

F-20: Implications of agricultural extension reforms: extension coverage under different management systems

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The agricultural extension systems in developing countries are very much concerned about the extension coverage in the process of technology dissemination. In order to achieve an effective extension coverage, Sri Lankan agricultural extension system underwent many reforms; the Training and Visit (T&V) System of Agricultural Extension in 1978; decentralization of administrative powers in 1990; and implementation of Second Agricultural extension Project (SAEP) in 1993. This study was carried out in the Southern province to reveal the implications of the above agricultural extension reforms

granting special attention to extension coverage. Qualitative as well as quantitative data were collected through a field survey and PRA methods.

An investigation carried out by Wijeratne (1993), demonstrates that comparatively the T&V extension management system has offered high visit frequencies than that of the provincial management system. According to the SAEP, the extension agent is supposed to keep contact with the Farmer Reference Groups (FRGs). However, as the number of requested farmer reference groups were not formed, the farmers not belonging to reference groups do not have access to extension. As a result, the actual coverage of farm families by the project is far below the expectation. Further, as the farmer reference groups were formed mainly on the interest of the line departments, other farmer categories were not represented. This situation led to inequity in access to extension. The inter-agency co-ordination was found to be strongest at the divisional level and weakest at the headquarter's level. However, the members of the Field Extension Team (FET) felt that integration resulted in mutual benefit to one another. It was also found that this integration has not rendered an effective service to farmers as their service was limited to farmer reference groups and only to the interests of line agencies. There was a significant difference of the area covered by each field extension worker especially between the Dept of Agriculture and other line Departments. Further, it was observed that as the integration made the specialized extension staff to perform general extension, they were not confident in the fields outside their specialties. Therefore, farmers have less access to specific extension input. Thus, contrary to the project objectives, SAEP has been no more successful than the previous T&V project in forging a fully integrated national extension system. Finally, it can be concluded that albeit Sri Lankan agricultural extension system underwent a series of extension reforms, extension coverage has not improved. Therefore, an alternative extension system with an effective extension coverage is warranted.