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Expectations from Farmers in Mediterranean Southern Countries: the case of Egypt

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Abstract. Recent Agricultural policy changes in the context of Egypt's ongoing economic reform program. Over the last five years the agricultural sector has been moving gradually towards privatization. This article presents Egyptian farmers' attitudes and expectations toward the present extension services and the government's policies in defining choices and priorities in developing the extension services programs. Traditional extension in Egypt has been carried out by giving directions to farmers. A top-down approach is not very successful among farmers as they obviously prefer two-way over one-way communication. Decentralized extension helps farmers to be involved in identifying the problems and setting the solutions. Some recommendations are presented for improving the extension work in Egypt in connection with Egypt's present policy.

Key words. Egypt – Extension services – Agricultural policy.

Introduction

The Agricultural development strategy for Egypt includes the goal of increasing farm productivity and farm incomes. We have a continuing supply of technology to do that.

Traditional extension in Egypt has been carried out by giving directions to farmers. A top-down approach to extension is not very successful because the messages are too general. This often causes extension workers to be mistrusted and not well accepted by farmers. People obviously prefer two-way over one-way communication. Without feedback we may not even know if the message was received, and if it was, we may not know its effect on the receiver.

One-way communication disseminates general recommendations regardless of differences in localities, environments, differences in target groups including different problems, experience and available resources. We can say that the major problem with top-down flow of agricultural information is that it limits the ability to develop specialized messages targeted to specific audiences in specific crops and climatic regions that reflect non-farmers participation in the message development process.

A 1982 Sallam study examining the farmer-receiver's perception of the value of extension communication methods revealed that: the farmers did not view one-way communication channels as being of tremendous value. They rated as highest the techniques that provided opportunities to give feedback. Between 80 and 90 percent of the farmers studied thought that communication channels using experts and demonstrations were the most valuable. While demonstrations alone were ranked slightly higher than experts alone, the results indicate that farmers did not necessarily have to be exposed to medium that emphasizes seeing something to be receptive to it. The crucial point from this study is that the farmer-receiver views certain techniques of communicating information as being more worthwhile than others; and the more worthwhile techniques provide the opportunity for the farmer to become more of a participant in the change process (Sallam, 1982).

The role of extension is changing from one of motivating people toward the adoption of improved practices to one of solving problems. Practices must be adopted for problems required to be solved, but problems are not always what they appear on the surface. A careful and probing analysis of the situation is often necessary to reveal causes which must be attacked and removed for the problem to be solved.

I – Decentralized Extension

Decentralization of extension is one of Egypt's goals because such a system is viewed as having many advantages. It is superior in identifying problems. Local people are usually quick to tell problems if given the opportunity. The involvement of people in decentralized planning and implementation brings much more energy to bear on solving problems.

Probably the strongest advantage to decentralized activity is that there will be greater acceptance of solutions and adoption of ideas if people have been involved in identifying the problems and setting the solutions.

Grass-roots-level planning is being implemented by some projects, in the attempt to realistically plan for beneficial outcomes. One important part of the strategy is to decentralize the extension service.

Two-way communication builds a positive relationship of trust and confidence between farmer and extensionist because the farmer realized that the extension worker is interested in his situation and opinions. Local adaptation of messages can be developed with receiver input. Specialized messages can be prepared for specialized receivers such as women or target groups in isolated areas by using small media such as video and slides. Specific audiences can be targeted and served directly by using specialized messages, taking into consideration their behaviour, habits, and other attributes.

Two-way communication is mutually beneficial to the receiver and the sender because they learn from each other and build from that experience.

Research-extension linkage is vital for supplying new technology to farmers. The narrow focus and depth of information from research must be linked with the broad scope of extension specialists knowledge and experience.

Farmers' successful practices are to be considered and tested by the research system for further wide dissemination among farmers (Farmer-Extension-Research). In the Farmer-Extension-Research continuum, Extension not merely occupies a bridge position but facilitates to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of both the farmer and the research.

To facilitate the farmer's work, extension staff is required to look, listen, and learn from farmers rather than see, speak, and sell.

Similarly, to facilitate research, extension is required to feed back the changing needs, opportunities, bottlenecks, and problems of farmers in relation to the research system. In the Farmer-Extension-Research continuum, it is essential to ensure that extension and research services remain responsive to changing farmers' needs and opportunities.

Farmers always make their own decisions on the varieties of the food crops they grow, the production practices they follow, and so on, having made their assessments of what best suits the particular circumstances of their holding.

1. The Egyptian farmers' attitudes towards the extension service and their expectations

An attitude represents a person's general feeling of favourableness or unfavourableness toward some stimulus. Farmers' attitudes are considered the most important factor affecting their behaviour and their participation in developing and conducting extension activities. Knowing farmers' attitudes helps Egyptian extensionists to understand and to be aware of the social context in which they work. The extension agent as an educator can play an important role in changing farmer's attitudes toward the technological and socio-economic changes in the village, through the diffusion of information. Farmers' attitudes are essential factors in making judgements about the adoption of agricultural technology. Therefore, adult educators, must be interested in changing or reinforcing these attitudes.

El-Shazly found that 60 percent of the respondents have positive attitudes toward the extension service in Egypt. He found that farmer innovativeness concerning agricultural mechanization was significantly and positively correlated with the favourable attitudes toward change, and favourable attitudes toward agricultural extension services (El-Shazly, 1977).

Sharshar in identifying Egyptian farmers' attitudes toward the extension service in an Egyptian village, found that farmers have a strong and favourable attitudes toward the extension service in Egypt, and a strong tendency to participate in extension activities (program planning and meetings). He also found a positive relationship between farmers' participation in extension activities and their attitudes toward the extension service (Sharshar, 1984).

Farmers' expectations concerning approaches for improving extension services in Egypt were investigated and the result revealed the following: they expected to be helped in solving their problems, to be kept informed of new innovations and practices and taught how to use them, to be guided when performing agricultural operations (conduct of field visits, workshops, extension demonstration fields); that distinguished farmers be encouraged, and that farmers' be made more aware of the necessity of broadcasting programs (FAO, 1988).

2. Attitudes and expectations of institutions involved in extension services in Egypt

El-Garhy, in his study on the possible cooperation and coordination methods between rural Youth Club leaders and agricultural extensionists, found that the majority of the respondents highly perceived the roles of the extension service in increasing agricultural products. They also have a high tendency for cooperation with the agricultural extensionists at the village level. There was a complete agreement according to which mutual meetings were the most efficient method for coordination (El-Garhy, Sharshar, 1989).

Knob, Sallam, and Wilking-Wells, analyzed the attitudes of both farmers and government officials involved in the process of rural development toward various approaches commonly utilized in development efforts. They questioned their subjects concerning various approaches to development, namely: reliance on formal national programs and policies, encouraging local self-help initiative, provision of educational, technological or economic resources, promotion of limitations on population growth... A model of different development approaches was offered to orient analysis of data collected. The focus of analysis was on: (i) the extent to which respondents see differing approaches as competitive or complementary, and (ii) the degree to which personal characteristics of farmers and officials are associated with their preferences for particular approaches.

The results challenge some commonly held academic beliefs. In general, officials and farmers do not recognize differences and inconsistencies in approaches which have been identified by academics, and further, personal characteristics often are not associated with approach preferences in the expected patterns. It is a basic truism for successful development that whatever the effort to be undertaken, the people involved must believe in it. Implicitly, they must either understand it and accept it, or have blind faith that it will work, based on respect for those who advocate it. They must anticipate that it will produce benefits which they themselves value without imposing unacceptable costs. For these reasons it is critical for the success of the development effort that approaches be selected to match the experiences and interests of both the rural target population and the professionals who serve them, and that these people be adequately prepared for application of innovative approaches (Sallam M.S., Knop E.C., and Knop S.A., 1980).

II – Conclusion

The urgency to improve agricultural productivity in Egypt is well documented. The most suitable and effective means and methods must be employed. Technology is available, but in many cases it must be adapted for local use. The decentralized approach and the two-way communication—which build a positive relationship of trust and confidence between farmers and extensionists, develop local adaptation of messages with receiver input, prepare specialized messages for specialized receivers, and specific audiences—can be

targeted and served directly by using specialized messages, taking into consideration their behaviour, habits and other attributes.

The decentralized approach of extension work helps extension workers to involve people in an active way. This includes analyzing with people the problems of the area, informing them of different resources available and helping them to organize and implement programs.

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