



Barriers to Privatization of Agricultural Extension in Khuzestan Province, Iran

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Abstract

Keywords:

Barriers,
Privatization,
Agricultural
Extension

The agricultural extension system in the country is facing challenges and shortcomings due to issues related to the provision of services by the public sector. These challenges highlight the need to review the pattern of agricultural service delivery by the public sector to create the conditions for greater private sector participation. But before entering the process of privatization and huge costs in this sector, it is necessary to identify the existing barriers and in the first step to remove the barriers, then in the second step to implement it to plan and take practical action. The purpose of this study is to identify barriers to privatization of agricultural extension in rural areas of northern Khuzestan Province. Based on the results, it was found that the most important barriers to the implementation of privatization of agricultural extension were economic, social and cultural barriers with an explanatory power of 57% of the changes in the barriers to privatization of agricultural extension in rural areas of northern Khuzestan Province.

1. Introduction

The agricultural extension in the public sector in the 1970s and 1980s was heavily criticized by politicians and economists in developed countries. Their main focus was on expenditures and financial issues in the public sector. Inadequacy, low quality and inconsistency and lack of relevance of training content to client needs, organizational and managerial constraints, low ability of managers to make optimal and timely decisions, increase subsidies, role conflict for employees and the departure of specialized staff led to criticism of government promotion and revealed the need to reconsider the structure of agricultural extension (Behtash et al., 2006). Blum et al., (2020) explained several changes in thinking about development had occurred during the 80's and 90's. An ideological shift toward privatization had gained prominence. The political economy of the developing world was dominated in those decades by the adoption of economic structural adjustment reforms and the emergence of pressures for the democratization of the political process. Donors have

been advising governments to take measures towards cost-recovery, outsourcing and partial or full privatization of agricultural extension services. Onslaught of conservative ideology emphasizing efficiencies over welfare (Rivera and Sulaiman, 2009) and implementation of structural adjustment programmes leading to reduction of government spending in Africa (Opio-Odong, 2000) and Latin America (World Bank, 2006) also enhanced the move towards privatization of extension services. Political liberalization was demanded by a "anti-authoritarian, anti-statist, non-governmental organizations" civil society reacting to those economic measures.

Agricultural extension, as an informal educational system, is one of agricultural development tools that lean on human capitals. Inefficiency of public bureaucracy on the one hand, and managerial problems on the other hand, as well as neglecting real needs of beneficiaries in planning, have determined responsible to transfer administrative tasks to the private sector and reduce government's tenure (Narmada and Bakhshi Jahromi,

2020). Agricultural extension, education and consulting services provided so far by the public sector have been criticized for their inability to perform their assigned functions, lack of cost-effectiveness and efficiency, while; Non-governmental organizations and organizations providing agricultural extension and educational services can play an important role in increasing the coverage of agricultural services for agricultural operators (Panahi and Ziaemehr, 2017). Narmada and Bakhshi Jahromi (2020) revealed that several factors such as education level, participating in extension activities, innovation acceptance, membership in associations, cosmopolitan, positive attitude toward knowledge and information, applying numerous information resources, pistachio yield per hectare, area of the pistachio garden and satisfaction of the private consultants had relation with attitude toward privatization of extension. Also, the level of participation in extension activities and attitude toward the public extension could explain 24.8 percent of changes in attitude toward private extension.

The organization of agricultural extension in Iran is taken from the conventional approach of extension and has a fully governmental structure. Since the beginning (except in 1950s), it has been grappling with financial shortage, misuse of human resources and unsuitable institutional structure. Hence, it is urgent to study inefficiency of extension and seek for a strategy to achieve the new goal. These days, privatization plays an important role in agriculture and due to its successful experiments; it has been publically accepted (Narmada and Bakhshi Jahromi, 2020).

The failure of the public agricultural extension sector has been attributed to a number of factors, including unmotivated employees, non-committing tasks, insufficient operating budget, lack of proper technology, poor planning, centralized management, and lack of accountability in the public sector. Given the emphasis of most researchers on the inadequacy of public sector agricultural extension, it is suggested that private agricultural extension services should play a greater role in service delivery. The private agricultural extension in recent years has emerged as an issue that plays an important role in increasing productivity (Patrick Chuks, 2012). Public extension performance in many developing countries including Iran is not up to the expectation of farming community. Further, in recent years, many governments are very reluctant to shoulder huge financial investment for public extension. Hence, extension specialists and policy makers propose privatization of extension services in developing countries (Asadi et al 2008).

2. Materials and methods

In this research, survey and correlation research methods have been used. The area of this research has been selected in the township of Andimeshk, Dezful, Shousha, Shushtar, Gotvandeh, Lali, andika and Masjed Soleiman, which are the rural areas of the northern township of Khuzestan province. The statistical population of this research consists of agricultural experts of agricultural jihad management in the mentioned township. In this research, stratified random sampling method has been used. For this purpose, each township is considered as a strata and in proportion to the number of experts in each city, a statistical sample is randomly selected from among them. The statistical population of extension and agriculture experts in the north of Khuzestan province was 386 people. Using Krejcie and Morgan table, 185 people were selected as a statistical sample, and 174 people answered the questionnaire. The expert panel method was used to determine the validity of the content of the research tool. After receiving the necessary comments and corrections, the final changes were applied and the questionnaire was prepared to determine the reliability. After extracting the data, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for each variable.

Given that Cronbach's alpha of the variables is higher than 0.8. It is therefore approved. The questions were asked in the form of a 5 Likert scale. The range is from very low to very high. In this research, a survey method has been used to collect information in two documentary methods and to complete the questionnaire.

3. Results and discussion

Findings showed that in the statistical population of the study, 44.8% of respondents with a frequency of 78 people with the highest frequency in the age group of 36 to 45 years. 64.4% were in the bachelor group with the highest frequency. According to the data, 64.4% of the respondents had less than 10 years of experience.

3.1 Barriers to privatization, agricultural extension

3.1.1 Economic Barriers:

Based on the results of the research (Table 1), it was found that based on economic barriers of prioritization, respectively, fragmentation of lands and weakness of financial strength of the farmer with an average of 3.619 and standard deviation of 1.145 in the first rank, inadequate income situation in return consulting and technology information with an average of 3.580 and a standard deviation of 1.138 in the second place and a lack of belief in the impact of privatization on the improvement of the farmer's

economy with an average of 3.465 and a standard deviation of 1.131 are the most important items of economic barriers.

According to the number of items, the range of response of individuals was determined between 8 and 40. Individuals with a score of 8 to 14.4 reported very low economic barriers to privatization. People with a score of 14.4 to 20.8 reported a low, people with a score of 20.8 to 27.2 reported a moderate, 27.2 to 33.6 a high, and 33.6 to 40 a very high. Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of people in these groups. According to the results, the highest percent of people (43.5%), believed that the economic barriers to privatization were high.

3.1.2 Social Barriers:

Based on the results of the research (Table 3), it was found that based on social barriers of prioritization, respectively, low social awareness of individuals in the field of privatization with an average of 3.706 and standard deviation of 1.014 in the first rank, low spirit of social participation with an average of 3.672 and a standard deviation of 1.086 in the second place and a unwillingness of a group to integrate lands with an average of 3.580 and a standard deviation of 1.065 are the most important items of social barriers.

According to the number of items, the range of response of individuals was determined between 5 and 25. Individuals with a score of 5 to 9 reported very low social barriers to privatization. People with a score of 9 to 13 reported a low, people with a score of 13 to 17 reported a moderate, 17 to 21 a high, and 21 to 25 a very high. Table 4 shows the frequency and percentage of people in these groups. According to the results, the highest number of people, 78 people, believed that the social barriers to privatization were high.

3.1.3 Structural Barriers:

Based on the results of the research (TABLE 5), it was found that based on structural barriers of prioritization, respectively, lack of rural infrastructure development with an average of 3.821 and standard deviation of 0.960 the first rank, problems due to lack of legal grounds and government support with an average of 3.701 and a standard deviation of 1.009 in the second place and a lack of long-term planning with an average of 3.632 and a standard deviation of 1.043 are the most important items of structural barriers.

According to the number of items, the range of response of individuals was determined between 7 and 35. Individuals with a score of 7 to 12.6 reported very low structural barriers to privatization. People with a score of 12.6 to 18.2 reported a low, people with a score of 18.2 to 23.8 reported a moderate, 23.8 to 29.4 a high, and 29.4 to 35 a very high. Table 6 shows the frequency and percentage of people in these groups. According to the results, the highest number of people, 93 people, believed that the structural barriers to privatization high.

3.1.4 Cultural Barriers:

Based on the results of the research (TABLE 7), it was found that based on cultural barriers of prioritization, respectively, Lack of belief in risk-taking with an average of 3.563 and standard deviation of 1.066 the first rank, farmers do not believe in paying for information with an average of 3.649 and a standard deviation of 1.141 in the second place and a low level of farmer literacy with an average of 3.580 and a standard deviation of 1.138 are the most important items of cultural barriers.

Table 1. Items of economic barriers to privatization of agricultural extension

Items	Mean	sd	CV	priority
The small size of the lands and the weakness of the financial of the farmer.	3.619	1.145	0.316	1
Inadequate income situations in return for receiving information and consulting information	3.580	1.138	0.317	2
Lack of belief in the effect of privatization and extension in improving the agricultural economy	3.465	1.131	0.326	3
Weakness of financial strength of private companies providing extension services	3.471	1.151	0.331	4
No use of agricultural mechanization	3.344	1.185	0.354	5
Risk taking of agriculture	3.350	1.234	0.368	6
Statehood of the economy	3.316	1.248	0.376	7
Low level of agricultural production	3.160	1.205	0.381	8

5 Likert scale: very low =1, low =2, medium=3, high=4, very high=5, Reference: Data collected (2020)

Table 2. General situation of economic barriers to privatization, agricultural extension

Grouping	Barriers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Sd
5-12	Very low	7	4	3.574	1.027
12-19	Low	20	11.5		
19-26	Moderate	42	24		
26-33	High	76	43.5		
33-40	Very high	29	16.6		

Table 3. Items of social barriers to privatization of agricultural extension

items	Mean	sd	CV	priority
Low social awareness of individuals in the field of privatization	3.706	1.014	0.273	1
Low spirit of social participation	3.672	1.086	0.295	2
Unwillingness of a group to integrate lands	3.580	1.065	0.297	3
Abundance of small farmers and livelihoods	3.695	1.129	0.305	4
Reduce communication between organizations and farmers during information exchange	3.844	1.184	0.308	5

5 Likert scale: very low =1, low =2, medium=3, high=4, very high=5, Reference: Data collected (2020)

Table 4. General situation of social barriers to privatization, agricultural extension

Grouping	Barriers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Sd
5-9	Very low	4	2.3	3.670	1.027
9-13	Low	18	10.3		
13-17	Moderate	35	20.1		
17-21	High	78	44.8		
21-25	Very high	29	22.4		

Table 5. Items of structural barriers to privatization of agricultural extension

Items	Mean	Sd	Cv	Priority
Lack of rural infrastructure development	3.821	0.960	0.251	1
Problems due to lack of legal grounds and government support	3.701	1.009	0.272	2
Lack of long-term planning	3.632	1.043	0.287	3
Barriers to bureaucracy and little flexibility of government structure	3.603	1.100	0.305	4
Lack of attention to cultivation pattern in extension programs	3.569	1.129	0.316	5
Lack of attention to the needs of farmers in extension programs	3.482	1.141	0.327	6
Get farmers accustomed to government agricultural services	4.028	2.259	0.560	7

5 Likert scale: very low =1, low =2, medium=3, high=4, very high=5, Reference: Data collected (2020)

Table 6. General situation of structural barriers to privatization, agricultural extension

Grouping	Barriers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Sd
7-12.6	Very low	9	5.2	3.775	1.003
12.6-18.2	Low	10	5.7		
18.2-23.8	Moderate	27	15.5		
23.8-29.4	High	93	53.4		
29.4-35	Very high	35	20.1		

Table 7. Items of Cultural barriers to privatization of agricultural extension

Items	Mean	Sd	Cv	Priority
Lack of belief in risk-taking	3.563	1.066	0.299	1
Farmers do not believe in paying for information	3.649	1.141	0.312	2
Low level of farmer literacy	3.580	1.138	0.317	3
Incompatibility of privatization of agricultural extension with the culture of farmers in the region	3.557	1.165	0.327	4
The farmer does not care about private sector advice	3.454	1.160	0.335	5
Most farmers do not believe in extension education	3.172	1.274	0.401	6

5 Likert scale: very low =1, low =2, medium=3, high=4, very high=5, Reference: Data collected (2020)

Table 8. General situation of cultural barriers to privatization, agricultural extension

Grouping	Barriers	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Sd
6-10.8	Very low	12	7.5	3.569	1.103
10.8-15.6	Low	14	8		
15.6-20.4	Moderate	39	22.4		
20.4-25.2	High	77	44.3		
25.2-30	Very high	31	17.8		

Table 9. Regression analysis to determine the role of barriers

Variables	B	Std Error	Beta	T	Sig
Social Barriers	-0.297	0.085	-0.334	-3.504	0.000
Economical Barriers	-0.177	0.076	-0.218	-2.010	0.032
Cultural Barriers	-0.217	0.095	-0.260	-2.227	0.024
Constant	20.949	1.605	---	13.051	0.000

Reference: Data collected (2020)

According to the number of items, the range of response of individuals was determined between 6 and 30. Individuals with a score of 6 to 10.8 reported very low cultural barriers to privatization. People with a score of 10.8 to 15.6 reported a low, people with a score of 15.6 to 20.4 reported a moderate, 20.4 to 25.2 a high, and 25.2 to 30 a very high. Table 8 shows the frequency and percentage of people in these groups. According to the results, the highest number of people, 77 people, believed that the cultural barriers to privatization high.

3.2 Regression analysis

Regression was used to determine the role of barriers to the applicability of privatization approaches to agricultural extension. At this stage, after the entry of barriers in the regression equation, social, economic and cultural barriers remained in the regression equation and 57% of the changes explained the possibility of applying privatization approaches to agricultural extension.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the results of the research, it was found that based on economic barriers of prioritization, respectively, fragmentation of lands and weakness of financial strength of the farmer in the first rank, inadequate income situation in return consulting and technology information in the second place and a lack of belief in the impact of privatization on the improvement of the farmer's economy are the most important items of economic barriers. According to the results, the highest number of people, 76 people, believed that the economic barriers to privatization were high. Based on the results of the research, it was found that based on social barriers of prioritization, respectively, low social awareness of individuals in the field of privatization in the first rank, low spirit of social

participation in the second place and unwillingness of a group to integrate lands are the most important items of social barriers. According to the results, the highest number of people, 78 people, believed that the social barriers to privatization were high. Based on the results of the research, it was found that based on structural barriers of prioritization, respectively, lack of rural infrastructure development the first rank, problems due to lack of legal grounds and government support in the second place and a lack of long-term planning are the most important items of structural barriers. According to the results, the highest number of people, 93 people, believed that the structural barriers to privatization high. Based on the results of the research, it was found that based on cultural barriers of prioritization, respectively, lack of belief in risk-taking the first rank, farmers do not believe in paying for information in the second place and low level of farmer literacy are the most important items of cultural barriers. According to the results, the highest number of people, 77 people, believed that the cultural barriers to privatization high. Regression was used to determine the role of barriers to the applicability of privatization approaches to agricultural extension. At this part, after the entry of barriers in the regression equation, social, economic and cultural barriers remained in the regression equation and 57% of the changes explained the possibility of applying privatization approaches to agricultural extension. In order to achieve the goals of privatization in the agricultural extension sector, the necessary conditions must be provided. Based on the results, it is suggested that the prevailing view for privatization in the agricultural extension sector should not be just an economic view. Rather, attention to social and cultural factors plays a very important role in the success of privatization of agricultural extension.

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