

Opinion and Preferences of Farmers regarding the services of Private Extension Service Providers

Itigi Prabhakar¹ and M. A. Ansari²

Abstract

Due to systemic, financial and manpower constraints, the public extension system has been rendered ineffective, inadequate and insensitive to the needs and demands of farmers. Consequently, a number of private agencies have emerged providing agri-input and advisory services. Tarai region of Uttarakhand, known as the food bowl of the state, has also seen the emergence of such agencies. Among them, three Private Extension Services Providers (PESPs) viz. Hariyali Kisan Bazaar, e-Choupal and Tata Kisan Sansar are more popular among the farming community. The present study was undertaken in Udham Singh Nagar district of Uttarakhand with the objective of finding out the opinion and preferences of farmers regarding the services of PESPs. A sample size of sixty farmers was selected based on simple random sampling technique from the list of clientele farmers of these agencies. Data was collected through structured interview schedule.

The findings reveal that farmers were not completely dependent on PESPs for information and services. This implies that the public extension system is still perceived to be a reliable source of information and services. However, PESPs can play a complementary role in supplementing public extension system but cannot substitute it completely. With respect to limitations, majority of the respondents reported 'High cost of service as a major problem with PESPs followed by 'Lack of assurance in quality of service/information'. It was also found that 'Farm and Home visit' was the most widely used extension method by PESPs. Regarding preferences for various extension methods it varied from farmer to farmer based on their needs, desire and urgency.

Introduction

Agricultural extension services are expected to fulfill many aims, from reducing rural poverty and improved livelihoods for rural households to increasing the overall production and contributing to foreign exchange earnings from export (Haug, 1999). This is especially so in the Indian context. Extension is about development of knowledge and human resources; accordingly agriculture

¹ Ph. D. Scholar, Division of Agricultural Extension, IARI, New Delhi.

² Associate Professor, Dept. of Agricultural Communication, College of Agriculture, G. B. Pant University of Agriculture & Technology, Pantnagar, Uttarakhand.

development is much more than the supply of seeds and fertilizers (Haug 1999). A decision on how far India should pursue privatising its agricultural extension services would essentially depend upon the type and quality of services made available by different agencies (especially private), information needs of farmers and also farmers' willingness to pay for extension services (Sulaiman and Sadamate, 2000). There has been perhaps insufficient critical reflection on principles, which should guide the privatisation process. Much has already been said about our public extension services such as lack of sustained funding, poor governance, poorly motivated staff and poor coverage and so on.

Van den Ban (1996) stated that the growing tendency towards privatization of government extension service is because of budget deficit in the public sector. Moreover, by making extension agents accountable to farmers, extension service will become more efficient. In view of emerging technological developments in the wake of economic liberalization and globalization there is growing emphasis on high-tech export oriented agriculture, knowledge based agricultural enterprises and science led development. Privatisation of agricultural extension services seems to be the natural choice to provide demand-driven information and service with speed and efficiency. However, concerns are being expressed about the profit motive of private organisations and plight of farmers if services are not assured as promised.

Moreover, experiences of developed regions suggest that private extension agencies normally serve large farmers growing commercial crops. (Zijp, 1991) observed that private firms typically focus on the type and levels of use of inputs, disease prevention or control and harvest and post-harvest techniques. They are intended to increase farmer output, reduce post-harvest losses, and improve the quality, consistency and timeliness of the crop.

In view of the above, this study is an attempt to investigate the opinion, preferences and expectations of farmers regarding various components of Private Extension Services Providers (PESPs) in Tarai region of Uttarakhand.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted in purposively selected Udham Singh Nagar district of Uttarakhand state. The state has huge potential for agricultural development, and the selected district (which comes under the Tarai region of the state) contributes maximum in terms of food production. Besides, the district has mostly large and medium farmers, with average land holding being more than 5 acres. In order to fill the void created by a weak public extension system, the Private Extension Service Providers (PESPs) have emerged and penetrated in the state. There are many PESPs operating in the district and providing various services as per the demands of the farming community. In order to study various

issues related with privatisation, the present study was taken up in Udham Singh Nagar district.

The selected district has many private agencies providing extension services along with agri-inputs. However, three private extension service providers (PESPs) viz. Hariyali Kisan Bazaar, e-Choupal and Tata Kisan Sansar etc. are more popular among the farmers. They provide agri-input as well as extension services to farmers of the study area. Using simple random sampling, sixty farmers were selected from the list of clientele member-farmers of the above mentioned PESPs. In view of the nature of the study, an analytical research design was followed.

Results and Discussion

The information pertaining to farmers' Opinion and Preferences about various components of their services viz. type of crop, type of services, extension methods/activities, quality of services and overall effectiveness of private extension service providers (PESPs), etc was collected and analyzed. The above mentioned aspects were selected after review of relevant literature and under the assumption that these issues were deemed important and influential traits of PESPs. The results obtained are presented hereunder.

1. Crops Preferred. It is generally believed that private service providers prefer to provide extension services for commercial crops. The farmers were asked to mention the name of crops wherein they received the services of PESPs. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents according to Crops preferred

S. No.	Crops	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	Wheat	54	90.00	I
2	Sugarcane	52	86.66	II
3	Paddy	50	83.33	III
4	Vegetable crops	49	81.66	IV
5	Mustard	47	78.33	V
6	Horticultural crops	43	71.66	VI
7	Forest trees	12	20.00	VII

Table 1 depicts crop-wise preference of respondents for availing the services of private extension service providers. It is evident from the above table that majority (90%) of respondents' preferred 'Wheat' crop followed by 'Sugarcane' (86.66%), 'Paddy' (83.33%), 'Vegetable crops' (81.66%), 'Mustard' (78.33%) and 'Horticulture crops' (71.66%). Arunkumar and Vijayaragavan (2007), reported that farmers prefer and were ready to pay for extension service for various

crops, especially for high value crops. However, in our study, even those farmers who were growing wheat and paddy also availed the services of PESPs. The probable reason for this may be that Tarai region of Uttarakhand is populated by large and medium farmers and rice-wheat is the most common crop rotation followed by the farmers.

Thus, it could be concluded that the agenda of the PESPs matched with the farmers' preference of service i.e. farmers were willing to avail the extension service for commercial as well as non-commercial crops.

2. Preference for Services. Traditionally, the main business of these private agencies has been the supply of agri-inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, etc. However, the weakening of the public extension sector has brought about a new awakening as well as a window of opportunity for these private agencies to tap these unserved/ under-served areas relating to information needs alongside the demand for agri-inputs. The results obtained regarding the farmers' preference for various services is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Respondents' Preference for Services from Private Extension Service Providers

S. No.	Services	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	Fertilizers	59	98.33	I
2	Plant protection measures	57	95.00	II
3	Veterinary services	55	91.66	III
4	Advice to solve specific problem in the field	54	90.00	IV
5	Marketing facilities	49	81.66	V
6	Weather information	43	71.66	VI
7	Cultivation practices	39	65.00	VII
8	Soil testing	39	65.00	VII
9	Training of farmers	35	58.33	VIII
10	Harvesting techniques	33	55.00	IX
11	Irrigation systems	31	51.66	X
12	Credit facilities	24	40.00	XI
13	Insurance facilities	22	36.66	XII
14	Repair of Agricultural Implements	19	31.66	XIII

Table 2 shows results pertaining to the preferences of respondents regarding various services utilised from PESPs. A careful perusal of table 2 highlights the fact that PESPs concentrated on sale of inputs/services where profit margins were high. They neglected important but complex services like training, insurance, post harvest processing etc. Saravanan (2001) observed that private extension concentrate on the commercial and resourceful big farmers, and favourable environment areas such as irrigated, high fertilized soil and crop growing areas. According to him private extension focus mostly on profit maximization.

3. Limitations with Private Extension Service Providers (PESPs)

Even though PESPs had several advantages for the farming community, they also suffered from many limitations. Some of the important limitations with PESPs as perceived by farmers were identified, analysed and are presented in Table 3.

The results presented in Table 3 give a clear picture about the extension problems with PESPs. Majority of the respondents (78.33 %) reported 'High cost of service' as a major problem with PESPs followed by 'Lack of assurance in quality of service/ information' (73.33 %), 'Adulteration of inputs' (65 %), 'Non-relevant service/ information' (63.33 %), 'Lack of proper Accessibility to service/information' (58.33), 'Lack of accountability and competency of extension personnel' (56.66 %), 'Existence of less responsive extension personnel' (48.33 %) and 'Lack of timely availability of service/information' (45 %). However, only 38.33 % of respondents expressed 'Complex procedure in delivery of service' as a problem with PESPs.

Table 3. Respondents' opinion regarding limitations with PESPs

S. No.	Nature of problem	Frequency	%	Rank
1	High cost of service	47	78.33	I
2	Lack of assurance in quality of service/information	44	73.33	II
3	Adulteration of inputs	39	65.00	III
4	Non-relevant service/information	38	63.33	IV
5	Lack of proper accessibility to service/information	35	58.33	V
6	Lack of accountability & competency of extension personnel	34	56.66	VI
7	Existence of less responsive extension personnel	29	48.33	VII
8	Lack of timely availability of service/information	27	45.00	VIII
9	Complex procedure in delivery of service	23	38.33	IX

Thus, it could be concluded that all is not well with private extension service and there is need for regulatory mechanism to monitor prices, quality assurance and adulteration of inputs through appropriate policies by the state and central governments.

4. Preference of Respondents for different Organisations for Various Services

The agriculture sector, being a priority sector, is serviced by different government as well as private agencies and institutions. This comprises of a number of activities ranging from supply of agri-inputs to diagnostic services (e.g. soil testing, disease control and management) to training of farmers. The respondents were asked to indicate their preference for various services being provided by different agencies. The results obtained are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Organizations preferred by Respondents for receiving different Services

S. No.	Activities	SDAH		PESPs		University/KVK		NGOs		Cooperatives	
		<i>F</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1	Input supply	31	51.66	22	36.66	00	00.00	00	00.00	07	11.66
2	Research work	05	08.33	10	16.66	45	75.00	00	00.00	00	00.00
3	Consultancy service	08	13.33	35	58.33	17	28.33	00	00.00	00	00.00
4	Training of farmers	22	36.66	10	16.66	26	43.00	04	06.66	00	00.00
5	Marketing services	18	30.00	30	50.00	00	00.00	07	11.66	05	08.33
6	Agriculture education	00	00.00	07	11.66	35	58.33	18	30.00	00	00.00
7	Insurance service	45	75.00	15	25.00	00	00.00	00	00.00	00	00.00
8	Credit facilities	33	55.00	00	00.00	00	00.00	00	00.00	27	45.00
9	Field diagnosis	10	16.66	06	10.00	28	46.66	16	26.66	00	00.00
10	Soil testing	15	25.00	25	41.66	20	33.33	00	00.00	00	00.00
11	Veterinary service	46	76.66	00	00.00	14	23.33	00	00.00	00	00.00
12	Seed production	00	00.00	15	25.00	45	75.00	00	00.00	00	00.00

f = Frequency

(SDAH = State Department of Animal Husbandry, PESPs = Private Extension Service Providers, KVK = Krishi Vigyan Kendra (Farm Science Center), NGOs = Non Government Organisations)

Table 4 indicates the respondents' preference for various organisations for different services. It is evident that the 'State Department of Animal Husbandry (SDAH)' was preferred for veterinary service (76.60 per cent), 'Insurance service' (75.00 per cent) and 'Input supply' (51.6 per cent). Similarly 'PESPs' were preferred for 'Consultancy service' (58.33 per cent), Marketing Services (50 per cent), 'Soil testing' (41.66) and 'Input supply' (36.66 per cent). 'University/ Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK)' was preferred for 'Research work' (75 per cent), 'Seed production' (75 per cent) and 'Agriculture education' (58.33 per cent). 'NGOs' were preferred for 'Agriculture education' (30.00 per cent), 'Field diagnosis' (26.66 per cent) and 'Marketing service' (11.66 per cent). 'Cooperatives' were preferred for 'Credit facilities' (45 per cent), 'Input supply' (11.66 per cent) and 'Marketing service' (8.33 per cent). Thus, it can be concluded that respondents were not completely dependent on PESPs for all type of services. This implies that the public extension system was still perceived to be a reliable source of information and services. PESPs can supplement or complement the public extension system but cannot substitute it completely.

Extension methods

Extension methods are the means employed by an extension agency for disseminating information about agriculture and to influence clientele to adopt their advice and services. The results obtained in respect of different extension methods used by PESPs, as reported by the farmers are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Extension Methods used by Private Extension Service Providers

S. No.	Extension Method	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	Farm and Home visit	48	80.00	I
2	Kisan Goshthi	43	71.66	II
3	Group Meeting	33	55.00	III
4	Office Calls	14	23.33	IV
5	Method Demonstration	12	20.00	V
6	Result Demonstration	07	11.66	VI
7	Farmers' Training	03	05.00	VII
8	Field Days	02	03.33	VIII

It is evident from Table 5 that 'Farm and Home visit' method of extension was the most frequently used method by PESPs as reported by 80% of the respondents followed by Kisan Goshthi (71.6%), Group Meeting (55%), Office Calls (23.3%), Method Demonstration (20%), Result Demonstration (11.6%), Farmers Training (5%) and Field Days (3.3%).

On the basis of the above it can be concluded that 'Farm and Home visit' was the most widely used extension method by PESPs.

Respondents' Preferences for Extension Methods

Private Extension Service Providers used different extension methods but respondents did not have equal preference for all the methods. These extension methods were ranked based on preferences given by respondents. The results are presented in Table 6. The pooled weighted mean score for each extension method is shown in the table in a decreasing order. Among various extension method used by PESPs, four methods, viz. 'Kisan Goshthi', 'Farmers Training', 'Field Days' and 'Farm & Home Visit' were the most preferred methods reported by the respondents. Further, 'Agricultural Exhibition and 'Result Demonstration' were reported as "More preferred". However, 'Method demonstration' was reported as "Somewhat preferred", and the remaining two methods ('Office calls' and 'Group Meetings') were reported as "Preferred". None of the extension methods was reported as "Least preferred". Thus, it may be safely concluded that the preferences for various extension methods varied from farmer to farmer based on their needs, desire and urgency.

Table 6. Respondents' Preferences for Extension Methods to be used by PESPs

S. No.	Extension method	Weighted mean score	Rank	Level
1	Kisan Goshthi	04.78	I	Most Preferred
2	Farmers' training	04.53	II	Most Preferred
3	Field days	04.52	III	Most Preferred
4	Farm and Home visit	04.35	IV	Most Preferred
5	Agricultural Exhibition	03.83	V	More Preferred
6	Result demonstration	03.77	VI	More Preferred
7	Method demonstration	02.55	VII	Somewhat Preferred
8	Office calls	01.60	VIII	Preferred
9	Group meeting	01.55	IX	Preferred

Conclusion

The meaning of agricultural extension varies from simple transfer of information to facilitating the process of total human development. The services were mainly funded and delivered by the government in the Indian context. However, recently private agencies have also begun funding and / or delivering

extension services in selected fields. This process of funding and delivering the extension services by private individuals or organizations is called Private Extension.

Based on the present study it can be concluded that respondents were not completely dependent on PESPs for all types of information. This implied that the public extension system was still perceived to be a reliable source of information. Regarding problems of PESPs, majority of the respondents (78.33 %) reported 'High cost of service' as the major limitation with PESPs followed by 'lack of assurance in quality of service/ information' (73.33 %), and 'adulteration of inputs' (65 %). It was also found that 'Farm & Home visit' was the most widely used extension method by PESPs. Regarding preferences for various extension methods, it varied from farmer to farmer based on their needs, desire and urgency.

References

- Arunkumar and Vijayaragavan, K. (2007). Effectiveness of Privatized Agricultural Extension Services- A case of Tata Kisan Sansar. *Indian Journal of Extension Education* Vol. 43 No. 3 & 4, pp 68-73.
- Haug, R. (1999). Some Leading issues in international Agricultural extension, a literature review. *Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension* 5(4) 263-274.
- Sulaiman, V. and Sadamate, V. V. (2000). Privatizing Agricultural Extension in India. Policy Paper 10, National Centre for Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (NCAP), New Delhi.
- Van Den Ban, A.W. (1996). Book review 1. *Journal of Extension Education*, 7: 1473-1475.
- Zijp, W. (1991). Personal communication. World Bank, Agricultural and Natural Resources Department, Washington, D.C.