

A critical review of Agricultural extension policies: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

Agricultural extension can play a vital role in the enhancement of agricultural growth and to achieve food security. It is evident that agricultural sustainability cannot be achieved without a comprehensive agricultural extension policy. Many countries have developed their agricultural extension policies and legislate them. The countries which are most highlighted in this regard are United States of America, Japan, South Korea and Thailand, while Brazil, Mozambique and Philippines have their provisional extension policy. These countries enhance their agricultural production by formulating effective agricultural extension policies. In developing countries, few Asian countries, like Bangladesh and Nepal have formulated a national extension policy. Being an agricultural country Pakistan is unable to develop its agricultural extension policy and there is an imminent need to do so as the formal agri. extension policy is the backbone of agriculture in any country. The foundations of agri. extension Policy should be on participatory research. Educational and livestock policies are some example in Pakistan as these policies were develop through participatory approach by involving the key stakeholders from both the sector. Policy must be need oriented by the active participation of all the stakeholders. Several in-depth research studies were commissioned to feed into the process of policy formation. Scholars, researchers and international organizations have emphasized the need for research based participatory agricultural extension policy for sustainable agricultural development and to achieve the food security in a country.

Keywords: Review, Agricultural extension, Policy, Challenges, Opportunities

Agri. extension for sustainable agri. development and food security:

Agricultural extension through its farm advisory services and programs aims to enhance the capacity of the farmers by providing and strengthening their access towards the fresh knowledge and practice which is very useful to the farmers (Kimaro *et al.*, 2010). Agricultural extension is broadly defined as the service which is provided to the rural people packed with information which they need to enhance and sustain their agricultural production and to fulfill their need and to improve their livelihood and household food security (NRI, 2011). Agricultural production, sustainability and prosperity of the world largely depend on the adoption and effective use of the latest agricultural technologies, management and efficient use of available resources. Agricultural sustainability is legislatively defined by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as the integrated method of plant and livestock production with site specific application that exist for a long period of time, having five key points which include: satisfy human needs and fiber, enhancing the environmental and natural resources quality, efficient use of non renewable resources and on farm resources, sustain the economic viability of the farm operations and enhancing the quality of life for farmers. The concept of agricultural sustainability is of very significant importance among the extension field staff, farmers, organizations and other stake holders. Agricultural sustainability is also conceptualized as the agriculture which produces sufficient food without depleting the natural resources, degrading its environment, securing rural livelihood and food security (Earles and Williams, 2005). Leeuwis (2000) argued that as the world population is increasing day by day agricultural extension has to play its role to address these kinds of issues to achieve the goal of sustainable agriculture. Agriculture nowadays is very complex and it should be based on the scientific practices to enhance the yield. In this regard there is dire need that research and extension should have to understand the need of the farmers

but also the social, economic, environmental aspects (Minarovic & Mueller, 2000) and educational programs would becoming very useful to achieve the agricultural sustainability.

The food production is sufficient but sometimes above the average but food insecurity is still exist, so there is need for a policy which take the clear and realistic picture that why the specific group of people become marginalized and food insecure (Farrington *et al.* 2002). There are many causes of food insecurity like poor governance, lack of institutions and unequal distribution of food at regional level, country and household or at individual level. It may also occur due to crop failure, drought, flood, disease attack, lack of purchasing power and lack of proper utilization of food. Agricultural extension in this situation plays its vital role to tackle the problems and ensure the availability; accessibility and utilization of food so that population becomes food secure (Rivera and Qamar, 2003). It can be achieved through adaptation of modern farm technology by farmers, capacity building and by diversify their livelihoods through best possible merge of farm and non-farm sectors employment. Studies have revealed that investment in agricultural research and extension has enhanced the economic return up to 40 percent (Anderson and Feder, 2003). It is very important to make the investment in agricultural research and its dissemination, while in developing countries, agricultural extension is underfunded which spoil its performance and activities required to achieve sustainability in agriculture and food security. In Pakistan, approximately half of the population (48.6%) doesn't have access to sufficient food for their vigorous and active life (Suleri and Haq, 2009). Due to unsustainable agricultural production and continuous increase of food prices for last many years, the people who were vulnerable to poverty are now into the poverty hole and those who were already poor are now below poverty line and facing the challenge of malnutrition and food insecurity (hunger) and they are struggling for sustaining their livelihood (Government of Pakistan, 2011).

Agri. extension policy in different countries:

Agricultural extension is one of the most important areas which can play its significant role in the uplift of agriculture of a country. Therefore, a sound, comprehensive and doable agricultural extension policy is needed to make the agri. extension more effective (Rashid and Hall, 2005). Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recognizes the importance and worth of

effective agri. extension policy and strongly argued that all the national governments should have effective and sustainable agri. extension policy. Agricultural extension work is carried out in different countries of the world to enhance their agricultural productivity and up gradation of rural life.

Most of the developed countries such as USA, Ireland, Denmark, Japan, China, Latvia and Lithuania had their formal or legislated agricultural extension policies. Similarly, there is dominant trend of formal policies in developing countries such as India, Philippines and Brazil etc. (Mis, 2006; Kania, 2006).

United States of America (USA) has legislative extension system in which land grant universities were established under Morrill Act of 1862. In 1914 with the implementation of Smith and Lever Act extension was formalized to diffuse useful and practical information among the people of USA related to agriculture and home economics (Ikerd, 2008). Japan has also legislated agricultural extension policy which was formed under the agricultural promotion law of 1948, which provides the funding for Japan's cooperative agri. extension service. The basic policy focus in this law was to develop a strong link between research and extension. The focus of agri. extension was to enhance agri. production, farm management and uplift of rural life. In 2005 improvement was made in agri. promotion law in which all subject matter specialists were designated as extension advisors to carry out extension work more efficiently (Fukuda, 2012). Philippines has also formulated its legislative agricultural extension policy in 1997 in which Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) is the main responsible agency to execute agri. extension work with the collaboration of local governments. South Korea has also legislated agri. extension policy under the agri. instruction act of 1957. However, amendment was made in 2003 in which agri. extension work became decentralized and agri. extension work is handed to local governments (Kim et al., 2009).

Many countries like China, Brazil, Nigeria, Uganda and Nepal have also developed their agricultural extension policies after the recommendations of FAO regarding formal agricultural extension policy and also made amendment in their policies with time to time (Turner and Satge, 2012). The major focus depicted in the agricultural extension policies of the countries is to enhance agri. production and to achieve national food security by investing on agri. extension workers and

by disseminating demand driven and site specific agricultural extension technologies among the farming community (Oladele, 2011 and Malik, 2011). On the other hand policy focus of European countries regarding agri. extension is to privatize the farm advisory services.

Agriculture Extension Policies in Pakistan

In Pakistan the formulation and making of policy in the entire context is carried out by Planning Commission (PC) which has the duty to develop five year development plans. Since the first five year plan 1955-60, the Planning Commission has generated eight five year development plans. In the first five year development plan 1955-60 the main policy of Government regarding agricultural extension was the recruitment of more extension professionals and to teach existing employees so that they can be used to play their active role is the succession of Village Aid program. This plan did not receive the formal approval of the Government until 1957 and was never received full support till the new Government came into power (Government of Pakistan, 1955). In the second five year plan 1960-65 the same objectives was set for agricultural extension as it was in first five year development plans. It was evident from the facts that the strength of supervisory and field staff has increased by about 50% during the second plan from a level of about 6000 in 1959-60 to about 9000 in 1964-65 (Government of Pakistan, 1960). In the third five year plan 1965-70 this number was aimed to exceed 10000 by the end of third plan period. Many problems were identified during the second five year plan which includes the lack of suitable office, residential accommodation for the extension workers and unattractive salary package. In third plan period government plan to increase the opportunities of promotion through provision of scholarships for further studies and recognition of good work through awards and rewards based on performance. Review of the previous policies revealed the significant improvement in the agriculture sector (Government of Pakistan, 1965). No plan period 1971-1976 indicates that during third five year plan the growth rate was raised up to 4.2 % per annum against the 3.4% p.a in second five year plan and 1.3% p.a in the 1950, s. Fundamental change in the attitude took place and farmers gradually shifted from traditional farming practices to the adoption of improved and latest agricultural practices. Government argued that services of research and extension should be production oriented and there must be continuous flow of latest agricultural information to the farmers. In this regard policy makers suggested to strengthening

the agri. extension services by establishment of Union Extension Centers with the aim to keep on improving the farm practices by disseminating latest agricultural information and practices to enhance farm production with their special focus on small farmers. Agricultural extension training programs and soil conservation program in the Barani areas were the basic policy elements derived by the government to raise the farm production in the no plan period (Government of Pakistan, 1971). Fifth five year plan reveals that there is decline in the agricultural production and annual growth rate fall at 1.5% per annum. Inputs shortage, water shortage and disease attack are some factors which are responsible for this decline but weather and external shocks are not the only factors responsible for this decline. Institutions also failed to play their role in agricultural development, so there is need to review the performance of existing agencies and programs. So in fifth plan high priority will be given to strengthening and reorientation of agri. extension services. There is imminent need to change the policy for effective agri. extension services and management of field services. This plan purposes to launch IBRD- assisted extension and development of agricultural projects in Punjab and Sind in order to provide extension services to about 40% of the cropping area. Policy also focuses on both the quality and quantity of the extension services which also aims to provide facilities to the agricultural extension staff. This five year plan aims to achieve 6.0% p.a growth rate for agricultural development (Government of Pakistan, 1977). Sixth five year plan 1983-88 accounts that agriculture contributes 29% to the GDP of Pakistan and this sector employs 55% labor force and this sector has 70% share in the export. This plan focus on the improvement of agricultural extension services by two way flow of information between research work and farmers via agri. extension services. The policy in this plan focuses on the role of private sector and argues that private sector should play its significant role in the expansion of plat protection, fertilizer and mechanization activities. There is also need of the remodeling of extension services and IBRD supported T&V projects (Government of Pakistan, 1983). Eighth five year plan 1993-98 review the agricultural extension system with a view to remove the deficiencies which hamper the effectiveness of agri. extension services. The policy focus of this program was on the extensive use of mass media i.e. radio, television and agricultural programs (Government of Pakistan, 1993). Latest five year plan 2005-10 given by planning commission (PC) focuses on extensive use of electronic media for broadcasting special agricultural programs. A technology transfer

section will be established as an integral part of all research institutes to ensure that latest research findings will be communicated to the farmers. Policy focus in this plan was to involve the women in agri. extension services so that women would be empower through extension services (Government of Pakistan, 2005). On August 14th, 2001 government implemented the devolution plan for all service line departments including agri. extension and the authority was handed over from provinces to local governments. The government policy behind this plan was to minimize the bureaucratic involvement and to strengthen the agri. extension department by giving the authority to the elected representatives of the people. However, this program cannot produce desire result and comes under the heavy criticism. The basic shortcomings which results in the failure of this program was the lack of professional training of agri. extension staff, lack of logistics support, lack of proper incentives, inefficient and unreliable input supply system and the top most is the weak relationship between research and extension (Baig *et al.*, 2012).

Conclusion:

Different countries of the world developed acknowledged the importance of farm advisory services and put a serious effort to formulate their agricultural extension policy. These policies played a significant role in the boosting up their agricultural production as well as their rural development. In the light of the recommendations of FAO many developing countries have also formulate their agri. extension policy and thus provide a smooth and clear pathway to agricultural extension. In Pakistan, several extension programs were launched since its independence to boost up the agricultural production and to uplift the rural life. Several agri. extension programs were launched in Pakistan but due to several factors like lack of cooperation among the departments, political involvement, poor management and lack of facilities were the factors which results in the termination of these programs time by time.

So, far there is no formal or legislated agri. extension policy exists in Pakistan and it can be safely concluded that in agricultural extension in Pakistan is not given due importance by the federal or provincial governments. In the light of review of agricultural extension it is suggested that institutional importance of agricultural extension should be acknowledged by the government and formal agricultural extension policy is a first step towards this end.

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