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Farmers' preferences for privatization of agricultural extension services

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Abstract

A lot has been changed since green revolution, in terms of technology and its dissemination in Indian agriculture. Public extension system is being condemned for not able to deliver as per the belief of the people. Meanwhile, privatization has come up as an alternative of public extension system across the country. However, its acceptance among the farmers remained a subject of analysis. A study was thus conducted to determine the preferences of farmers towards various aspects of privatization of agricultural extension services in North Bengal. A multistage, purposive and random sampling method was followed in selecting the study area and the respondents of the study. Total 100 farmers were selected randomly from two districts namely Cooch Behar and Malda. Total four blocks, two from each district and one village from each block were selected randomly. Data was collected from farmers with the help of structured interview schedule through personal interview method. Farmers were asked about their preferences against various aspects of privatization of agricultural extension services and conclusion was drawn by using statistical tools like frequency, percentage, mean etc. It has been found that private agricultural extension interferences were more accepted for irrigation, post-harvest, marketing and credit related areas by the farmers in the study area. Privatization of agricultural extension services was more in demand when it comes to inputs supply like fertilizers, agro-chemicals, technological know-how, information kiosk and food processing among others. Large farmers, commercial crop growers and progressive farmers were found to be the most preferred clientele group for privatized agricultural extension services. Consultancy firms, Agri business companies, Farmer association and NGO's like approaches of Private agriculture extension services were found to be well accepted by the selected farmers of the study area.

Keywords: Agricultural extension services, approaches of private agricultural extension services, extension services, private agricultural extension services

Introduction

In recent years, the Private sector extension efforts are being increasingly recognized in India in complementing and supplementing public sector extension efforts. Presently, almost every developing country has public, NGO as well as private firms for delivering extension services to the farmers. The reason might be the reduced governments' expenditures for extension in many countries over the last few decades. Further, poor performance, low coverage, wider public extension worker: farmer ratio, limited role of village extension workers, commercialization of agriculture and many other existing market problems have given birth to the privatization of agricultural extension services in India as well.

India is a developing country, where agriculture is the primary occupation, farmers are either small or marginal. Question therefore, arises on the acceptance and preferences for privatization of agricultural extension services by the farmers who earlier thought that agricultural extension services are the responsibility of the government and its cost incurring. A study thus has been conducted to find out the preferences of farmers towards privatization of agricultural

extension services in North Bengal. The study was the part of a PhD program, thus time and resources were some of the constraints. The findings are based on the responses of the farmers of the study area. The study may further be extended to different districts of the state with larger population of farmers, to come to a more generalized conclusion. It can also be conducted to find out the preferences of extension professionals and functionaries.

Material and Methods

The study was conducted in Cooch Behar and Malda districts of West Bengal, selected purposively due to the presence of abundant number of private extension agencies in the area. Four blocks namely Cooch Behar-II, Mathabhanga-II, Ratua-II, and Gazole were randomly selected out of twelve blocks of Cooch Behar district and fifteen blocks of Malda district. From these selected blocks, one village from each block was taken randomly. From Cooch Behar-II block, Tenganmari village was selected. The village namely Anrakata Paradubi was selected from Mathabhanga-II block. Villages namely Sreepur and Doas were selected from Ratua II and Gazole block respectively.

Total 100 farmers were selected through multi stage random sampling technique. 25 farmers were selected with simple random sampling technique from each village. A pilot study has been done before conducting the actual survey. A structured interview schedule was prepared and pre tested with the farmers of the study area, based on which necessary modifications were made in the interview schedule. The data were then collected through physical interview method with the help of the interview schedule. Care was taken for not to include the farmers with whom the schedule was pretested. The schedule was prepared in vernacular and responses were recorded by the researcher. Later the data were processed with the help of Microsoft excel and analyzed with the help SPSS software.

Results and discussion

1. Preferences of farmers towards privatization of extension services.

It is evident from the table that majority of the respondents (74%) have favored the private extension agencies for services related to post-harvest technology. A big percent (78%) of respondents have preferred private extension agencies to provide the technical services related to fisheries, followed by respondents (77%), preferred

privatized services for poultry. A huge number of respondents (79%) have opted for private agencies over public extension services for credit facilities. Post harvest technology, marketing and credit facility are some of the most important areas in agriculture which directly impacts the profit obtained from agriculture. However, these services demand for quick, up to date and modern technology which perhaps private agencies may offer effectively in need.

Whereas, Land development, Cultivation practice of agricultural crops, Cultivation practice of horticultural crops, Seed production technology, Dairy and Poultry are some of the areas where public extension services were preferred more. It might be due to the fact that by KVKs, research centers, agricultural universities etc present in the study area, provides frequent trainings, workshop and exposures to the farmers etc.

The table also reveals the percent of respondents willing to pay for the services rendered by extension agencies in the field of agriculture. Irrigation technology and management, Post-harvest technology, Fishery, Poultry and Marketing service are the areas where farmers have shown their willingness to pay and the percent of such respondent farmers are 84%, 75%, 68%, 74% and 72% respectively.

Table 1: Preferences and willingness to pay for extension services rendered by private agencies. n=100

Sl. No	Statements	Agency preferred		Willingness to pay	
		Private (Frequency)	Public (Frequency)	Willingness to pay (Frequency)	Unwillingness to pay (Frequency)
1	Land development	10	90	8	92
2	Cultivation practice of agricultural crops	22	78	22	78
3	Cultivation practice of horticultural crops	60	40	59	41
4	Seed production technology	28	72	28	72
5	Irrigation technology and management	61	39	84	16
6	Post-harvest technology	74	26	75	25
7	Diary	68	32	63	37
8	Vermicomposting	63	37	59	41
9	Fishery	78	22	68	32
10	Poultry	77	23	74	26
11	Marketing service	71	29	72	28
12	Credit facility	79	21	62	38

2. Preferences of farmers for various forms inputs/ services

Farmers are now more into profit-oriented agriculture than subsistence type, which they used to believe in, few decades ago hence, when it comes to various inputs and services required for agriculture, they prefer timely, improved and advances technologies and services to ensure more profit and less risk. It has been found that among various inputs and services, items like Fertilizers, Plant protection

chemicals, Growth regulator, Technical knowhow, Marketing facilities (Transportation), Information Kiosks, food processing etc are considered as important and private extension services are preferred more to avail these whenever required.

Whereas, public extension agencies are preferred over private, for supply of inputs or services like Seeds, Bio fertilizers, Plantation materials, Storage structure and Value addition

Table 2: Preferences of farmers for various forms inputs/ services n=100

Sl. No	Inputs	Least Preferred (Frequency)	Moderately Preferred (Frequency)	Most Preferred (Frequency)	Weighted score	Weighted mean score
1	Seeds	34	33	33	199	1.99
2	Fertilizers	43	44	23	200	2.00
3	Chemical	32	34	34	202	2.02
4	Bio fertilizer	34	46	20	186	1.86
5	Plantation material	45	20	35	190	1.90
6	Plant protection chemicals	42	26	32	190	1.90
7	Growth regulator	41	21	38	197	1.97

	Services	Least Preferred (Frequency)	Moderately Preferred (Frequency)	Most Preferred (Frequency)	Weighted score	Weighted mean score
1	Technical knowhow	09	19	72	263	2.63
2	Storage (WHC, Cold storage) Structure	10	30	60	250	2.50
3	Marketing facilities(Transportation)	11	21	68	257	2.57
4	Information Kiosks	07	21	72	265	2.65
5	Value addition	15	18	67	252	2.52
6	Food processing	13	22	65	252	2.52
7	Grading facilities	16	21	63	263	2.63

3. Preferences towards privatization of extension services with respect to clientele groups

It has been found that all the large (3.0 weighted mean score) and commercial crop growing (3.0 weighted mean score) respondent farmers have preferred privatization of extension services more over public extension services. They rely on private agencies more for updated, advanced and customized services for better profit and return from

their investment.

Similarly, progressive farmers (2.82 weighted mean score) and farmers based on their income (2.74 weighted mean score) from farms have preferred private services over public extension services as they are more open to risk taking and ready to pay for the services if those are comparatively promising.

Table 3: Preferences towards privatization of extension services with respect to clientele groups n=100

Sl. No	Items	Least Preferred (Frequency)	Moderately Preferred (Frequency)	Most Preferred (Frequency)	Weighted score	Weighted mean score
1	All the farmers	70	20	10	140	1.40
2	Only to the large farmers	00	00	100	300	3.00
3	Horticulture farmers	07	83	10	203	2.03
4	Commercial crop growing farmers	00	00	100	300	3.00
5	Farmers classified based on farm high income	00	26	74	274	2.74
6	Progressive farmers	00	18	82	282	2.82

4. Preference for extension service providers with respect to various approaches of extension services.

It has been found that extension services through various Farmers' association followed by Consultancy firms, Agri business companies, NGOs etc were the most preferred and

thus score ranks as per their weighted mean score viz I, II, III, IV respectively. This indicates that farmers have well accepted these private agencies in spite of being private agencies.

Table 4: Preferences for private extension service providers with respect to various approaches of extension services. n=100

Sl. No	Items	Least Preferred (Frequency)	Moderately Preferred (Frequency)	Most Preferred (Frequency)	Weighted score	Weighted mean score	Rank
1	Share cropping system	47	25	28	181	1.81	IX
2	Contract farming	00	16	84	284	2.84	II
3	Joint funding (public+ private)	03	12	85	282	2.82	III
4	Consultancy firms by certified agricultural graduates	47	03	50	203	2.03	VII
5	Agri. Business companies	13	40	47	234	2.34	V
6	Farmers association	00	15	85	285	2.85	I
7	Private corporate firms	00	66	34	234	2.34	V
8	Through Non-Govt. Organization	15	85	00	185	1.85	VIII
9	Through cooperatives	00	25	75	275	2.75	IV

Conclusion and recommendation

The study concludes that private extension service providers are deep rooting day by day through their multidimensional activities. It has become crucial for national food security and effective service delivery system in the country. Understanding the significant contribution of private service providers, the public-private partnership may be the answer in the present agriculture system.

Thus, the study recommends strengthening the NGOs, Farmer's organisations, Consultancy firms etc for better agricultural knowledge information system. Unemployed agricultural graduates to be supported and trained, who wish to become agricultural consultants so that knowledgeable

and efficient people are there to support the extension system.

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