AN ANALYSIS OF FARM SERVICES CENTRE (FSC) APPROACH LAUNCHED FOR AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN NWFP, PAKISTAN

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Agricultural extension services have a pivotal role in agricultural and rural development. It is the major source of technology dissemination and helps the farmers to rationalize the use of natural resources for a sustainable agricultural development. Globally, public–private partnership approach in Agricultural Extension is considered more effective, efficient, and responsive to different categories of farmers. In Pakistan, government of North West Frontier Province (NWFP) has initiated a public-private partnership Extension Programme in the province. This is locally called as Farm Services Centre (FSC). This approach has the inbuilt mechanism of inputs delivery, market facilitation, exchange of experiences and diffusion of knowledge and technology. However, the extent to which this public-private partnership is instrumental in achieving aforementioned objectives is yet to be established. The present study was an attempt to analyze this public-private partnership approach by measuring its strengths and weaknesses. For this purpose, out of 24 districts of NWFP, two districts namely Swabi and Lakimarwat were selected randomly. From these two districts, 491 FSC's member farmers were selected as respondents for interview on random basis. The analysis showed that the most prominent strength of FSC was "farmers' empowerment" with mean 4.05 and SD 1.29, while that of Agriculture Extension Department (AED) was "effective message delivery". As per respondents, the major weakness of both (FSC & AED) systems was "no marketing facility" with mean 4.12 & 4.13 and SD 1.22 & 1.01 respectively. It is essential that the government should ensure the mandated activities at FSC forum particularly the facilitation by line agencies and NWFP Agricultural University, Peshawar. It should be a forum of technology dissemination, agricultural surplus produce marketing and cooperative farming. Agricultural Extension Department should provide more facilities to the staff indulged in FSC activities to increase their efficiency through special allowance and honorarium. As pointed out by respondents, separate meeting place should be provided for female farmers for an effective training and efficient utilization of the acquired knowledge in relevant fields.

Keywords: Extension system, public-private partnership, farm services centre, extension approach, agri-extension

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan has agro-based economy but crop production in Pakistan is low as compared to the world's averages (khan, 2004). NWF Province of Pakistan is sheltering a population of more than 20 millions people, out of which 83% reside in rural areas in a meagre situation under tremendous pressures on natural resources. The major crops of the province include wheat, rice, barley, maize, sugarcane, tobacco, rape and mustered, groundnut, pulses, vegetables and fruits (Government of NWFP, 2005). Weak industrial base further increases dependence on agriculture. This situation highlights the need for agricultural development in the province.

Government of NWFP took different measures for the improvement of agriculture but all these attempts could not fully succeed to accelerate the agricultural development. Keeping in view the recent experiences, Government of NWFP has initiated a new public-private partnership extension program in the province, locally called as Farm Services Centre (FSC). Inputs delivery, market facilitation and exchange of experiences and knowledge are the main activities of these centres.

However, to know how much this approach is beneficial and helpful in agricultural development requires a thorough analysis. The present study analyzed the situation through collection of primary data about newly launched public-private partnership extension system with emphasis on its strengths and weaknesses.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Present study was conducted in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. It comprises 24 districts (Shah, 1992). Two districts namely Swabi and Lakimarwat were randomly selected from the province. Each selected district had five numbers of FSCs. Again two out of the five FSCs from each district were also selected randomly.

All the registered member farmers of selected FSCs served as population of this study. Sample size was

determined with the help of table designed by *Fitzgibbon et al* (1987) for determining sample size from the given population. A sample of 491 respondents was selected through single random sampling. Data were colleted with the help of validated interview schedule by using 5-points likart scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The responses recorded by farmer stakeholders of the study were collected as primary data from the study area. After analysis of the data the results obtained are presented under sub-titles as per relevance to the established objectives of the study and are discussed as under:

Strengths of the approach

As depicted in Table 1 the most important strength of FSC is its management activity. It includes representative of farming community. The statistical analysis showed that the farmers feel empowered through their involvement in the process of decision making at FSC forum. This characteristic of the new system was ranked as 1st by the respondents with mean 4.05 and SD 1.29. The facilitations provided in the shape of "one window operation" and "linkages with government departments" were ranked 2nd and 3rd in the strengths of the public-private partnership with mean 4.00 and 3.71 and SD 1.12 and 1.25, respectively (Fig. 1).

Research studies show that when inputs were made available, the yield increased (Mesic *et al.,* 2007 and Reman *et al.*, 2007). Contrary to the results obtained for FSC, the mean and SD for AED for the same categories of strength were significantly low as compared to that of FSE. The results forecast that AED approach is not good enough as compared to this new model of public-private partnership in the shape of FSC. This ability of farmers' empowerment ultimately accelerates the diffusion process.

Weaknesses of the approach

Table 2 provides a sleek view of the weaknesses of public-private partnership approach. In this regard it shows the weaknesses of the FSC as of marketing

Table 1. Comparison regarding mean, standard deviation (SD) and rank order of the respondents' response about the existence of strengths of FSC and AED

Sr. No.	Strengths	FSC			AED			t-test
		Mean	SD	Rank order	Mean	SD	Rank order	
1.	Need-based technology	3.50	1.43	4	2.27	1.22	4	14.096*
2.	Timely extension services	3.44	1.25	6	2.23	1.08	5	15.966*
3.	Effective massage delivery	3.48	1.16	5	3.08	1.27	1	5.385*
4.	Awareness programs	3.30	1.15	6	2.93	1.10	2	22.727*
5.	Linkages with line agencies	3.71	1.25	3	2.27	1.22	4	18.242*
6.	Professional trainers	3.33	1.18	7	2.74	1.05	3	31.414*
7.	One window operation	4.00	1.12	2	0.00	0.00	6	-
8.	Farmers' empowerment	4.05	1.29	1	0.00	0.00	6	-

t-value 1.645 at p 0.05 NS= Non-significant *Significant

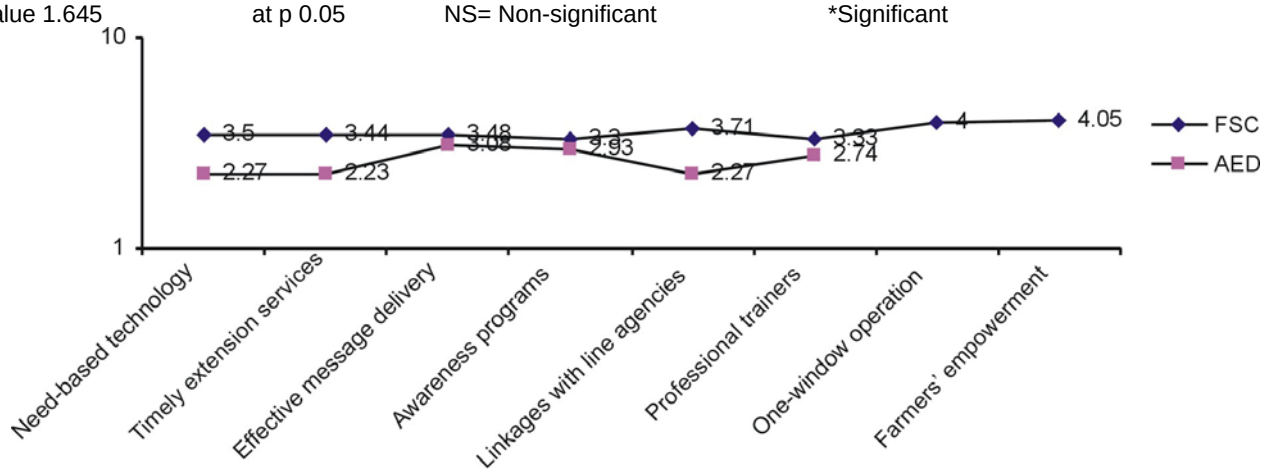

Fig. 1. Graphical presentation of rank order of the response of respondents regarding strengths of F.Sc. and AED

Table 2. Comparison regarding mean, standard deviation (SD) and rank order of the farmer responses about the weaknesses of FSC and AED

Sr. No.	Weaknesses	FSC			AED			t-test
		Mean	SD	Rank order	Mean	SD	Rank order	
1	Farmers representation	2.70	1.21	7	3.60	1.35	6	-11.310*
2	Feedback system	3.15	1.38	4	3.68	1.25	5	-18.851*
3	M & E system	2.27	1.25	8	3.72	1.22	4	-0.121 NS
4	Marketing facilities	4.12	1.22	1	4.13	1.01	1	-11.454*
5	Leadership development	2.84	1.28	6	3.74	1.14	3	-10.607*
6	Gender mobilization	3.32	1.11	2	4.03	1.10	2	-3.046*
7	Storage facility	3.26	1.14	3	3.49	1.31	7	-11.310*
8	Appropriateness of extension programs	3.11	0.96	5	3.19	0.99	8	-4.496*

t-value 1.645 at p 0.05 NS= Non-significant *Significant

facilities (4.12), gender mobilization (3.32), storage facility (3.26), feedback system (3.15), appropriateness of extension programs (3.11), leadership development (2.84), farmers' representation (2.70) and monitoring and evaluation (M & E) system (2.27) with SD 1.22, 11.1, 1.38, 0.96, 1.28, 1.21 and 1.25, respectively.

The respondents were very concerned about marketing, gender mobilization and storage facility at FSC. However they also commented about the non-professional approach of gender mobilization.

In contrast to FSC, the major weaknesses of AED were "lack of marketing facilities", "no gender mobilization" and "no leadership development" ranked as 1st, 2nd and 3rd with mean 4.13, 4.03 and 3.74 along with SD 1.01, 1.10 and 1.14, respectively. For AED, the extent of responses varied between average extent to high extent. The t-test results showed a negatively significant difference between FSC and AED, which infer that AED had more acute weaknesses as compared to FSC.

The smart return of produce is the objective of farmers and it is only possible with established marketing system. But still no sound step has been taken by the government in this regard which leads to instability in the rates of produce due to which all efforts of the farmers' go in vain (CEEC AGRI POLICY, 2007; and Turner and Wibberlay, 2007). This instability results in low interest of farmers in different extension activities which weakens the farmer-extension or farmer-research relationship (Amanor and Farrington, 1991).

Different studies show that learning become easy with the good sitting arrangements and basic infrastructure (Reman *et al.,* 2007), but FSC still lacks these basic requirements like training halls and offices for staff especially for women farmers. The quality of a program can be improved and weaknesses can be minimized if there exists high quality of monitoring and evaluation system (Mesic *et al.,* 2007), but still it was found deficient in case of public-private partnership system of extension.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the most prominent strength of FSC was "farmers' empowerment" with mean 4.05 and SD 1.29, while that of Agriculture Extension Department (AED) was "effective message delivery". As per respondents, the major weakness of both (FSC & AED) systems was "no marketing facility" with mean 4.12 & 4.13 and SD 1.22 & 1.01 respectively. It is further concluded that FSC model has the potential and strengths to provide a break through in agriculture development by increasing agricultural production. This will create an opportunity for a cooperative farming and that will lead to coherent marketing activities with farmers. Agricultural Extension Department be funded with additional fund for the staff indulged in FSC activities. Separate training facilities may be provided for greater mobilization.

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