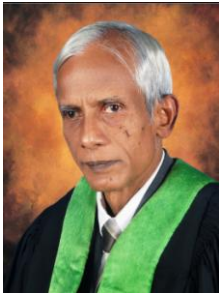


FACE TO FACE



Without a comprehensive policy, agricultural extension is unlikely to get the priority and attention it deserves. Formulation and implementation of an extension policy should be the first priority for improving extension delivery in Sri Lanka.

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Prof. C. Sivayoganathan retired last month as Senior Professor (Agricultural Extension) from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. He spoke to AESA recently on the current challenges in extension delivery in Sri Lanka

What significant changes in extension provision happened in Sri Lankan food crop sector during the past 3 to 4 decades?

The most significant change in the 1980s was the introduction of the Training and Visit (T&V) system during 1979-80. T&V continued till 1989 when the agricultural extension services were devolved to the provinces under the 13th amendment to the constitution. Nearly 2400 field level extension workers (*Krusha Viyapathi Sevakas*) were transferred from the Department of Agriculture to the Ministry of Public Administration as *Grama Niladharis* and this created a vacuum at the field level.

From 1993 to 1998, under the Second Agricultural Extension Project, the Integrated Agricultural Extension Service involving the Department of Agriculture, Department of Export Agriculture, Department of Animal Production and Health, and Coconut Cultivation Board was implemented. However, from 1999 each department again started offering its own extension service separately. Greater emphasis was given to group and mass extension methods as against individual extension methods since then.

In 2002 about 9000 persons were recruited, given a brief training in agriculture, and employed as Agricultural Research and Production Assistants. They are currently engaged in village level extension activities (2-3 days in a week).

Box 1: Sri Lankan Agriculture

Agriculture contributes to 11.2 per cent to the country's GDP (Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka, 2013). Agriculture sector has alone employed 33 per cent of its total labor force. Sri Lanka's main agricultural products comprise paddy, subsidiary crops, coconut, rubber, tea, sugarcane and tobacco. Rice is the single most important crop occupying 34 percent of the total cultivated area. Coconut, rubber and tea, the three important commercial tree crops are grown on the West coast and hill areas. Tree crops comprise a significant portion of the exports of the country and are taken care of by the Department of Plantation Industries. In 2012, country's total export was of \$9.785 billion. Textiles and apparel; tea and spices; rubber manufactures; precious stones; coconut products and fish are its major exports.



Tea is the most prominent plantation crop in Sri Lanka and the country is famous for its high quality black tea and is its largest supplier in the world. The second major commercial crop is Rubber. Much of it is used in the domestic manufacturing sector and the rest is exported. Coconut, the third commercial crop is a major ingredient used in food preparation and the product is also exported in the form of kernel products, coconut cream and coconut milk powder.

Which are the major extension providers in Sri Lanka?

Department of Agriculture, Department of Animal Production and Health, Department of Export Agriculture, Coconut Cultivation Board, Tea Research institute, Rubber Research Institute, Coconut Research Institute, Tea Small Holdings Development Authority and Rubber Development Department are the major extension providers. Other state organizations such as Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka, Sugarcane Research Institute, and Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources also have their own extension services. In addition, some private sector firms and non-governmental organizations are also engaged in agricultural extension work in a limited way.

What are the major challenges in extension provision in Sri Lanka?

Agricultural extension is a neglected component of the Knowledge and Information System. Lack of a clear cut (written) policy on agricultural extension has also contributed to this situation. There is very limited coordination among the state (service oriented), private sector (profit oriented) and non-government (empowerment oriented) organizations in the provision of agricultural extension services.

Similarly, the coordination between the extension service organizations and input suppliers as well as the central and provincial extension services is far from satisfactory. Another major issue is the shortage of extension manpower and the challenges in using ICTs and mass media for extension message delivery.

What changes happened in extension teaching in Sri Lanka during the past three decades?

Teaching of agriculture in the University system commenced in Sri Lanka in 1948 and the first batch of students graduated with Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture in 1951. Agricultural extension was introduced as one subject to the undergraduate students only in 1974-75.

In Sri Lanka, extension is taught formally in five Schools of Agriculture under the state Department of Agriculture (offering diplomas) and seven Faculties of Agriculture in the universities offering Bachelor’s degrees. Post-graduate programmes leading to M.Sc, M.Phil and PhD are offered in some of the faculties of agriculture including the Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture in the University of Peradeniya.



The University of Peradeniya has eight faculties including the Faculty of Agriculture and two Post Graduate Institutes. Its campus has a network of academic buildings, vast lawns, magnificent flowering trees and idyllic walkways.

How extension teaching in the University of Peradeniya changed during this period?

The name of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm Management in the University of Peradeniya was changed to Agricultural Economics and Extension in 1983. A separate Department of Agricultural Extension was established in December 1995. A new curriculum based on the course unit system was introduced in 1991. Under this scheme, all the undergraduate students followed a core program during the first two years and during the third and the fourth years they followed advanced programs in different fields in agriculture.

After the establishment of the Department of Agricultural Extension, 10 to 20 students followed an advanced module in “Development Communication and Extension” annually. The subjects followed include Human Behavior, Organizational Management, Human Resource Management, Developmental Extension, Extension Education, Communication, Journalism and Media Use, Gender Issues in Development, Social Research Methods etc. The students are also exposed to real life situation through a course called “Productivity Enhancement Training”. The students also have to undertake a research study / project and submit a report in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

Bachelor’s degree. The name of the degree was also changed from Agriculture to Agricultural Technology and Management during 2006.

At the postgraduate level, earlier only one type of Master’s degree in Agricultural extension was offered. However, in response to the changing demand, the Postgraduate Institute of Agriculture started offering two Master’s degree programs viz. “Organizational Management” and “Development Communication and Extension” 10 years back. Currently about 50 students enroll for the program in Organizational Management and 10 students for the program in Development Communication and Extension annually. In addition, a few students pursue M.Phil and PhD studies.

What is the current status of extension research?

Currently extension research conducted in Sri Lanka leaves much to be desired. It is largely restricted to the research studies conducted by the university staff and students both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and some evaluation studies conducted by selected state institutions, international development agencies and non-government organizations.



The library of the University of Peradeniya, one of the largest libraries of Sri Lanka has a collection of more than one million books.

What should be done to improve the quality of extension delivery in Sri Lanka?

Without a comprehensive agricultural extension policy, agricultural extension is unlikely to get the priority and attention it deserves. Therefore formulation and implementation of an extension policy should be the first priority for improving extension delivery.

The extension workers should be recognized and given the necessary incentives such as enhanced status, increased salaries and allowances, and transport facilities to perform

their duties effectively. The extension curriculum should be regularly revised to cater to the changing needs in the sector. Extension faculty should continue to organize regular consultations with the users (Department of Agriculture, private sector, NGOs, private sector organizations etc.) to bring about the needed changes in the curricula.

Every effort should be made to coordinate the activities of the educational institutions, government departments, international development agencies and the non-government organizations in providing an effective extension service to the farmers.