

Constraints Perceived by Farmers and Multi Purpose Extension Officers in Delivering Extension Services

Key Words: *Constraints, Farmers, MPEOs, Profile, suggestions,*

Agricultural Extension refers to an education system that provides farmers with technical advice required to increase farm output and income including advice on credit, other inputs and marketing. It also provides research institutes and credit institutions information about farmer's conditions (Bello and Salau, 2009). The role played by extension service in every sector of agricultural production cannot be over emphasized; for the prominent role it plays in dissemination of vital agricultural information. The responsibility of making farmers aware of research findings to increase their production is that of extension service providers. From government perspectives, whatever priority is given to agricultural production extension will remain a key policy tool for promoting ecologically and socially sustainable farming practices. (Yusuf et al., 2011). Over the years, agricultural extension has been at the fore-front in the delivery of adequate information to farmers for increased productivity. According to Apantaku and Oyegunle (2016) and Agbamu (2007), agricultural extension service delivery all over the world has been concerned with communicating research findings and improved agricultural practices to farmers. Agricultural extension service is saddled with the responsibility of disseminating innovation that could transform agricultural production to ensure food security and economic development of agrarian community. The roles of extension today go beyond technology transfer and training of farmers but include assisting farmer to form groups, dealing with marketing issues, addressing public interest issues in rural areas such as resource conservation, health, monitoring of food security and agricultural production, food safety, nutrition, family education, and youth development and partnering with a broad range of service providers and other agencies (Ijeoma and Adesope, 2015).

In many developing countries the public extension services run into serious operational and financial problems. According to a worldwide survey conducted by the FAO, the extension work around the world is carried out through public extension system alone. The public extension system is now crumbled by various factors viz., lack of resources, inadequate funds, futile policies and reforms. The greatest challenge faced by

the public extension system is to develop effective strategies in meeting the dynamic demands of modern and commercial agriculture. In India performance of the public extension system was vain. With a rapidly expanding population and declining budget, rethinking the way agricultural technology is delivered to farmers has become necessary. Moreover, the multifarious demands of farming systems should be approached in an economical way as it is evident that public sector extension agencies are facing manpower and operating funds crunch. With this back ground a need was felt to ascertain constraints expressed by farmers and field level extension functionaries (Multi Purpose Extension Officers) and their suggestions for effective extension delivery.

The present investigation was carried out in Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh during the year 2016-17. From nine subdivisions viz., Ongole, Addanki, Singarayakonda, Kandukuru, Darsi, Podili, Markapur, Cumbum and Martur were selected for the study. Ninety farmers and ninety Multi Purpose Extension Officers (MPEOs) (From each subdivision 10 farmers and 10 MPEOs) were randomly selected to analyze the constraints in extension delivery and suggestions for effective extension delivery. Data were collected on age, education, farming experience, land holding and extension participation of farmers and age, education, years of experience, gender and marital status of MPEOs. Open ended questions were posed to farmers and MPEOs to identify major constraints and suggestions and they were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to prioritize.

Majority (57.78%) of the farmers were in middle age group followed by old and young age groups. This might be because majority of the farmers were not encouraging their next generation to continue in the field of agriculture. Almost one third (32.22%) of the farmers were with high school education followed by illiterates (31.11%), primary school education (26.67%), intermediate (7.78%) and very meager (2.22%) were with graduation. Almost half (46.67%) of the farmers were with 11-20 years of farming experience followed by thirty four per cent with more than 30 years of farming experience and remaining nineteen per cent with less than 10 years farming

experience. As majority of the farmers were in middle and old age group they had more farming experience. Fifty per cent of the farmers had less than one hectare land holding followed by thirty eight per cent with 1-2 ha. and only seventeen per cent (16.67%) with more than 3 ha land holding. This result clearly indicated that majority of the farmers were small and marginal in the study area. Almost sixty per cent (56.67%) of the farmers had medium extension participation followed by high (23.33%) and low (20.00%) categories. Similar results were reported by Omer *et al* (2012)

Great majority of the farmers felt lack of timely information and services (92.22%), inadequate knowledge of field extension functionaries (84.44%), irregular contacts with farmers (81.11%), local non availability of field extension functionaries (76.67%), poor communication skills (73.33%), extension functionaries always engaged with documentation works rather than dissemination works (65.56%) and insufficient number of field extension functionaries (62.22%). Below fifty per cent of the farmers expressed lack of confidence on extension functionaries (48.89%) and field extension functionaries were not from agriculture background (45.56%) were their constraints. Procedural delays and improper programme planning were the major reasons contributed for failure to provide timely information and services to the farmers. As majority of the field extension staff (MPEOs) were with diploma qualification and recently joined they were lacking practical field knowledge. Field extension staff were majorly involved in 'e' crop booking and other documentation works consequently leading to irregular contacts with farmers. Some of the field extension officers were from other than agriculture background which in turn affecting the farmers' confidence on them. Apantaku *et al*(2016) reported similar constraints like inadequate extension equipment, inadequate extension staff and improper planning of extension programmes.

Great majority of the farmers suggested that training extension functionaries on local needs of the farmers (91.11), local availability of field extension functionaries (85.56%), field extension functionaries with agriculture background (67.78%), involvement of field extension functionaries in organizing demonstrations and trainings to farmers (65.56%) and providing transport and communication facilities (53.33%) will enhance the efficacy of extension delivery. Updating the knowledge levels of field extension functionaries on a regular basis, within reach to the farmers and facilitating facilities like transport and mobiles will help the field extension functionaries to gain the confidence of the farmers on departmental activities.

Majority (68.89%) of the MPEOs were in 20-30 yrs age group followed by thirty per cent in 31-40 yrs and only two per cent in 41-50 years age group. Majority of them had diploma in agriculture (65.56%), followed by B.Sc. (17.78%), Ag.B.Sc. (13.33%) and M.Sc.(3.33%) qualification. More than half (54.44%) of the MPEOs had below two years of experience followed by forty per cent with 2-3 years and 5.56 per cent with more than 3 years of experience. The major reason behind this result was majority of the MPEOs joined with diploma in agriculture and they have been recruited on large scale during the year 2015-16. More than fifty per cent (52.28%) of the MPEOs were female and remaining 47.78% were male. Regarding the marital status almost sixty per cent of them were single and others (43.34%) were married. This might be because majority of them belonged to the age group of 20-30 years.

From table 5 it is evident that majority of the MPEOs felt that, insufficient aids and facilities to disseminate information (86.67%), large area to be covered (83.33%), overloaded with schemes (81.11%), lack of field experience (78.89%), poor transportation facilities to villages (76.67%), most of the time they were engaged with documentation works (75.56%), lack of need based trainings (73.33%), political instability in villages (56.67%), lack of timely communication in department (55.56%), poor planning of extension programmes (54.44%), insufficient staff (47.78%) and insufficient funds from government (32.22%) were the major constraints in extension delivery. Huge targets, insufficient facilities and improper programme planning were hindering field extension functionaries to deliver their services effectively. The results were in conformity with that of Navab singh *et al* (2016).

Suggestions given by field extension functionaries were presented in table 6. Majority of the MPOs expressed that regular training to extension functionaries (81.11%), providing facilities to implement extension programmes effectively (73.33%), proper planning of extension programmes (60.00%), need based extension services (56.67%) and sufficient number of field extension functionaries (45.56%) will facilitate effective extension delivery. Regular trainings to them may help them to solve the regular field problems with the enhanced knowledge and skills. Facilities like transportation will help MPEOs to reach unreached and fulfill their needs. Sufficient manpower is the first and foremost requirement for the success of any programme.

CONCLUSION

It could be concluded from the results that both farmers and field extension functionaries expressed constraints like lack of regular trainings, lack of facilities,

insufficient staff, irregular contacts with farmers and improper planning of extension programmes which need to be rectified with regular trainings with sufficient infrastructure and manpower with meticulous planning. More extension personnel should be employed and fortified with necessary equipment and facilities to enhance effective dissemination of information for transformation of agriculture, proper planning of extension programmes should be made before its being carried out and provision of equipment for dissemination of information should be done by the government to enhance effective dissemination of information to the rural farmers. Extension personnel should be well motivated to enhance them to work more efficiently. The constraints identified can be reduced by a re-structured, re-examined and strengthened extension service system after intervening of government by developing suitable policies and reforms. Effective policies and reforms are going to be the greatest challenge for the Public Extension System. In order to improve the quality of extension service, needs assessment should be conducted and involvement of farmers in programme development should be encouraged.

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