***Original Research Article***

**Assessing the Role and Effectiveness of Private Extension in Western Zone of Tamil Nadu: A SWOC Perspective**

**ABSTRACT**

The study explores the preferences and perceptions of farmers toward private agricultural extension services in Tamil Nadu's Western Zone, specifically in the districts of Dindigul, Karur, and Coimbatore. With a sample of 150 farmers selected through multistage purposive and random sampling, the research assesses the SWOC (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Constraints) of extension services provided by private organizations. Results show that 79.3% of farmers preferred private extension services due to their efficiency, market responsiveness, cost-effectiveness, and timely support. While private agencies exhibited strengths in innovation and collaboration, challenges such as dependence on market trends and limited government support were noted. The study concludes that privatization has become a vital component in strengthening India’s agricultural competitiveness, despite the need to ensure equitable access and inclusive development for small and marginal farmers.

***Keywords: SWOC, Preference, Private Extension, Tamil Nadu***

**INTRODUCTION**

Agriculture is the root of human civilization and backbone of many economies across the globe. It encompasses the art and science of cultivating soil, growing crops, raising the livestock for food, fibre, fuel and other products essential to sustaining life. Agricultural extension services play pivotal role in enhancing farm productivity, sustainability and rural development by bridging the gap between research institutions and farmers (Jaiswal *et al*, 2025) These services aim to transfer scientific knowledge, modernize techniques, improve productivity, encouraging adoption of innovations and ensuring sustainable agricultural development. With the increasing pressure on agriculture due to climate change, population growth and resource scarcity, effective extension services have become more critical than ever. But from recent times public extension system has become ineffective and correspondingly, there is emergence of some new actors like private extension agents in agriculture sector (Kaur *et al*, 2014). In many developing countries, farming is the main source of income, especially for people living in rural areas. Over time, because of its important role in improving agriculture, extension services have mostly been provided by the government (Danjuma *et al*, 2024). These public extension services have helped improve food production and have given good results for the money invested. However, it is now clear that government extension services alone cannot meet the different needs of all farmers in different regions (Papnai *et al*, 2013). So, new policies are supporting private and community-based extension services. These services can work with, add to, or even replace government services where needed. The main reason for moving toward private extension services is the drop in government spending on these programs (Nandi and Nedumaran, 2019). Because of budget problems, many governments have had to reduce funding for public extension services. Other reasons for this shift include poor performance of public extension, not enough coverage for farmers, a high number of farmers for each extension worker, the limited role of village extension workers, the growth of commercial farming, and problems in the market. Because of these issues, this study was done to analyze the strength, weakness, opportunities and constraints (SWOC) of private extension services from farmers’ perspective.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The present study was conducted during 2025 in the 3 districts namely: Dindigul, Karur and Coimbatore of Tamil Nadu state. 3 blocks from each district were selected randomly. These were Batlagundu block from Dindigul district, Thogaimalai block from Karur district and South Pollachi block from Coimbatore district. The main purpose of this study was to know the SWOC of private extension agencies from farmers’ perspective. A manageable size of 50 farmers was selected from each block thus making total sample size of 150 farmers. Multistage Purposive and Random Sampling was done. The survey has been done by using a structured questionnaire having a total of 22 questions which were fully on a ranking basis. Each major aspect was subdivided and responses were obtained by giving ranking from 1 to 10 as per their preferences. A rank of 1 indicated first preference and a rank of 10 indicated least preference. Based on the findings, inferences were drawn. Tabulation and Data analysis was done using statistical techniques like Descriptive statistics.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The gender-wise distribution of respondents across the Western Zone shows a significant predominance of male participants in the study. Out of the total 150 respondents, **123 (82%) were male** and only **27 (18%) were female.** In Region-wise, Pollachi had 42 male and 8 female respondents, Thogaimalai recorded 38 males and 12 females, while Batlagundu had 43 males and 7 females. This pattern indicates that **male farmers were the primary respondents across all locations.** The relatively low female participation may also suggest **limited involvement of women in formal agricultural roles or decision making** in agriculture.

**Fig. 1 Gender distribution of respondents**

The data on farming systems adopted by respondents in the Western Zone, comprising Pollachi, Thogaimalai, and Batlagundu, reveals a predominant reliance on inorganic farming methods. Out of the 150 farmers surveyed, an overwhelming majority of 130 respondents (86.7%) reported adopting **inorganic farming** practices. Batlagundu had the highest number of inorganic farmers (48), followed by Thogaimalai (45) and Pollachi (37), indicating a widespread dependence on chemical inputs and conventional agricultural techniques across the region. Only 15 respondents (10%) practiced **organic farming**, with Pollachi contributing the most (8), while Thogaimalai and Batlagundu had 5 and 2 respondents respectively. A minimal number, 5 respondents (3.3%), reported using **integrated farming systems**, all from Pollachi, suggesting that this more sustainable and resource-efficient approach in the region. While **natural farming** was not adopted by any of the respondents, pointing to a lack of awareness or accessibility to such eco-friendly practices.

**Fig. 2 Farming systems adopted by respondents**

The data on farmers' current satisfaction levels across the Western Zone indicates a generally **positive perception of existing agricultural support systems**. Out of 150 respondents surveyed from Pollachi, Thogaimalai, and Batlagundu, a significant majority **110 farmers (73.3%)** expressed satisfaction with the current support provided to them. Thogaimalai and Batlagundu reported particularly high satisfaction rates, with 42 and 40 farmers respectively affirming the adequacy of support, while Pollachi had 28 satisfied respondents. A smaller proportion of **34 farmers (22.7%)** indicated that they were **only sometimes satisfied**, suggesting occasional gaps in consistency. Only **6 respondents (4%)** expressed dissatisfaction, all of whom were from Pollachi (4) and Thogaimalai (2). Meanwhile, Batlagundu recorded no dissatisfied responses, reflecting strong satisfaction with the support provided. These findings suggest that, overall, the current agricultural support being provided possibly in the form of inputs, training, subsidies, or information is largely sufficient and Pollachi has to be focused for their satisfaction.

**Fig. 3 Current satisfaction of respondents**

The assessment of farmers’ overall experience with Private Organizations in the Western Zone, which includes Pollachi, Thogaimalai, and Batlagundu, reflects a generally **positive trend** in the farmers' perception of Private Organizations functioning. Out of 150 respondents, a majority of **87 farmers (58%)** rated their experience as **good,** with Batlagundu contributing the highest number (45), followed by Thogaimalai (25) and Pollachi (17). Additionally, **10 respondents (6.7%)** reported an **excellent experience**, all from Thogaimalai (10) indicating that Private Organizations in that area may be more effective in service delivery or farmer engagement. **43 farmers (28.7%)** described their experience as **average**, with the majority of them from Pollachi (30), Thogaimalai (8) and Batlagundu (5). **Only 10 farmers (6.7%)** expressed **poor experiences**, primarily from Pollachi (3) and Thogaimalai (7) while **no respondents rated their experience as very poor**. These findings indicate that Private organizations are functioning well overall, particularly in Batlagundu and Thogaimalai, but improvements in consistency is needed in areas like Pollachi where the majority of experiences are only average.

**Fig. 4 Overall experiences with Private Organizations**

Based on the data collected from the Western Zone, the overall preference for agricultural support services of Private Organizations (PO) was analyzed. Out of a total of 150 respondents 119 respondents (79.3%) preferred Private Organizations (PO). A zone-wise breakdown shows a consistently higher preference for Private Organizations across all locations. In Pollachi, 32 out of 50 respondents (64%) preferred PO; in Thogaimalai, 42 out of 50 respondents (84%) preferred PO and in Batlagundu, 45 out of 50 respondents (90%) chose PO. These results indicate a strongpreference for Private Organizations across the Western Zone, suggesting that Private Organization services are perceived as more effective compared to those offered by other extension services

In Pollachi, **FPOs** are the most positively viewed, followed by **NGOs** and **input dealers/agriclinics. Agriculture colleges** hold a moderate rank, while **YouTubers/vloggers** and **others a**re less preferred, possibly due to perceived credibility or limited outreach. In Thogaimalai too, **FPOs** and **NGOs** are seen as primary contributors. **Input dealers** and **agriculture colleges** follow. **YouTubers/vloggers** and **others** are again the least utilized. Batlagundu ranks **input dealers/agriclinics** and **FPOs** highest, indicating more reliance on immediate field-level support. **NGOs** and **agriculture colleges** are mid-tier. **YouTubers/vloggers** remain at the bottom. The overall private source relayed by the farmers is FPO.

**Table 1. Private sources relayed on by Farmers**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sl. No.** | **Pvt. Agencies** | **Median Score** | | | |
| **Pollachi** | **Thogaimalai** | **Batlagundu** | **Western Zone** |
| 1. | Input dealers/ Agriclinics | 3 | 2.5 | 1 | 3 |
| 2. | NGOs | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| 3. | FPO | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. | Agriculture Colleges | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 5. | You tubers /Vloggers | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| 6. | Others | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |

The farmers inferred that the major strength of private agencies is its efficiency, cost effectiveness and collaboration with research institutions inPollachi block and the farmers also insist that the private agencies has its less strength in the part of niche expertise while in Thogaimalai block the farmers inferred that the major strength of private agencies is market responsiveness, efficiency and cost effectiveness and also has its less strength in niche expertise .Likewise in Batlagundu block, they inferred that the major strength of private agencies is its efficiency, cost effectiveness and market responsiveness. Hence the overall major strength of private agencies in Western Zone is market responsiveness and its efficiency and cost effectiveness and they are lacking in the areas of global reach and niche expertise.

In Pollachi, the most concerning weakness for private agencies is dependence on market trends, followed by lack of government support and profit-driven focus and limited resources both have moderate concern levels and ethical concerns are less significant, while lack of coordination is the least prominent weakness inferred by the farmers. In Thogaimalai, lack of government support is again one of the most pressing issues and followed by profit-driven focus while limited resources and dependence on market trends both raise moderate concern levels and lack of coordination and ethical concerns stand out as the least weaknesses in this block. In Batlagundu, dependence on market trends is considered the most significant weakness and followed by lack of government support and limited resources and profit-driven focus is a moderate concern, while ethical concerns score 5. The least critical issue remains lack of coordination, which has the highest score of 6 in this block.Hence the overall major weakness of private agencies in Western Zone inferred by the farmers are dependence on market trends, followed by lack of government support and the least concerning weakness inferred by the farmers is lack of coordination.

In Pollachi the highest opportunity for the private agencies is **Technological innovation** and followed by **Global market expansion, Sustainability and risk management** and **Agricultural investment** and **Supply chain optimization** reflecting moderate potential. The lowest opportunity for Pollachi lies in **Consumer trends.** In Thogaimalai, the highest opportunity for the private agencies is **Global market expansion** followed by **Sustainability and risk management** and Agricultural **investment** and **Supply chain optimization** reflecting moderate potential. The lowest opportunity for Thogaimalai lies in **Consumer trends.** In Batlagundu, the highest opportunity for the private agencies is **Agricultural investment**  followed by **Technological innovation** and **Global market expansion** and **Sustainability and risk management** and **Agricultural investment** and **Supply chain optimization** reflecting moderate potential. The lowest opportunity for Batlagundu lies in **Consumer trends. Hence the overall farmers’ preference for the** highest opportunity for private agencies is **Technological innovation and least opportunity for Consumer trends.**

Pollachi faces its highest constraints in **intense competition** and **supply chain disruptions** indicating relatively manageable issues. Mid-level concerns include **regulatory challenges, public perception, environmental challenges** and **economic vulnerability**. Least severity is seen in **access to resources and staff shortages.** Thogaimalai identifies **supply chain disruptions** as the highest pressing issue followed by **intense competition.** Then come **regulatory challenges** and **environmental challenges. Public perception** and **economic vulnerability** rise slightly in concern. **Access to resources** and **staff shortages** is at the least. Batlagundu’s highest constraint is **supply chain disruptions** showing a smooth logistics flow. **Intense competition** and **regulatory challenges** follow. Then comes **environmental challenges** and **economic vulnerability.** **Public perception** is slightly lower, while the least critical issues are **access to resources** and **staff shortages. The overall constraint is supply chain disruptions.**

**Table 2. SWOC of Private Agencies**

| **Particulars** | | **Median Score** | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Pollachi** | **Thogaimalai** | **Batlagundu** | **Western Zone** |
| **Strengths** | | | | | |
| 1. | Flexibility and innovation | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. | Market responsiveness | 2.5 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 3. | Efficiency and cost-effectiveness | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| 4. | Collaboration with research institutions | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 5. | Access to capital and investment | 5 | 4 | 4.5 | 4 |
| 6. | Global reach | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| 7. | Niche expertise | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **Weaknesses** | | | | | |
| 1. | Profit-driven focus | 3 | 2.5 | 3 | 3 |
| 2. | Lack of government support | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 3. | Limited resources | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| 4. | Dependence on market trends | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| 5. | Ethical concerns | 5 | 5.5 | 5 | 5 |
| 6. | Lack of coordination | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 |
| **Opportunities** | | | | | |
| 1. | Technological advancements | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| 2. | Sustainability and green practices | 3.5 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 3. | Global market expansion | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| 4. | Agricultural investment | 3.5 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| 5. | Supply chain optimization | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 6. | Consumer trends | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| **Constraints** | | | | | |
| 1. | Regulatory challenges | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. | Intense competition | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 3. | Supply chain disruptions | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 4. | Environmental and climate challenges | 4.5 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 5. | Public perception | 4 | 3 | 5.5 | 4.5 |
| 6. | Economic vulnerability | 4 | 6 | 5 | 5 |
| 7. | Access to resources | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| 8. | Staff shortages | 8 | 7 | 7 | 7 |

**Fig. 5 Strength of Private agencies in Western Zone Fig. 6 Weakness of Private agencies in Western Zone**

**Fig. 7 Opportunities of Private agencies in Western Zone Fig. 8 Constraints of Private agencies in Western Zone**

**CONCLUSION:**

Privatization of agricultural Extension System has various advantages like Market responsiveness, Efficiency in services, providing Timely support, introduced innovation technologies and Quality inputs to the farmers which is complement or supplement to the Public Extension system. At the same time it has disadvantages like reduced access for small and marginal farmers, potential neglect of public interest in favor of profit motives, limited resources and decreased emphasis on disseminating information beneficial to all farmers restricts the flow of information and increases social disparity.From the study, it is clear that Private extension system has become essential to increases the competitiveness in the country. Privatization of agricultural extension in India has brought efficiencies and innovations in the field of agricultural extension system.

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