

Impact of Administrative Changes on the Working Efficiency of Extension Field Staff After Decentralization in the Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Working efficiency of employees working in any organization/institution determines its performance. Extension field staff (EFS) is the main actor for agricultural and rural development. After devolution of power plan some drastic changes occurred in the administrative setup of all the public delivering departments including agriculture. The present study was designed to appraise whether these changes have a positive impact on the working efficiency of EFS or not. The study was conducted in one randomly selected district of Punjab province. All the staff currently working under EDO was selected as respondents of the study. The data was collected through a pre-tested interview schedule and was analyzed with the help of SPSS. It was found that FAs were in majority (78.2%). After decentralization Govt. of Punjab introduce Farmer Field Schools (FFS) for training farmers. It was noted that decentralization had both positive and negative impact on the working efficiency of EFS.

Key Words: Decentralization; Devolution of Power; EFS; Working efficiency

INTRODUCTION

According to an estimate, nearly one-sixth of the world's population is chronically malnourished. Global demand for food is expected to soar over the next 30 years as the world population increases by 2.1 billion people (USAID, 1999). Providing food and other basic requirements of this huge population is a big challenge especially for third world countries. Agricultural production on available land needs to be doubled to meet the required food supply on sustainable basis (World Bank, 1999). In developing countries its importance is more than ordinary because about 61% of total labor force in these countries is employed in agriculture (Gill, 1991). But unfortunately agricultural production in these countries continues to be low (Muhammad, 1994).

Pakistan being a developing country has a share of agriculture in national economy is about 23.3%. According to an estimate most (42.1%) of country's work force is employed in agriculture. The rural population (67.03%) is directly or indirectly linked with agriculture for their livelihood (Govt. of Pakistan, 2004). The major field crops are cotton, rice, sugarcane and wheat that contribute, 2, 1.3, 1 and 3.4%, respectively to GDP and accounts for 8.2, 5.4, 4.2 and 13.8%, respectively of the value added in agriculture. In spite of such a great importance, the yield of these crops is generally low as compared to other countries. There is a huge gap between the potential and actual yield of major crops. For example, during the year 2002-03, the

average yield per hectare of wheat, rice, sugarcane and cotton, was 2384, 2012, 47927 and 621 kg, as compared with the yield potential of these crops being 5302.69, 6125, 107500 and 5261 kg ha⁻¹, respectively (Govt. of Pakistan, 2003).

This situation clearly indicates that agricultural production in Pakistan depends on many factors including isolation of agricultural education, research and extension wings (NRSP, 1999). Agricultural extension plays an important catalytic role in agricultural and rural development. It brings the farming community information and new technologies that can be adopted to improve production, incomes and standards of living. Agricultural extension provides a channel through which farmer's problems can be identified for research and modification of agricultural policies to the benefit of rural communities (FAO, 2002).

Agricultural extension, as one of the institutional components, promotes the transfer and exchange of information that can be converted into functional knowledge, which is instrumental in helping to develop enterprises that promote productivity and generate income in the present climate of change. Extension work in Pakistan has been in progress since independence. Pakistan has tried several extension models/approaches/systems during different regimes as Village Agricultural Industrial Development programme (Village-AID) was started in 1952 with substantial help from USAID and Ford foundation. With the abolition of the Village-AID programme in 1961,

rural development became a part of the Basic Democracies System (BDS). The BDS also met the same fate as its predecessor programs. The change in the government in 1970 abolished the BDS and introduced a new rural development approach, the "Integrated Rural Development Programme" (IRDP). Subsequently in 1978, the IRDP subsumed into the local government department and turned into a routine bureaucratic agency (World Bank, 2003). In later years of the IRDP, the government assigned extension personnel to deliver agricultural inputs such as improved seed, fertilizer and pesticides, to farmers through farmers' doorsteps approach (Axinn & Thorat, 1972). The approach also proved costly and ultimately paved the way for the privatization of agricultural inputs and phasing out the subsidies borne by the government (Davidson *et al.*, 2001).

In 1978 Government introduced a new system namely Training and Visit (T&V) system of extension with the financial and technical assistance of International Development Association, World Bank (Govt. of Punjab, 1983). Under (T&V) System of agricultural extension, the functions of transfer of technology were clearly delineated and separated from supply functions such as provision of inputs. This system could not meet the new challenges because it emphasized on the communication of messages rather than making farmers understand these messages and improving their technical and managerial skills (Byerlee, 1988; FAO, 1990). Agriculture today is entirely different from that in the past as a result of transition from traditional to modern technology. The capacity of the farmer to adapt to the changing conditions ultimately determines the rate and direction of agricultural development. Under these circumstances, at the national level, inappropriate public extension policies, limited public funds, lack of accountability and increasing rural poverty have prompted developing countries to re-examine the relevance of agricultural extension to rural development (Shah, 1998). International agencies and scholars have been urging developing countries to decentralize their extension systems and to introduce other organizational reforms to deal with many of these problems, as well as to realize rural development goals, such as the more equitable distribution of economic growth and to facilitate grassroots participation of local people in development (Cohen & Peterson, 1999). In Pakistan, with the change in political regime in 1999, Government of Pakistan introduced a new system named as Devolution of Power Plan, which is a more advanced form of decentralization on August 14, 2001 for strengthening the functions of and empowering with more authority to the elected representatives (FAO, 2001). The devolution of power plan brought administrative changes in all the public sector departments including agricultural extension.

Under the new setup of agricultural extension, each district is managing its agricultural extension activities where the functions of all sister organizations such as Water Management, Fisheries, Livestock, Soil conservation, Forestry, etc; are put under one manager called as Executive

District Officer of Agriculture (EDOA). The designation of Deputy Director Agriculture (DDA) has been changed as District Officer Agriculture (DOA) who now works under the EDOA. The EDOA reports to the District Coordination Officer (DCO) who is answerable to the elected District Nazim (Administration), whereas the line departments provide the technical backstopping and monitor the cross-district agricultural development projects. DOA and Deputy District Officer of Agriculture (DDOA) at district and tehsil levels assist EDOA, respectively. Agricultural Officers (AOs) and Field Assistants (FAs) are working at Merkaz and Union council level respectively (World Bank, 2003). Keeping in view the concept of new administrative setup, the question is that whether the system has any effect on the working EFS. The present study determines the impact of administrative changes on the working efficiency of EFS after decentralization in the Punjab, Pakistan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Punjab province consists of 34 districts. Out of these, districts Muzaffargarh was selected by using simple random sampling technique. The selected district is equally important for crops, fruits and vegetables. It consists of four tehsils namely Alipur, Kotadu, Jatoi and Muzaffargarh. All the (EFS), which comprises of EDO, DO, DDOs, AOs, Agricultural Inspectors (AIs) and (FAs) working in the district were taken as respondents. The data was collected with the help of pre-testes and validated interview schedule and analyzed with the help of statistical package SPSS. Descriptive statistics was used for the interpretation of data for reporting results and drawing conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data presented in Table I reports that majority (78.2%) of the respondents were FAs, followed by AOs, AIs, DDOs, DO and EDO as reported by 10.0, 6.4, 3.6 and 0.9% of the respondents, respectively.

Data on the frequency of visit of EFS to the farming community indicated that an overwhelming majority (94.5%) of the respondents made fortnightly contact with farmers before decentralization followed by 58.2 and 23.6% of the respondents who met weekly and according to training schedule, respectively (Table II). However, after decentralization 94.6% of the respondents contacted the farmers according to training schedule followed by 61.8 and 16.4% of the respondents who met with farmers on weekly and fortnightly basis, respectively.

The data given in Table III revealed that changes in administrative setup had positive affect as reported by majority (60.0%) of the respondents. Whereas 36.4% of the respondents believed that change was positive as well as negative. However, only 3.6% respondents were of the view that changes were negative.

The data regarding the working efficiency of EFS

Table I. Distribution of respondents according to their designation

Designation	Frequency	Percentage
Executive District Officer (EDO)	1	0.9
District Officer (DO)	1	0.9
Deputy District Officers (DDOs)	4	3.6
Agricultural Officers (AOs)	11	10.0
Agricultural Inspectors (AIs)	7	6.4
Field Assistants (FAs)	86	78.2
Total	110	100.0

Table II. Frequency of contact of EFS with farmers as reported by the respondents

Frequency	Before Decentralization n = 110				Before Decentralization n = 110			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Weekly	64	58.2	46	41.8	68	61.8	42	38.2
Fortnightly	104	94.5	6	5.5	18	16.4	92	83.6
Monthly	3	2.7	107	97.3	3	2.7	107	97.3
Bimonthly	1	0.9	109	99.1	1	0.9	109	99.1
Quarterly	1	0.9	109	99.1	1	0.9	109	99.1
Twice a year	1	0.9	109	99.1	2	1.8	108	98.2
Once a year	1	0.9	109	99.1	2	1.8	108	98.2
Never	1	0.9	109	99.1	1	0.9	109	99.1
According to training schedule	26	23.6	84	76.4	106	96.4	4	3.6

Table III. Distribution of respondents according to the affect of administrative changes

Effect	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	66	60.0
Negative	4	3.6
Both Positive and Negative	40	36.4
Total	110	100.0

after decentralization shows that according to 50.9% of the respondents the new administrative setup very good (Table IV). Increased mobility of EFS, EFS can involve farmers in programme planning in good category as reported by 45.5% of the respondents, while EFS treated all the farmers equally fall in poor category as reported by 37.3% of the respondents. New setup provided better transport facilities to EFS in very poor category as

Table IV. Impact of changes in administrative setup on the working of EFS as perceived by them

Statement	Rating										Mean	S.D.
	Very Poor (1)		Poor (2)		Average (3)		Good (4)		Very good (5)			
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
It increased mobility of EFS	-	-	-	-	6	5.5	48	43.6	56	50.9	4.45	0.60
EFS can involve farmers in Programme planning	-	-	5	4.5	40	36.4	50	45.5	15	13.6	3.68	0.77
EFS can treat all farmers equally	11	10.0	41	37.3	36	32.7	13	11.8	9	8.2	2.71	1.07
It provided better transport facilities to EFS	52	47.3	14	12.7	3	2.7	10	9.1	31	28.2	2.58	1.76
EFS has better chances of promotion	79	71.8	18	16.4	9	8.2	2	1.8	2	1.8	1.45	0.86
Extension worker got increased salary	66	60.0	8	7.3	29	26.4	6	5.5	1	0.9	1.80	1.06
Feel comfortable in performing their duties	19	17.3	12	10.9	44	40.0	32	29.1	3	2.7	2.89	1.09
EFS can interact with farmers more frequently	2	1.8	20	18.2	18	16.4	41	37.3	29	26.4	3.68	1.11
It has strengthen research Extension linkages	60	54.5	27	24.5	17	15.5	5	4.5	1	0.9	1.73	0.95
More helpful in technology transfer system	3	2.7	15	13.6	23	20.9	33	30.0	36	32.7	3.76	1.13
It has close monitoring and evaluation mechanism	-	-	-	-	8	7.3	29	26.4	73	66.4	4.59	0.63

reported by 47.3% of the respondents. The better chances of promotion fall in very poor category as reported by 71.8% of the respondents. Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents reported very poor conditions in case of extension worker got increased salary. While average (40.0%) respondents fell comfortable in performing their duties. EFS can interact with farmers more frequently fell in average category as reported by 37.3% of the respondents. The extension research linkage in decentralization was very poor as reported by 54.5% of the respondents in technology transfer system the present set up was very good in view of 32.7% of the respondents. The monitoring and evaluation mechanism was very good as stated by 66.4% of the respondents.

CONCLUSIONS

Majority of the respondents reported that before decentralization they contacted with the farmers according to the fortnightly schedule and after decentralization their contact was according to the training schedule designed for each crop. For the training of farmers, Directorate of Extension and Adoptive Research introduce Farmer Field Schools (FFS) in the Punjab after decentralization. It was also concluded that decentralization had both positive and negative impact on the working efficiency of EFS.

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