

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF BIOGRAPHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CHANGE AGENTS IN AGRICULTURE: A STUDY IN THE PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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In order to analyze the biographical and professional characteristics of Agricultural Officers (AOs), information was obtained from stratified random sample of 60 AOs through distributed questionnaires. It was found that the majority of the respondents had a degree in agriculture, service experience of less than ten years, and age below 40 years with rural background.

Key words: characteristics of change agents, descriptive analysis, Pakistan, Punjab

INTRODUCTION

The process of bringing change in the behaviour of farmers with respect to the adoption of innovations in agriculture has gained a global recognition with a total annual expenditure of more than six billion US dollars (FAO, 1990). At present most of the 'countries have at least one formally organized extension system with the mission to change farmers' behaviour (Axin, 1988). These systems are generally named as Agricultural Extension Systems. In these systems farmers are assisted to improve their farming methods and techniques through non-formal procedures of education.

At present the training and visit (T&V) approach to agricultural extension is in vogue in the Punjab, Pakistan. This approach was introduced in this province in 1978 with the goal to reform and improve the effectiveness of the conventional agricultural extension service (Govt. of the Punjab, 1993). At the first stage it was started in few selected districts but later on during the year 1987-88 this approach was extended to all districts of the province. There is a hierarchy of management from the Director General Agriculture (Extension & Adaptive Research) to Director Agriculture, Deputy Director Agriculture, Extra Assistant Director Agriculture, Agricultural Officers (Extension), and Field Assistants. Agricultural Officers (Extension) and Field Assistants are known as agricultural extension workers or agents of change (Directorate General of Agriculture, Extension & Adaptive Research, Punjab, 1994).

The agricultural extension system in the Punjab,

is under severe criticism for its poor performance (Malik, 1993). The change agents or agricultural extension workers are considered the backbone of this system. This study was thus designed to analyze the professional characteristics of Agricultural Officers (Extension).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The provincial Department of Agriculture (Extension and Adaptive Research Wing) has administratively divided the Punjab province into three regions- Multan, Lahore, and Rawalpindi. One district from each of the three regions was selected randomly and all Agricultural Officers (Extension) of these three districts were taken as the sample of the study. In all there were 60 Agricultural Officers (Extension) covered in the sample. The field data were collected through tested and validated distributed questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data regarding educational qualifications, age, service experience, rural or urban background, farming experience, and professional competence of Agricultural Officers (Extension) were analyzed.

Educational Qualifications: Majority of the respondents (76%) had M.Sc. degree in agriculture. There were only 16% of the respondents who had B.Sc. degree. However, there were about 7% of the respondents who had Field Assistant diploma only. They were promoted from the position of Field Assistant to Agricultural Officer in lieu of their long experience. The data

Table 1. Educational qualifications of the respondents

Specialization (Major subject)	Degree/Diploma obtained							
	M.Sc.		B.Sc.		Diploma (F.A)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Agriculture (General)	-	-	-	-	4	6.6	4	6.6
Agronomy	11	18.3	2	3.3	-	-	13	21.6
Agri. Economics	3	5.0	1	1.7	-	-	4	6.7
Agri. Extension	3	5.0	1	1.7	-	-	4	6.7
Crop Physiology	1	1.7	-	-	-	-	1	1.7
Entomology	3	3.0	-	-	-	-	3	5.0
Forestry	2	3.3	-	-	-	-	2	3.3
Food Technology	1	1.7	-	-	-	-	1	1.7
Horticulture	6	10.0	1	1.7	-	-	7	11.7
Rural Sociology	1	1.7	-	-	-	-	1	1.7
Soil Science	4	6.6	1	1.7	-	-	5	8.3
Plant Breeding and Genetics	8	13.3	4	6.6	-	-	12	20.0
Plant Pathology	3	5.0	-	-	-	-	3	5.0
Total	46	76.6	10	16.8	4	6.6	60	100.0

regarding educational qualifications are shown in Table 1.

It is obvious from Table 1 that there were only 7% of Agricultural Officers who had opted for Agricultural Extension as a major subject during their studies at the University. Among others, this in general, might be one factor for the poor performance of AOs in the field. Because most of the AOs are not properly trained in agricultural extension work; they need in-service training for increasing their work efficiency.

Age: Most of the respondents (73%) were below 40 years of age.

Service Experience: About 65% of the respondents had service experience of up to ten years. The data regarding age and service experience show that the majority of the Agricultural Officers (Extension) was relatively young. This indicates that young and energetic AOs, if properly trained and supervised, can brighten the future of farming community in Pakistan.

Rural/Urban Background: Seventy-three percent of the respondents had rural background, whereas only 27% of them had urban background. It indicates that majority of the AOs had sufficient knowledge about the socio-economic problems of rural Pakistan.

Personal Involvement in the Farming Business: As much as 40% of the respondents were personally involved in the farming business in addition to

their professional duties. This on the one hand showed their interest in farming work, while on the other hand, it could be an attempt to supplement their income to meet expenditure due to rising standards of living.

Professional Competence: About 20% of the respondents indicated that they were not fully competent to handle the venture of extension work. They were in search of some other job either in a research organization or in a university. It is recommended that research studies should be planned to identify the in-service training needs of Agri. Officers and efforts should be made to popularize the option of Agricultural Extension as a major subject during the university education especially for those students who after completion of their education intend to serve as Agricultural Officers in extension wing of the provincial Agriculture Department.

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