

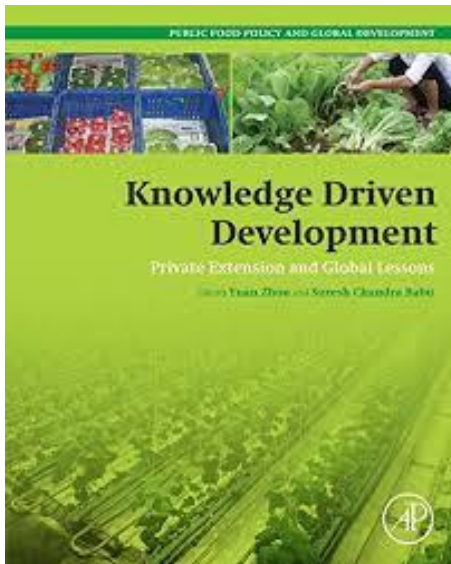
Agricultural Extension in South Asia

KNOWLEDGE DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT – Private Extension and Global Lessons

Yuan Zhou and Suresh Chandra Babu (Eds)
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The book provides new insights into the continuing debate over the extent to which public sector provides extension services in the new era of pluralistic extension especially in the developing world. It also addresses the key policy issue of how to increase the productivity and income of smallholder farmers through optimal complementarities between the public and private extension approaches. As such it makes interesting reading to both the policy makers and the academicians involved in agricultural extension and technology management.



The systematic narration spread in 14 chapters is a comprehensive account of different perspectives on the privatization of extension services especially in the context of liberalized developing economies. The specific roles and the milieu in which private extension services through NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) and embedded extension services of input agencies take lead in meeting farmer needs are convincingly depicted with case studies from seven countries (India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Kenya, Nigeria, Nicaragua and Brazil). The issue of improving the agricultural productivity of smallholders is at the center of all discussions.

Through clarity in narration and use of convincing data, the advantages of privatization are illustrated well. However the disadvantages from these initiatives are not clearly discussed.

The opening chapter gives a broad description of the challenges faced by public extension system world over and emergence of private extension systems in the context of rising complexity of farmers information needs. It also gives a rationale and overview of the contents of the book along with key research questions and methodology adopted. This is followed by a chapter on conceptual framework for analysing the role and contribution of private extension systems as a means of increasing agricultural productivity. It elaborates the major trends in the development of private extension such as pluralism and decentralization; transition from subsidies to direct payment; contract farming; embedded extension from input dealers; and public private partnerships. Inclusion of the graphical representation of the trends in agricultural extension transformation and list of

recommended literature on the subject really helps in cross analysis and validation of many arguments and concepts detailed in the book.

The third chapter gives an account of the theoretical propositions on what constitutes private extension and an analysis of the historical background of evolution of private approaches in agricultural extension and advisory services. The context of declining public extension funding and concerns of its efficiency and effectiveness are addressed with compelling reasons from 18 landmark publications across the globe on the issue. A list of challenges faced in the development and expansion of private extension is also enlisted. This is used to develop the case studies presented in the following 10 chapters of the book thus retaining the interest of the reader.

Chapters 4-13 are built around 10 individual case studies on specific agricultural crop value chains documented mostly on commercially important crops from different parts of the world. It provides persuasive accounts of private extension models documented in sugarcane, onion, safflower, and organic basmati rice from India; bean value chains from Kenya and Nicaragua; vegetables from Brazil; cocoa from Nigeria; contract farming model from Bangladesh; and plant protection in rice of Vietnam. Relevance of the extension advice to increase the quality/quantity of outputs to make value chain competitive and profitable was inherent in the choice of the commodity value chains. The private agencies involved varied across the models and ranged from NGO to private agencies involved in food processing/export/input supply. Marketing and contract agreements were integral part of all models and worked effectively under conditions of a win-win situation for both farmer and private agency involved.

The contracts covered provisions of quality standards, cost recovery, buy back prices and other specifications to make the model effective. In most of the cases the entry of private sector to buy outputs on a contractual basis resulted in the reduction of the role played by middlemen. The emergence of contract farming also improved the quality standards in production and also reduced the volatility of market prices. The special features of the associated private extension systems employed with respect to its relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact provide useful guidance to policy strategists and other users in scaling up the models. Though detailed information on the different forms of cost recovery of the services extended under the private extension models is covered, the nature and implications of disguised payments are not well covered. Moreover, though the monopsony power of the private extension agencies constraining the farmers to sell back their products is mentioned, the book is silent on strategies to overcome such issues.

The real highlight of the book is the final chapter that provides a deeper analysis of the trends, cost recovery strategies, role of different actors, enforcement of quality standards, elimination of middlemen and scaling up issues of private extension interventions. These are based on a synthesis of the cases detailed in previous chapters. Creation of shared value, provision of integrated services, remaining demand driven and capacity development are some of the major factors that led to the success of the cases discussed in this book.

Despite the attempts to provide a balanced evaluation of the cases, the accounts on advantages override the limitations throughout the book. Another inherent inadequacy of the book is that it relies on cases based on individual commodities having commercial importance and as such attempts made to extrapolate it as general trend cannot be well accepted. Similar to many of the earlier

publications on the role of private extension, this also falls short of providing a more elaborate account on the public-private partnerships and the specific roles of public extension in the whole system. Therefore, in terms of the content it fully justifies the title *Knowledge Driven Development -- Private Extension and Global Lessons* but leaves the reader wanting in terms of complementarities the private and public extension systems need to serve in most of the developing countries.

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