COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNITY BASED LEARNING AND OUTREACH

Assisting Severely Disadvantaged Agricultural Areas in Pakistan: The Potential for Improving the Interaction and Effectiveness of Development Partners Research, Extension and Village Religious Leaders

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Introduction

At present, in the NWFP of Pakistan, village religious leaders play no formal role in agricultural development. Yet, historically they have had functional involvement in other development sectors such as education through the mosque schools programme (Government of Pakistan, 1985). Hidayat Ullah (1986) recommended that programmes need to be developed for the possible involvement of religious leaders in agricultural development. Yet since then, little direct action to bring this about has been forthcoming which is particularly unfortunate given the continuing difficulties with information transmission of complex agricultural issues being experienced by disadvantaged farming communities in the NWFP highlighted by Nowshad Khan, 1999.

Moreover, available literature on research in Pakistan into the potential involvement of religious leaders in agricultural development is largely lacking. Yet, this kind of study has been occasionally conducted in other Islamic countries. Fernandez (1989) reported that the mosque, as a local and indigenous institution in the Malay community (Malaysia), can be utilized as an effective channel to reach the majority of village farmers. He noted that the content of the Friday address at the mosque was not necessarily on religious matters per se but could also relate to community, national and developmental issues like agriculture, health, nutrition and the need to participate in development projects. As religious leaders have been used as a successful motivational force for change in other Islamic and non-Islamic countries, the hypothesis, that they could contribute a role in an improved model of agricultural information transfer in disadvantaged agricultural communities in the NWFP, is not unreasonable (Alebikiya et al. 1993; Morner and Hansen, 1991; Webb, 1990).

Methods

A list of religious leaders in the tehsils of Baboozai and Kabal in the Swat valley of NWFP (Nowshd Khan, 1999) was prepared with the help of a resident in the area. From each of these representative tehsils 4 villages were selected randomly and likewise from each village four religious leaders were picked for inclusion in the survey. There are approximately 4-6 religious leaders serving in most villages depending upon the population. A total number of 32 religious leaders were therefore selected for the study equally divided between each tehsil. This number was deemed to be a sufficiently large sample to be adequately illustrative of general trends in the area. This sample makes up approximately 2% of the total population of religious leaders.

A survey was conducted involving 104 farmers across eight villages, four in each of two tehsils selected from a total population of around 61,000 farm families living in 318 villages. A total of 27 research personnel out of a 40 were available for interview in the study period. For extension personnel, all the Agricultural Officers (AOs) with direct responsibility in Swat were selected. All 18 staff of the AED in Malakand Division, the staff of the MFVDP Technology Transfer Unit (TTU) and the staff of the Agricultural Development programme (ADP) of the provincially Administered Tribal Areas(PATA) Project

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were included in the survey. Thus a total number of 27 extension personnel served as respondents for present study resulting in a deliberate 1:1 ratio between research and extension staff to eliminate bias.

Results

General information concerning respondents

It is generally considered that age, qualification and experience affect the duties of village religious leaders. The data presented in Table-I reveals that 53.1% of respondents were of middle age (35-54 years) and 21.9% were young, below 34 years of age. Very few respondents were old > 60. In general, the majority of village religious leaders are physically and mentally capable of undertaking work in aid of agricultural development. The vast majority of respondents spent 6-15 years in Islamic Institutions of high calibre in Pakistan or abroad. Details concerning formal education of respondents were not asked, intentionally, to encourage participation in the survey. However, in the present establishment of Islamic Institutions in Pakistan every student has to study basic English, Urdu and Mathematics and the management of Islamic institutions also provide facilities for extracurricular activities like playing sports. Some of the younger village religious leaders have received this type of education. Information about the experience of respondents serving in a mosque are presented in Table-I. More than half of the respondents have had experience in a mosque for 11 years and above. It suggests that they should have a very strong bond with their follower farmers in rural areas. Given the importance of Friday prayers the village

Table-I
Distribution Of Respondents According To Age, Education And Experience

Categories	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age			
Young<35	7	21.9	21.9
Middle 35-54	17	53.1	75.0
Old>60	8	25.0	100.0
Education in years			
1-5	3	9.4	9.4
6-10	13	40.6	50.0
11-15	11	34.4	84.4
Above 15	5	15.6	100.0
Experience in years			
1-5	7	21.9	21.9
6-10	7	21.9	43.8
11-15	9	28.1	71.9
Above 15	9	28.1	100.0

Religious leaders were asked how many farmers attended the mosque at that time. The data are presented in Table-II and shows the majority see more than 80 farmers every Friday and less than a quarter of village religious leaders saw under 40 farmers. It may be assumed that a very substantial majority of male farmers in the villages attend mosque every Friday.

Respect for religious leaders

Therefore, the respondents were asked their perceptions concerning the respect they receive from their followers. Most respondents (69%) receive "considerable" respect from their followers and 28% of respondents opted for an "average" level of respect with the remainder having no opinion (Table-II).

Table-II

Opinion of Respondents Concerning Degree of Respect, Degree of Compliance by Farmers to the Wishes of Village Religious Leaders and His Estimates of Attendance at Friday Prayer

Categories	Percent	Cumulative percent
Degree of respect		
Strongly	68.0	68.8
Average	28.1	96.9
No opinion	3.1	100.0
Degree of compliance		
Fully comply	62.5	62.5
Occasionally comply	34.4	96.0
Rarely comply	3.1	100
Estimates of farmers attendance at Friday prayer		
Less than 40	21.9	21.9
41-80	21.5	34.4
81-120	28.1	62.5
More than 80	37.5	100.0

Obedience to instructions

The respondents were asked to what extent farmers in their constituency follow their instructions. A large majority of respondents (63%) were of the opinion that they get full compliance from their farmers and 34% recorded occasional compliance with the very small remainder suggesting that farmers rarely comply with their wishes (Table-II). Additionally the respondents were asked whether they participate in social events involving farmers and whether they help in developmental programmes in their area. All of the respondents indicated that they did. Evidently village religious leaders are already actively involved in social events and in helping in development programmes in remote areas and thus could easily extend their cooperation to help in the field of agriculture.

Proposal to involve village religious leaders in the agricultural information system

The village religious leaders were asked whether they would consent to a request to use their services in agricultural development activities in addition to their religious commitments. A large majority of respondents (81%) agreed with the idea that they could, and should, play a role in agricultural development (Table-IIIa) and this majority was not significantly influenced ($p<0.05$) by either their age or

their length of education (Table-IIIb). The 81% of respondents who agreed were asked what they could do to help in agricultural development. The data presented in

Table-IIIa

Willingness Of Village Religious Leaders To Participate In Agricultural Development Activities Averaged Over Age And Length Of Education

Consent	Percent	Cumulative percent
Agree	81.3	81.3
Disagree	18.8	100.0
Total	100.0	

Table-IIIb

Willingness Of Village Religious Leaders To Participate In Agricultural Development Activities Disaggregated By Age And Length Of Education

	Agree %	Disagree %	Total %	Chi-square significance level
Age				**.201**
Young< 35	23.1	16.7	21.9	
Middle 35-54	46.2	83.3	53.1	
Old>60	30.8	-	25.0	
Education				
1-5 years	3.8	33.3	9.4	
6-10	38.5	50.0	40.6	
11-15	38.5	16.7	34.4	
Above 15	1902	-	15.6	

Table-IV show that 78.1% of respondents agreed to make announcements in the Mosque to farmers and other interested people. Less than half of respondents agreed to encourage farmers to watch agricultural programmes on radio and TV. Most of the farmers are illiterate in the area and, in this regard, 69% of respondents agreed to read printed materials to help farmers understand Extension Department publications.

Table-IV
Contributions of village religious leaders to Agricultural development

Contributions	Yes	No	Possibly
Announcements	78.1	3.1	-
Encourage farmers to listen and Watch radio/TV farming Programmes	40.6	21.9	18.8
To read printed materials	68.8	-	12.5
Extension meetings	46.9	6.3	28.6

Distribution of leaflets	62.5	3.1	15.6
Helping less educated	75.0	-	6.3
Attendance at field days	59.4	63	15.6

Missing value = 6 (%18.8)

Most farmers do not attend Extension Department field days (for methods or results demonstration) at present. To ensure more participation in such field days, village religious leaders were also asked whether they might attend these and about half the sample responded positively to this idea. A clear majority of the respondents agreed to provide additional help to the less educated farmers in their constituency. Those 19% of respondents who did not agree with the proposition were asked why they did not and they indicated that they felt that they were not the appropriate person for the job and it might not be socially acceptable

Official appointment or not? Honorarium or voluntary service?

The 81% of respondents who agreed to the proposition were also asked whether they felt that they should be officially appointed to the job or not. Half of them were in favour of an official appointment (50%) with 31% being against this idea (Table-V). Though village religious leaders enjoy a place of respect in rural areas, it is unfortunate that in most villages their means of livelihood are very limited. Tirmizi (1968) collected information which reveals that 50% of village religious leaders have additional sources of income other than that derived from the **Imamat** (Leading of Prayer) and in some cases their main sources is the Mosque agricultural land. Therefore, they were asked whether they wished to claim an honorarium for agricultural extension activities. The sample was effectively split with 54% of respondents being in favour of receiving an honorarium for this work while 46% did not demand any kind of financial incentive and would work for their farmers on a voluntary basis to promote agricultural development (Table-V).

Time allocation per week

The respondents were asked what time allocation in their busy schedule could be set aside for farmers. The data presented in Table-V show that more than half of the respondents were willing to allocate 3 or more hours per week and the remainder 1-2 hours per week to help in agricultural development

Table-V
Opinion Of Respondents For Official Appointment And Honorarium Or Voluntary Basis And Allocation Of Hours

Opinion	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Official appointment		
Yes	50.0	61.5
No	31.1	100.0
Honorarium		
Yes	43.8	53.8
No	37.5	100.0
Voluntary		
Yes	40.6	43.3
No	53.1	100.0
Time allocation for agricultural development		
<1-2 hours	37.5	46.2
3-4	15.6	65.4
4-6	15.6	84.6

>6	12.5	100.0

Missing values = 18.3

As part of the survey reported by Nowshad Khan and Keatinge (1999a) 104 farmers from Baboozai and kabal tehsils, classified into three socio-educational/resource status groups termed “progressive farmers, traditional farmers and small-scale farmers” were asked about the proposition of using the services of village religious leaders to assist in agricultural extension. Their responses are considered below:

Farmers views on the potential use of the services of religious leaders in agricultural development

It was only with noticeable reserve and reluctance that farmers responded to these questions in the survey and there were misgivings in their minds as to why village religious leaders should be involved in agricultural development. These doubts were addressed prior to the formal questioning and it was explained to them that this was the first study of its kind. The farmers were asked whether they would consent to use the services of village religious leaders in agricultural development activities. The data presented in Table-VI show that more than three quarters of respondents agreed to the proposition. There was a significant

Table-VI

Distribution Of Farmer Respondents According To Their Willingness To Use Of Village Religious Leaders In Agricultural Development Activities

Consent	Progressive farmers %	Traditional farmers %	Small-scale farmers %	Total %	Chi-square significance level
Agree	66.7	80.4	95.5	78.8	
Not agree	33.3	19.6	4.5	21.2	
Total	34.6	44.2	21.2	100.0	.031

cant difference between farmer categories ($p<0.05$) with more progressive farmers being less keen on the idea. These data suggests that less progressive categories of farmer want information supplied at a local level by someone they know and trust. The respondents who agreed (78.8%) were asked why they did. The results given in Table-VII show that a large majority of respondents agreed because the religious leader is a man able to motivate farmers, is reliable and helpful, gives unbiased advice and is a good communicator. Those respondents, mostly progressive farmers, (21.2%), who did not agree with the proposition were asked why and Table-VIII gives data which show that they felt the religious

Table-VII

Reasons for agreeing to use Religious Leaders for

Reasons	Progressive Farmers %	Traditional farmers %	Small-scale farmers %	Total %	Chi-square significance level
Literate and other educated	66.7	78.3	95.5	77.9	.037
Motivate farmers to radio & TV farming programmes	63.9	69.6	90.9	72.1	.073
Motivate farmers to print	63.9	78.3	90.9	76.0	.057
Reliable & helpful	66.7	80.4	95.5	78.8	.031
Unbiased advice	63.9	78.3	95.5	76.9	.020
Good communicator	66.7	80.4	95.5	78.8	.031
No alternatives	33.3	60.9	63.6	51.9	.021

N = 82

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Table-VIII

Reasons for Not Agreeing To Use Religious Leaders For Agricultural Development

Reasons	**Progressive** farmers %	**Traditional** farmers %	**Small-** scale farmers %	**Total** %	**Chi-** square signifi-cance level
Spend his time on religion	30.6	19.6	4.5	20.2	.056
Not acceptable	30.6	17.4	4.5	19.2	.046
Not appropriate man	30.6	19.6	4.5	20.2	.056

leader should spend his time solely on religious matters and thus he is not appropriate to a role in agricultural development.

Potential activities in which religious leaders might help in agricultural development

The farmer respondents were asked to assume that the religious leaders would be involved in agricultural extension activities and then to say what activities they might or might not undertake. The information presented in Table-IX shows that a large majority of respondents were of the opinion that the religious

leaders could make announcements in the mosque of extension and research messages, to distribute leaflets, to help read printed materials to farmers, to help the less educated and to be involved in field days.

The views of research and extension scientists on the potential use of the services of religious leaders in agricultural development

Extension and research personnel were asked whether they would Consent to use the services of village religious leaders for information dissemination. The data presented in Table-X show that a majority

Table-IX
Potential Activities for Religious Leaders

Jobs for religious leaders?	Progressive farmers	Traditional farmers	Small-scale farmers	Total	Chi-Square signifi-Cance Level
	%	%	%	%	
Announcements					**.472**
Yes	80.6	80.4	95.5	83.7	
No	5.6	6.5	4.5	5.8	
Possible	13.9	13.0	—	10.6	
Listening & watching					**.183**
Yes	50.0	65.2	77.3	62.5	
No	30.6	26.1	9.1	24.0	
Possible	19.4	8.7	13.6	13.5	
Extension meetings					**.010**
Yes	55.6	78.3	86.4	72.1	
No	33.3	19.6	—	20.2	
Possible	11.1	2.2	13.6	7.7	
Leaflet distribution					**.047**
Yes	61.7	78.3	95.5	76.0	
No	27.8	15.2	—	16.3	
Possible	11.1	6.5	4.5	7.7	
To read print					**.127**
Yes	69.4	78.3	90.9	77.9	
No	25.0	13.0	—	14.4	
Possible	5.6	8.7	9.1	7.7	
Input distribution					**.169**
Yes	55.6	71.7	77.3	67.3	
No	36.1	19.6	9.1	23.1	
Possible	8.3	8.7	13.6	9.6	
Helping less educated farmers					**.066**
Yes	72.2	82.6	90.9	80.8	
No	27.8	10.9	4.5	15.4	
Possible	—	6.5	4.5	3.8	
Attend field days					**.017**

Yes	50.0	73.9	81.8	67.3
No	33.3	17.4	—	19.2
Possible	16.7	8.7	18.2	13.5

N = 82

Table-X

Consent of Extension And Research Personnel In The Utilization Of The Services Of Religious Leaders

Consent	Extension Personnel %	Research Personnel %	Total %	Chi-square significance level
Agree	66.7	63.0	64.8	.775
Disagree	33.3	37.0	35.2	
Total	50.0	50.0	100.0	

respondents (64.8%) were in agreement but (35.2%) disagreed with the proposal. This proposal was welcomed by most research and extension personnel because they considered that their contact with farmers would be of value in making agricultural development more efficient.

The respondents who agreed with the proposal were asked why. The results given in Table-XI show that a large majority (65%) of respondents agreed because they felt that village religious leaders could make announcements of extension messages in the mosque, help and motivate farmers to listen and watch farming programmes on radio and TV and

Table-XI

Distribution of Research And Extension Respondents According To Their Perceptions Of The Potential Contribution Of Village Religious Leaders To Agriculture

Contributions of village religious leaders	Extension Personnel **%**	Research Personnel **%**	Total **%**	Chi-square significance level
Announcements	83.3	88.3	85.7	.678
To motivate farmers to listen/ watch farming programmes	61.1	70.6	65.7	.554
To motivate farmers to read printed materials	77.8	76.5	77.1	.926
Distribution of leaflets	55.6	70.6	62.9	.357
Distribution of inputs	55.6	41.2	48.6	.394
To attend field days	88.9	76.5	82.9	.329
Other extension activities	83.3	64.7	74.3	.207
Helping the less educated	88.9	82.4	85.7	.580

N = 34

Also to read printed output, world assist in the distribution of leaflets would attract other farmers to come to field days with their attendance and could generally help less educated farmers. About half of the respondents (48.6%) were of the opinion that the religious leaders could also have a role in distributing inputs.

Those respondents who did not agree with the proposition (35.2%) were also asked why and Table-XII gives these data which show that

Distribution of Research and Extension Respondents not Agreeing with the proposal for the use of the use of Religious leaders and the reasons why not

Reasons	Extension Personnel %	Research Personnel %	Total %	Chi-square siqnificance level
No one will listen/watch on The advice of the village Religious leader	44.4	45.5	45.0	.963
No one will read on the Advice of the village Religious leader	44.4	30.0	36.8	.514
Should spend his time on Religion	77.8	60.0	68.4	.405
Not socially acceptable	88.9	60.0	73.7	.153
Not appropriate person	100.0	90.0	94.7	.329

N = 19

45.0 % felt the religious leaders would not be effective in motivating farmers to listen to radio and TV for farming programmes and to read agricultural magazines. Most (68.4%) were of the opinion that religious leaders should spend their time on religious matters only. A large majority(94.7%) and (73.7%) felt that they were not appropriate persons for this job and it would not be socially acceptable.

Discussion

The potential importance of village religious leaders as active partners in the agricultural information exchange process has yet to be adequately assessed in the NWFP and other disadvantaged agricultural areas in Pakistan. The rather thin literature in this area clearly supports the proposition that village religious leaders can materially assist in the agricultural development process. For example, the results in Malaysia reported by Fernandez (1989) mirrors the findings of this survey that a large majority of farmers (Table-VI) and village religious leaders (Table-Ill) were in favour of the involvement of religious leaders in agricultural development activities. About a third of the Malaysian survey participants registered slight, but not strong opposition, to the idea and this was echoed in Swat where there was a minority trend towards resistance to the idea amongst the more progressive and large-scale farmers (Table-VI). It may be inferred (Tables-VI, VIII and XII) that where there are other literate farmers in the village the religious leader may not be the only suitable alternative spokesman for the agricultural development agencies. This seems to be a reasonable position in better educated village communities but, in those villages where the religious leader is the only literate member, the case for their involvement seems to be

overwhelming. Tirmizi (1968) reports one historical example in the NWFP, when this has occurred with good effect, where village religious leaders had been responsible for equably distributing new green revolution wheat seed and fertiliser amongst farmers.

This concept is more commonly practised by other religious groups such as the Christian Churches in Ghana (Alebikiya et al., 1993). In this example, the Association of Church Development Projects (ACDEP) succeeded in actively fostering links between formal research centres and government departments with church based projects. In the Swat survey (Nowshad Khan, 1999c) agricultural extension and research personnel were largely (65%) in favour of the involvement of village religious leaders (Table-X) but, as with the farmers (Tables-VIII and XII), there was a recongnisable minority against the proposal (35%). The advantages for extension personnel, in particular, seem to be self-evident as shown in the results given in Tables-IV, IX and XI. Helping with announcements, motivating farmers to attend field days and to listen to agricultural programmes, and helping the less-educated farmers understand printed publications and product labels are all actions to the betterment of the work of agricultural extension, particularly when the extension service has such a large mandate area and inadequate operational funding (Nowshad Khan, 1998). The opposition to the concept is not very well articulated, even in the findings of the survey (Table-XII). About half of the research and extension respondents who disagreed suggested that fanners will ignore the advice of their village religious

leaders but this is in contradiction with the view of the village religious leaders themselves (Table-II) and perhaps with the perceptions of farmers (Table—VII). A more universal response from research and extension critics of the proposal being not socially acceptable and the village religious leader not being the appropriate man for the job (Table-XII) finds some echo in the responses of critical progressive farmers (Table-VI) and critical village religious leaders (Table-Ill) Therefore, it should perhaps be recognised that the recommendation domain to which approval of this proposal is most appropriate needs to be restricted and skewed towards the more disadvantaged and educationally deprived areas. It should be understood that the opposition to the proposal voiced by a minority of progressive farmers is likely to be somewhat of a reflection of the "power struggle" for leadership in the village. Granting village religious leaders a grater role in development might shift the balance of power locally to some extent. This would be particularly the case if village religious leaders became responsible for input distribution for example (Table-IX). In addition, this would probably become a factor in deciding official policy on whether village religious leaders should be offered official appointments as they largely desire, and whether or not this resulted in the payment of an honorarium for which the response was mixed (Table-V). Though addressing the political implications of such issues are beyond the mandate of this paper, it should be appreciated that such implications exist. Some precedent for official appointments exists as evidenced by moves in the educational sector (Government of Pakistan, 1985).

Conclusion

The results suggest that encouraging a greater involvement of village religious leaders in agricultural development would be a positive step forward for the disadvantaged agricultural communities of the mountainous areas of Pakistan and it would be a step largely welcomed by the partners in the process of agricultural information exchange. Care with the detail on how this should be implemented would be important to avoid local antagonisms. Feasibility studies, involving all partners in the development process in a range of mountainous villages, would be a sensible way in the first instance of engendering this shift in emphasis in the current agricultural development policy in Pakistan.

It is also suggested that commonwealth countries make carry the same research and to use the services of **r**eligious leaders for agricultural development and poverty alleviation for the better life of rural communities.

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