private extension:

The data regarding expectation of farmers about sharing the cost of private extension are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 : Expectations of farmers about sharing the cost of private extension services

Sl. No.	Expectations about cost of sharing	Willing Respondents (n=15)	
		Number	Percentage
1	30% cost by the FIGs and 70% by the Government	8	53.33
2	50% cost by the FIGs and 50% by the Government	4	26.68
3	Complete cost be born by the Government	2	13.33
4	25% cost by the FIGs and 75% by the Government	1	6.66

It is observed from Table 6, that of the respondents who were willing to share the cost of private extension, more than half (53.33 per cent) suggested that the cost of extension service should be shared in 30:70 ratio by FIGs and government, respectively. However, 26.68 per cent and 6.66 per cent of the farmers expectation was that this ratio should be '50:50' and '25:75', respectively. Remaining 13.33 per cent of the farmers' expectation was that 'complete cost of private extension be borne by the Government'.

Expectations of farmers from private extension services:

Findings related to expectations of farmers from private extension services are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Expectations of farmers from private extension services

Sl. No.	Expectations from private extension	Willing Respondents (n=15)	
		Number	Percentage
1	Emphasis on market extension	12	80.00
2	Technology must help increase the yield	9	60.00
3	Demonstrations on farmers' field	10	66.66
4	Need based consultancy	7	46.66
5	Provision of low cost technology	7	46.66
6	Result oriented technology	6	40.00
7	Training programmes	5	33.33
8	Exposure visits	5	33.33
9	Field days at demonstration sites	5	33.33
10	Shiwar pheri (field visits)	4	26.66
11	Workshop	3	20.00
12	Campaign	3	20.00

From the information presented in Table 7, it was revealed that amongst the respondents who were willing to share the cost of private extension, majority (80.00 per cent) desired 'emphasis on market extension' by the

private extension services. 'Demonstration on farmers field', 'technology must help increase the yield' and result oriented technology' were the expectations of 66.66 per cent, 60.00 per cent and 40.00 per cent farmers, respectively. 'Need based consultancy' and 'provision of low cost technology' (46.66 per cent each) were also the expectations of a good number of farmers from private extension services. Arranging training programmes', 'exposure visits' field days at demonstration sites' were the expectations of one third (33.33 per cent each) of the farmers from the private extension services. More than one fourth (26.66 per cent) of the farmers suggested that 'shiwari' (field visits) should be arranged by the private extension services. One fifth (20.00 per cent each) of the farmers expected 'workshops' and campaigns' organised by the private extension agencies.

Reasons for not favouring private extension:

The farmers who were not in favour of private extension had quoted several reasons in support of their opinion. which are listed in Table 8.

Table 8. Reasons for unwillingness of the farmers to share the cost of extension services

Sl. No.	Reasons	Willing Respondents (n=15)	
		Number	Percentage
1	Private extension service is cash crop oriented	20	57.14
2	No faith in private extension service	17	48.57
3	It is not need based	17	48.57

The data presented in Table 8 revealed that of the respondents who were unwilling to share the cost of private extension service, majority (57.14 per cent) believed that the 'private extension service was cash crop oriented', while equal number (48.57 per cent) of the farmers had 'no faith in private extension services and believed that 'private extension service was not need based'.

Conclusion

From the findings, it can be concluded that only 36.00 per cent of the respondents were in favour of privatization of extension, whereas 64.00 per cent of the farmers were not in favour of it. Only 30.00 per cent respondents were ready to share the cost of private extension services, while 70.00 per cent were not willing to do so. This may be because more than 70 per cent of the farmers are small and marginal. Their ability to pay for the extension services is poor. Moreover, about 70 per cent of the net sown area in India is rainfed with weak institutional and infrastructure support, So these farmers cannot afford the cost of the private extension services.

From the findings, it can also be inferred that according to majority of the farmers, private extension agencies are more interested in the irrigated areas having fertile soils and cash crops. They are less interested in rainfed, dryland and difficult areas where possibility of making profit is very low.