

Agricultural Extension Service in Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Sri Lanka is a country in the South Asian region. The total land area is around 6.5 million hectares of which nearly 30 percent is used for agriculture. The total population in the year 2001 is around 19 million people, which nearly 65 percent live in the rural areas. Nearly 38 percent of the labor force works in the agricultural sector, which accounts for 18 percent of GDP 21 percent of GNP and 22 percent of export earnings in the year 1998.

Agricultural Production can be identified mainly as crop cultivation and livestock farming. Crop cultivation plays a major role. Crop cultivation consists of the plantation sector and the smallholder peasant sector. Plantation sector produces mainly tea, rubber, and coconut. Smallholder peasant sector produces mainly paddy and other field crops such as vegetables, fruits, spices, onion, chili, etc. Livestock sector mainly comprises diary farming and poultry industry.

After independence in 1948, the government, attempted to develop the domestic agriculture sector through providing agricultural infrastructure such as irrigation facilities, credit, training of professionals in agriculture, providing inputs and agricultural extension and establishing research institutes. Until early 1990's government had marketing boards to purchase farm products.

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Today the subsistence nature of the domestic agriculture has largely disappeared. Though there are several shortcomings and difficulties, domestic agricultural sector moves towards commercialization. Since independence, the agricultural sector in Sri Lanka as a whole has expanded at a rate of 2.6 % per annum. However this rate of growth was lower than the annual average growth rate of the overall economy. Therefore the share of the agriculture sector in GDP has declined from 38 percent in 1950 to 18 percent in 1998.

The total area under cultivation in Sri Lanka is around 2.25 million hectares and divided among three main sub sectors. Majority of these crops are produced on smallholdings.

- Paddy accounting for 850,000 ha
- Tree crops- tea, rubber and coconut accounting for 800,000 ha
- Other crops accounting for 600,000 ha

These other food crops include pulses (green gram, black gram, cowpea), oilseeds (gingerly, ground nuts, soybean), condiments (chilies, onion, ginger, turmeric), roots and tubers (potato, sweet potato and cassava), vegetables (temperate and tropical), and fruits (mango, papaya, banana, and pineapple). An estimated 73 percent of all cultivated land is under smallholdings.

History of the Agricultural Extension Service in Sri Lanka

Agricultural Extension Service in Sri Lanka has been evolved over the years since latter part of the 19th century. First, at the end of 19th century a few Agricultural Instructors (AIs) were recruited. They worked directly under the Government Agents. In 1904 Ceylon Agricultural Society was established to resuscitate peasant agriculture. In 1912 Department of Agriculture (DOA) was established, mainly to cater the plantation sector. In early 1920s the agricultural extension service was developed as a part of the DOA. The functions of the DOA were defined as research, extension and edu-

cation. In early 1930s an Agricultural Officer (AO) headed each province. There were 37 Agricultural Instructors all over the island. In 1950s one AI was recruited to each Divisional Revenue Officer (DRO) division. The extension programs were executed at DRO division level. This limited number of extension officers was not enough to cope up with the needs of the farmers. In 1957 District Agricultural Extension Officers (DAEOs) were appointed as in charge of the district levels. Under this program Village Level Extension officers (Krushhi Viapthi Sevaka) were recruited to execute extension programs at the village level. In 1963 separate division was organized in the DOA under supervision of Deputy Director (Extension). There was a very clear single line of command at the extension service of the DOA.

Director (Agriculture) → Deputy Director (Extension)
→ DAEO → AI → KVS

In 1980 with the assistance of the World Bank the Training and Visit (T&V) system was introduced. Although it helped to strengthen and enhance the extension service, due to several reasons this system could not be sustained after termination of the World Bank assistance in 1986. The major reason for the failure of the T&V system was resource scarcity to allocate high level of recurrent funding required by the Government of Sri Lanka. In 1989, under the 13th amendment to the constitution central governance power was devolved to the newly created eight provincial councils. Hence agriculture became a duty of provincial councils, agricultural extension function of the DOA and Department of Animal Production and Health (DAPH) was largely devolved to the provinces. In 1990, according to a political decision taken by the President of the country, the total carders of 2400 grassroots level extension workers (Krushhi Viapthi Sevaka) of the DOA were transferred to the Ministry of Public Administration as village officers. A consequence of this decision was a virtual collapse of the extension service at the village level.

While DOA pays attention on domestic food crop sector, other government and semi government institutions being have involved in other crops and livestock have developed their own extension services. The DAPH has developed an extension service for the livestock sector. The Department of Export Agriculture (DEA), which is responsible for a number of export oriented crops, Coconut Cultivation Board (CCB), which has the authority to develop the coconut sector, and the Tea

smallholdings Development Authority (TSHDA) have their own extension services.

In the early 1990s the integrated agricultural extension approach (IAEA) was introduced with the World Bank assistance involving four government institutions namely DOA, DAPH, DEA and CCB. The IAEA is based on the integration of the extension activities of the four institutions.

Agricultural extension organizations

In Sri Lanka agricultural extension services are provided mainly by the government sector organizations. The major state sector institutions involved in agricultural extension are Department of Agriculture, Department of Animal Production and Health, Department of Export Agriculture, Coconut Cultivation Board, Tea smallholdings Development Authority, Rubber development Department, Tea Research Institute, Rubber Research Institute, Coconut Research Institute and Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka. Cashew Corporation, Silk and Allied Authority, Sugar Research Institute, Forest Department, Livestock Development Board and Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources also have their own extension services. There are a few Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) and private sector input supplying companies who deliver extension services to the selected farming communities.

Department of Agriculture (DOA)

The Department of Agriculture was established in 1912. It is the prime organization responsible for agricultural research and extension. The mandated crops of the DOA are paddy, other field crops such as pulses, oilseeds, condiments, roots and tubers, vegetables and fruits.

The extension service of the DOA comes under two administrations: central government and provincial councils. There is a Director (Extension) in the central government authority. The provincial Deputy Directors (Extension) are responsible to the respective provincial authorities. Because of this dual structure, there are conflicts between extension service of the central government and provincial councils. There is no clear line of command. The designation of the Director (Extension) was changed at several occasions in Director (Technology Transfer) and Director (Communication).

The DOA has both, staff grade extension officers and field level extension officers. Directors, Deputy Directors and Assistant Directors are considered as staff grade extension officers. Agricultural Officers (AOs) and Agricultural Instructors (AIs) are the field level extension officers. Before 1990, there was 2400 grassroots level extension workers named as “Krusha Viapthi Sevaka”. But due to political reasons they were transferred to the Ministry of Public Administration as village officers (Grama Niladhari). So currently there is no grassroots level extension staff in DOA. The responsible authorities such as Ministry of Agriculture did not take any effective measure to fill this vacuum and the extension service of the DOA is not efficient as early days.

Department of Animal Production and Health (DAPH)

The DAPH was a part of the DOA until 1972. In 1972 livestock production division including animal health was organized as the Department of Animal Production and Health. Unfortunately since 1977 up to 2002 DOA and DAPH were under different ministries. So there was no sufficient coordination between crop and livestock sectors, which is essential for the development of the agriculture of the country. The field level extension officers of the livestock sector are Livestock Development Instructors (LDI).

Department of Export Agriculture (DEA)

The DEA was established in 1972. The crops mandated to this department are coffee, cocoa, cardamon, cinnamon, cloves, betel, areca nut, oil palm, vanilla, and lemon grass. All these crops are mainly export oriented ones. The DEA has its own extension service and the field level extension officer is called Extension Officer (EO). They are two years agricultural diploma holders.

Coconut Cultivation Board (CCB)

The CCB is a semi government institution, which involves in extension services to coconut small holders in the country. Coconut Development Officers (CDOs) are the field level extension officers in this institution.

Integrated Agricultural Extension Service (IAES)

The IAES is being implemented from 1993 with participation of the above described four institutions namely, DAO, DAPH, DEA and CCB. The major reasons to introduce this approach were cost effectiveness, disruption in the technical line of command,

insufficiency of grassroots level extension workers and the need to practice farming system approach (Sivayoganathan, 1999).

The IAES is an integration of the extension efforts of four institutions. The extension programs for the area is planned and implemented at the field level by Field Extension Team (FET) comprising of the field extension officers of the four institutions. These officers are Agricultural Instructors (AIs) of the DOA, Livestock Development Instructors (LDIs) of the DAPH, Extension Officers (EOs) of the DEA, and Coconut Development Officers (CDOs) of the CCB. These officers serve as general practitioners in addressing farm problems, which are more general, and leaving community specialized ones to the respective line institutions. The FET members are guided and logistically assisted and supported by the Guide Extension Team (GET), at the district level and the Provincial Extension Team (PET) at the provincial level (Sivayoganathan, 1999; Sivayoganathan and Kotagama, 1999).

Tea Small Holdings Development Authority (TSHDA)

The TSHDA is the organization responsible for providing extension services to the tea smallholdings sector. The field level extension officers of the TSHDA are Tea Inspector/ Extension officers (TI/ EOs). They are involved in providing extension service to the tea smallholders as well as in the supply of other agricultural support services. The extension service of the TSHDA is under the supervision of the Deputy General Manager (Extension) who is operating from Colombo.

Tea small holders are taxed indirectly for the extension services provided to them through the Tea Small Holdings Development Authority. Sixty percent of the island's tea production comes from the smallholder sector. Government takes 1.50 Sri Lanka Rupees from each and every exporting tea kilogram as an exporting tax. But this money is reinvested in the tea sector. All the tea sector institutions such as Tea Research Institute, Sri Lanka Tea Board, and Tea Small Development Authority are funded by this money, not by the treasury funds (Mahaliyanaarachchi, 1996).

The Tea Small Holdings Development Authority is totally responsible for the extension delivery to the tea small holders in the country that is approximately two hundred and thirty thousand farmers. There is nearly 200 field level extension workers, and around 30 supervisory level extension officers. All these offic-

ers are paid by the tax money collected at the exporting end. Here farmers pay indirectly for the extension services, which they obtain though they have no idea about it.

Rubber Development Department (RDD)

The RDD was established in 1994 by the amalgamation of the Rubber Control Department (which was totally responsible for disbursement of subsidies) and the Advisory Services Department (which was totally responsible for the extension service). Currently the RDD is responsible for providing extension service to the rubber small holders and disbursement of subsidies and other input facilities such as fertilizer, planting material, etc. The field level extension officers are designated as Rubber Development Officers (RDO). The extension activities in the RDD are decentralized, covering 12 districts of rubber growing areas under the supervision of the Assistant Directors.

Private Sector Extension Service

There is no highly specialized private sector extension service in Sri Lanka yet. There are some NGOs namely Care International, Red Bana, and Sarvodaya involved in agricultural extension work mostly as part of their overall community development programs. Also private sector input supplying companies such as Hechem, Ceylon Tobacco Company, Bours Ltd, provide limited advisory services to their clients. These private sector companies recover their costs through the margin on the product they are either selling or buying. They do not make any direct charge to the extension services provided.

It was found that there is a potential to privatize extension services especially in the horticultural sector, export agricultural crops, and livestock enterprises (Malkanthi and Mahaliyanaarachchi, 2001; Sivayoganathan, 1999).

Current Situation of Agricultural Extension

The National Agricultural Extension Committee (NAEC), which was a standing committee of the Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy (CARP) had been entrusted with the responsibility to develop a policy for agricultural extension service. The role of the NAEC was to advise the CARP on policy matters in Agricultural Extension, especially agricultural extension and training, organization, coordination, planning, execution, funding of agricultural extension services, extension pilot programs

& training and research-extension-farmer linkages. However, as usual, the committee could not serve the purpose for which it was constituted. The major reason for this was political interferences.

Currently NAEC emphasizes more on following:

- a. Promotion of a farmer-centered farming system based integrated extension approach.
- b. Channeling of extension delivery system primarily through group approach.
- c. Use of mass media
- d. Promoting the NGO sector in agricultural extension services.

(Sivayoganathan, 1999)

Since 1990, the aim of the government policy makers has been to reduce extension budget as much as possible. They used to think that it is a waste of public money. They have not considered that agricultural extension plays a vital role in agricultural production. Since early nineties, it has become a worldwide trend, to privatize agricultural extension or minimize the public sector involvement in agricultural extension. The same influence came into Sri Lanka and without alternative these policy makers have started to cut down allocations for agricultural extension. The consequences were tragic and horrible. Currently the farmers are lacking information in new technology, marketing, proper advice in pest and disease management, and farm planning and management.

Also many of the agricultural extension professionals are feeling lost, alienated and demoralized because they are not involved in the general decision-making process.

At present, there is very little research on agricultural extension in the country. Not even an objective, historical evaluation of the policies that we have followed. There is very little support and investment in this area. According to experts in the agricultural extension sector, investment in this area includes two important aspects. First, to refine, improve and select appropriate techniques in extension. Second, address the organizational and administrative aspects of extension. In Sri Lanka the extension administration takes wide swings with regard to approaches, for example the linkage of extension workers with the general administration and back to agricultural administration institutes. Earlier, District Agricultural Extension Officers (DAEO) came under the Government Agent (GA), and then was brought back to the Department of

Agriculture. Now the grass root level extension workers were taken to the public administration. These wide swings of approach reflect a lack of proper understanding and information and assistance to guide policy formulation based on sound objective research that will help decide on stable course of action.

As a reform of the agricultural extension system in Sri Lanka, in 1999 the Second Agricultural Extension Project (SAEP) was implemented. This was named as Integrated Agricultural Extension Service (IAES). The main objective of the project was to strengthen the agricultural extension services for the food crop sector as well as integrating the different extension agencies at different levels. With the introduction of SAEP, the amount of money given to the extension sector was increased. But, it was found out that farmers did not experience much change in the extension service. So, the problem of limited access of the resource poor to extension still remains unchanged and unsolved or became even worse as increased financing flows were confined to certain categories.

According to a study done by Prof. Mahinda Wijeratne of the Ruhuna University of Sri Lanka, even though reforms in agricultural extension have made changes in financing, structural adjustments and delivery mechanism, the benefits and opportunities offered for the vast majority are limited.

Problems faced by agricultural extension system

- Lack of grass root level extension workers in the major agricultural extension service the Department of Agriculture. Due to this gap, there is no proper link between research and farmers. The farmers rarely get modern technological information especially in the food crop sector. The political authorities or government sector officials do not want or do not have interest to correct this completely wrong decision taken by a dictator president in 1989. A number of reforms were introduced after this period, but none of them pay attention to reorganize the grass root level extension service.
- The policy makers and planners do not have a clear idea about the priority areas of extension. They never practiced the “farmer first approach”. Priority has always been given to the interests of the top rank officers of the extension service. Most of these approaches are top down and inflexible to farmer needs. The farmers have to depend on officers, in addition farmers’ participation in extension programs has decreased.

- In most of the cases, the project approach of extension became unsuccessful due to unsustainably. After completion of the project, most of the projects were discontinued due to lack of resources and the financial crisis in the government sector. The T&V system is a good example.
- Due to continuous failures of extension services the farmers’ respect and trustworthiness on these programs have decreased.
- The failures of most foreign funded projects occurred due to implementation of extension strategies that did not suite the local socio- economic conditions. These foreign agencies try to implant extension strategies from one part of the world to another part.
- The extension personnel has to work according to the agenda introduced by political authorities suited to their own interests not to the farming community. For instance, the two programs, namely “AMA’ and ‘Cultivation Battle” lunched during 1994-2000 by the Ministry of Agriculture became an utter failure. Both programs were daydreams of the politicians. Today the farmers as well as the officers look on these programs sarcastically.

Opportunities to develop Agricultural Extension

- The economy of Sri Lanka still depends mainly on agriculture. Nearly 38 per cent of the population is involved in farming. So agricultural extension has a great role to play in the development of agriculture.
- The farmers still trust public sector extension services, though they do not function well currently. They have experiences of the efficient public extension service prior to 1989.
- The farming community in Sri Lanka has the highest literacy level among the developing countries in the world. It is 92 percent. It was found in a number of studies that the formal education level of the farmers and the adoption of new technologies by them have a positive relationship.
- There are seven agricultural faculties and ten agricultural schools in the country. So annually around 500 agricultural graduates and 800 agricultural diploma holders come out from these institutes. This large work force could and should be used to enhance the quality of the extension service.

Summary

There is a wide range of agricultural extension services in Sri Lanka. They can be categorized as Government, Semi Government and Private sector extension services. Still Department of Agriculture (DAO) is the main agricultural extension service provider, especially to paddy, vegetables, fruits and other field crops.

In Sri Lanka four major agricultural extension reforms were undertaken in the peasant agricultural sector since 1948, the independence of the country.

- In 1957, District Agricultural Extension Officers and village level extension offices (KVSs) were appointed. This is the first significant attempt taken to widen the accessibility of the extension services to the peasant farming community.
- The second major reform was the introduction of T&V system in 1979. This system became a failure due to number of reasons such as financial scarcity, lack of research, social problems and administrative difficulties.
- The third reform was absorbing of the village level agricultural extension offices (KVSs) from agricultural service to administrative service as village offices in 1989. Village officers are the grass root level administrative officers of the state service. So they have nothing to do with agriculture. This bad political decision taken to abolish the field level extension layer has given long-term negative consequences to the development of the agricultural sector in the country.
- The fourth one was the implementing of an Integrated Agricultural Extension Service in 1993. The main objectives of the programme were to strengthen the different agricultural extension services in the country by integrating their functions.

Currently extension service of DOA is accused for not doing enough. In other words, it is highly inefficient and insufficient. This should be considered seriously by the policy makers while the majority of the farmers are small holders and economically vulnerable. They are not economically strong enough to pay for extension yet.

There are several commodity specialized extension services provided in tea, rubber and coconut sectors. The public sector (Government and semi govern-

ment) extension services are mainly targeted on small and recourse less farmers. These services are free of charge.

There are few NGOs and private sector companies who provide agricultural extension services to the limited number of farmers. Public sector dominates extension services still. But due to different factors such as a failure to adopt a demand driven approach, a lack of appropriate technology, increasing cost of production, decreasing soil fertility, the uneconomic size of small holdings due to the continued fragmentation of the land, and financial and marketing constraints, they are unable to improve the productivity and profitability of farming since 20 years.

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