

## AN ASSESSMENT OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES POSSESSED BY EXTENSION FIELD STAFF OF PRIVATE AGRI. EXTENSION SYSTEM IN PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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In Pakistan, privatization of agricultural extension system was started in 1988 on the recommendation of National Commission on Agriculture established by the government to look into the causes of poor performance of agricultural sector. Currently, private sector (320 multinational, national and generic pesticide companies) is actively engaged in extension activities in the Punjab. The sector is bound to provide extension services to the farmers in addition to selling pesticide products. In the present study, Narayana's Lotus Model was adopted to assess the strengths and weaknesses of competencies possessed by extension workers of private extension system. A cross-sectional research design was used for the study in Punjab province. Simple random sampling technique was used for the selection of respondents. Sixty (60) respondents (private extension field staff) from selected multinational pesticide company (Syngenta) were personally interviewed with the help of pre-tested and validated research instrument. Results show that mean values of professional competencies of private agricultural extension workers regarding knowledge, attitude, skills and attributes were 3.68, 3.82, 3.84 and 3.73 with standard deviation of 0.47, 0.39, 0.38 and 0.49, respectively. This means that competencies possessed by extension workers of private sector (Syngenta) were perceived in the range of strength and great strength on the likert scale. But, keeping in view some other studies conducted to measure competency of extension field staff (EFS) through farmers' respondents, a great discrepancy in opinion existed among farmers and EFS on the same issue.

**Keywords:** Professional competencies, extension field staff, private agri. extension system

### INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, in Pakistan, agricultural extension has been the mandate of provincial government organized under the Ministry of Agriculture. Since independence, several extension programs have been tried for agricultural development including the Village Agricultural and Industrial Development (V-AID) Program from 1952-1962, Basic Democracies System (BDS) from 1959-1970, Rural Works Program (RWP) from 1963-1972 and Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP) from 1970-1977.

These programs met with partial success and abolished one after the other. In 1978, Training and Visit system was launched with the technical and financial support of World Bank which still exists with major modifications. Farmer field school (FFS) approach and Hub program has also been introduced in the current decade for effective and efficient extension services. Hence, the role of public sector in dissemination of agri. technology among farmers cannot be denied but it is fact that, public extension system has been criticized due to the failure to deal with the needs of the farmers (Ahmad *et al.*, 2000; Sofranko *et al.*, 1988). So, in the 1980s, majority of the farmers were dissatisfied with the performance of extension field staff of public sector

extension system (Munir, 1982; Khan, 1982; Khan and Akbar 1985). Due to an overall lack of success of public sector extension, the then Government of Pakistan appointed a Commission on Agriculture in 1988 to look into poor agricultural performance and make recommendations for strengthening the agricultural sector. As conclusion, the commission suggested the inclusion of the private sector in reshaping agricultural extension. In the push towards privatization, mainly private business companies, i.e. pesticide and fertilizer companies entered into extension work in addition to selling their agricultural inputs. This constituted private extension system in Punjab, Pakistan. But, was privatization experience a remedy of poor extension system performance? Abbas (2005) reported that majority of the farmers was not satisfied with the working of field staff of private sector. This situation directly questions the competency of the field staff of private extension system. The present study was therefore designed to assess the self perceived professional competencies possessed by extension workers of private agricultural extension system in the Punjab, Pakistan.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the Punjab province. A cross-sectional research design was used for the study. A private agri. business company 'Syngenta' was selected for the study on the basis of its active involvement in providing extension services. Seventy one (71) extension personnel (population) of Syngenta pesticide were working in the Punjab. Among population, sixty (60) field staff personnel were selected randomly through Fitzgibbon table (Fitzgibbon and Lynn, 1987). In the present study, Narayana's Lotus Model was adopted with some modifications to assess the strengths and weaknesses possessed by extension workers of private extension system. This model described four areas, i.e. knowledge, attitude, skills and attributes to measure competency among private extension personnel. Competency was measured on 4-point scale for each area. On measuring scale, mean value of 1 represents great weakness, 2 represents weakness, 3 represents strength and 4 represents great strength. The data were collected through personal interviews with the help of pre-tested and validated interview schedule. The data, thus collected were analyzed by using computer software 'SPSS' and interpreted.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Professional competency of EFS:** Narayana's Lotus Model (Swamy, 2001) described four areas, i.e. knowledge, attitude, skills, and attributes to develop competency among private extension professionals. To assess the professional competencies of private extension field staff, Narayana's Lotus Model was adopted with some modifications. The data collected regarding this aspect are presented and discussed in the following lines.

**i. Knowledge:** Knowledge is sub-divided into 5 sub-headings, i.e. subject matter, farming systems, input, farmers' problems and marketing. The respondents were asked to rate these statements at the given scale to make a

self-assessment. The data regarding these aspects is presented in Table 1.

Self perceived knowledge competency of EFS was determined by asking 5 questions as depicted in Table 1. The mean values of all the responses of the respondents were above 3.50 which showed the strength of the system. The overall mean value of knowledge competency was 3.68 with standard deviation 0.47. This means that knowledge competency of EFS of private sector extension was perceived as great strength of the system. But Ali *et al.* (2009) revealed that knowledge competency of private EFS was rated as weak as reported by the farmers in the Punjab. This might be due to fact that private sector employs fresh graduates preferably having less exposure of field and practical knowledge (Ali, 2009).

**ii. Attitude:** Attitude is sub-divided into 3 sub-headings, i.e. serving clients, field work and problem solving. The respondents were asked about their response. The data concerning these aspects were collected and are presented in Table 2.

Self perceived attitude competency of EFS was analyzed by asking three questions (Table 2). The mean values of the responses regarding these questions were above 3.78. The overall mean value of attitude competency was 3.82 with standard deviation 0.39. This means that attitude competency of EFS of private sector extension perceived by themselves was considered as great strength of the system. Khan *et al.* (2004) concluded that EFS had no ability to identify the clients' needs but was competent enough to answer the questions raised by the farmers. They emphasized on the need to train the staff to make them competent because in the field, it is hard to solve the problems of the farmers without being competent in identifying the real needs of the farmers. Ali *et al.* (2009) reported farmers' view on attitude competency of EFS in the domain of weakness of the system. It showed the discrepancy between the opinion of service providers and end users on the same question. So, there is need to build attitude competency of the EFS by considering the view of

**Table 1. Frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation regarding competency of extension field staff concerning knowledge as strengths/weaknesses of private extension system as reported by private EFS**

EFS Knowledge parameters	Great weakness		weakness		Strength		Great strength		Central tendency	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	$\bar{X}$	SD
Subject matter	-	-	-	-	14	23.3	46	76.7	3.80	0.40
Farming systems	-	-	-	-	16	26.7	44	73.3	3.73	0.45
Inputs	-	-	-	-	16	26.7	44	73.3	3.73	0.45
Farmers problems	-	-	-	-	16	26.7	44	73.3	3.63	0.49
Marketing	-	-	-	-	30	50.0	30	50.0	3.50	0.57
Overall knowledge mean									3.68	0.47

the end users of agri. extension services.

**iii. Skills:** The skill competency was divided into 4 sub-headings i.e. technological skill, training skill, diagnostic skill and skill in finding solutions of problems. The data with respect to this aspect are presented in Table 3.

Skills competency of EFS was determined by asking 4 questions as presented in table 3. The mean values of the responses of the respondents were rated above 3.80. The overall mean value of skill competency was 3.84 with standard deviation 0.38. This means that skill competency of EFS of private sector extension was rated by themselves as great strength of the system. But Ali *et al.* (2009) concluded in a study that skill competency of EFS of private extension system was rated by the farmers as weakness of the system. It showed the discrepancy between opinions of EFS and farmers on same issue.

**iv. Attributes:** The attributes competency was sub-divided into 4 questions about politeness, good conduct, empathy towards farmers and flexibility. The respondents were asked about their responses. The data regarding this aspect are given below in Table 4.

Self perceived attributes competency of EFS was analyzed by asking 4 questions (Table 4). The mean values of all the parameters presented in table were rated by the respondents above 3.70 except flexibility which was rated at mean value of 3.12 and standard deviation 0.43. This means that flexibility was perceived as strength while remaining three items were perceived as great strength. The overall mean value of attribute competency was 3.73 with standard deviation 0.49. This means that attributes competency of EFS of private sector extension was perceived as great strength of the private extension system. Androulidakis and

**Table 2. Frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation regarding competency of extension field staff concerning attitude as strengths/weaknesses of private extension system as reported by the private EFS.**

EFS Attitude parameters	Great weakness		weakness		Strength		Great strength		Central tendency	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	F	%	$\bar{X}$	SD
Serving clients	-	-	-	-	11	18.3	49	81.7	3.82	0.39
Field work	-	-	-	-	9	15.0	51	85.0	3.85	0.36
Problem solving	-	-	-	-	11	18.3	49	81.7	3.78	0.42
Overall attitude mean									3.82	0.39

**Table 3. Frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation regarding competency of extension field staff concerning skills as strengths/weaknesses of private extension system as reported by the private EFS.**

EFS Skills parameters	Great weakness		weakness		strength		Great strength		Central tendency	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	$\bar{X}$	SD
Technological	-	-	-	-	9	15.0	51	85.0	3.85	0.36
Training	-	-	-	-	15	25.0	45	75.0	3.82	0.39
Diagnostic	-	-	-	-	9	15.0	51	85.0	3.85	0.36
Finding solution of problems	-	-	-	-	11	18.3	49	81.7	3.82	0.39
Overall skills mean									3.84	0.38

**Table 4. Frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation regarding competency of extension field staff concerning attributes as strengths/weaknesses of private extension system as reported by the private EFS.**

EFS Attributes parameters	Great weakness		weakness		Strength		Great strength		Central tendency	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	$\bar{X}$	SD
Politeness	-	-	-	-	5	8.3	55	91.7	3.70	0.46
Good conduct	-	-	-	-	5	8.3	55	91.7	3.87	0.34
Empathy towards farmers	-	-	-	-	17	28.3	43	71.7	3.77	0.43
Flexibility	-	-	-	-	49	81.7	5	8.3	3.12	0.49
Overall attributes mean									3.62	0.43
professional competency mean									3.74	0.11

Siardos (2003) pointed out that EFS competence should be in accordance with the areas in which they will be assigned to operate. Otherwise, in-service training would be essential. Raad *et al.* (1994) identified that EFS needed competency to recognize traditional culture and understand human behavior. They suggested the continuing educational program for extension personal. Cooper and Graham (2001) revealed that being fair, honest and trustworthy was the most important professional competency. Similarly, Haynes (2000) reported that EFS should have competency in behavioral flexibility.

## CONCLUSION

Self perceived competencies regarding knowledge, attitude, skills and attributes of private EFS were considered as strength of private extension system in this study. This might be due to efficient staffing criteria and pre & in-service training provided to the private EFS. But keeping in view the review of literature, it can be safely stated that there is great discrepancy existed between the opinions of EFS and farmers about professional competency except attributes competency. EFS had a view about themselves that they are competent and are strength of the system while farmers had a view that private EFS are incompetent and are weakness of the system. Both point of views had its own significance but farmers' opinion is more considerable as they are clients and end users of private extension system. So, there is need to review the field competency of EFS by involving both EFS and farmers at a time in order to provide need oriented and effective extension services for the benefit of the farmers.

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