

EXTENSION STAFFS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS AFFECTING CO-ORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES IN RAKAI DISTRICT, UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

In Uganda's Rakai District, (with a population of about 400,000) there are over a dozen organizations involved in delivery of agricultural extension services. To improve service delivery, a model for inter-organizational coordination of extension services is proposed. The model stipulates that coordination depends on; (a) perception of need for coordination, (b) planning for coordination, (c) communication and information systems, and (d) organizational and societal structures. The model is used to design a survey instrument to determine factors affecting coordination of agricultural extension services in the District. All extension staff (N=173) was requested to complete a questionnaire that was developed after discussions with selected extension staff, farmers, and extension and local leaders. Results, from 149 respondents (86% response rate) are summarised as follows:

The most outstanding means of coordination that were used by extension organizations in the District include: (a) working with farmer development committees; (b) involving politicians in planning; (c) strengthening relevant associations; and (d) coordination mechanisms at the District level.

Various reasons why coordination was important were identified, notably the following:

- *harmonisation of programmes to avoid duplication of services;*
- *sharing of experiences for effective and efficient service delivery;*
- *development of systematic procedures for delivery of services; and*
- *it minimises wastage of resources.*

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Finally, the following recommendations for improving coordination were perceived as the most efficacious:

- *harmonisation of plans among organisations to avoid contradictions, duplications, or conflicts;*
- *establishing a common forum for exchange of information; and*
- *establishing co-ordination mechanisms at District, sub-county and parish levels.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In Rakai district, Southern Uganda, there are over a dozen organisations and projects involved in the delivery of agricultural extension and related services. This is in addition to various smaller community-based organisations, private stockists (agro-input dealers), and farmers' groups, among others. Thirteen major organizations from the public, private and NGO sectors were considered in this research, and are presented in Table 3. Co-ordinating extension services is therefore a challenging role. Moreover, unlike in the more industrialised countries, pluralistic systems of social services delivery are still novel phenomena in many developing countries. In light of the diversity of organisations and projects involved in agricultural service delivery, improved co-ordination of programmes, projects, and/or activities of the different organisations and individuals involved in agricultural extension in Rakai district would improve the performance of the District's agricultural sector. But how can co-ordination be improved? Answering this question required a thorough understanding of factors affecting co-ordination of agricultural extension programmes in the District.

2. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to present factors affecting coordination of agricultural extension services in Rakai District, Uganda. The following are the specific objectives:

To present a conceptual exposition of what coordination of agricultural extension services entails.

To describe ways in which agricultural extension organizations in Rakai District co-ordinate agricultural extension services.

To identify major factors affecting coordination and partnerships among agricultural extension services and their associated constraints in Rakai District with emphasis on public private partnerships; and,

To determine appropriate means of improving coordination and partnerships in extension.

3. WHAT IS COORDINATION? A CONCEPTUAL EXPOSITION

Operationally, the type of coordination addressed in this paper namely; inter-organizational coordination, or what Mulford & Klonglan (1982) refer to as coordination among organizations, has been operationally defined as the process of ensuring, through various means, that extension programmes, projects, and activities of a particular organisation do not unnecessarily conflict with or duplicate those of other organisations operating in the same target area, but instead complement or supplement each other.

Based on the definition above and on theoretical models reviewed, such as social interdependence model, stakeholder analysis, behaviour analysis model (Düvel, 1998:34), force field analysis (Hersley & Blanchard, 1993) and network exchange theory (Levine & White, 1961:583-601) a simplified model for coordination of pluralistic extension services is proposed (see Figure 1).

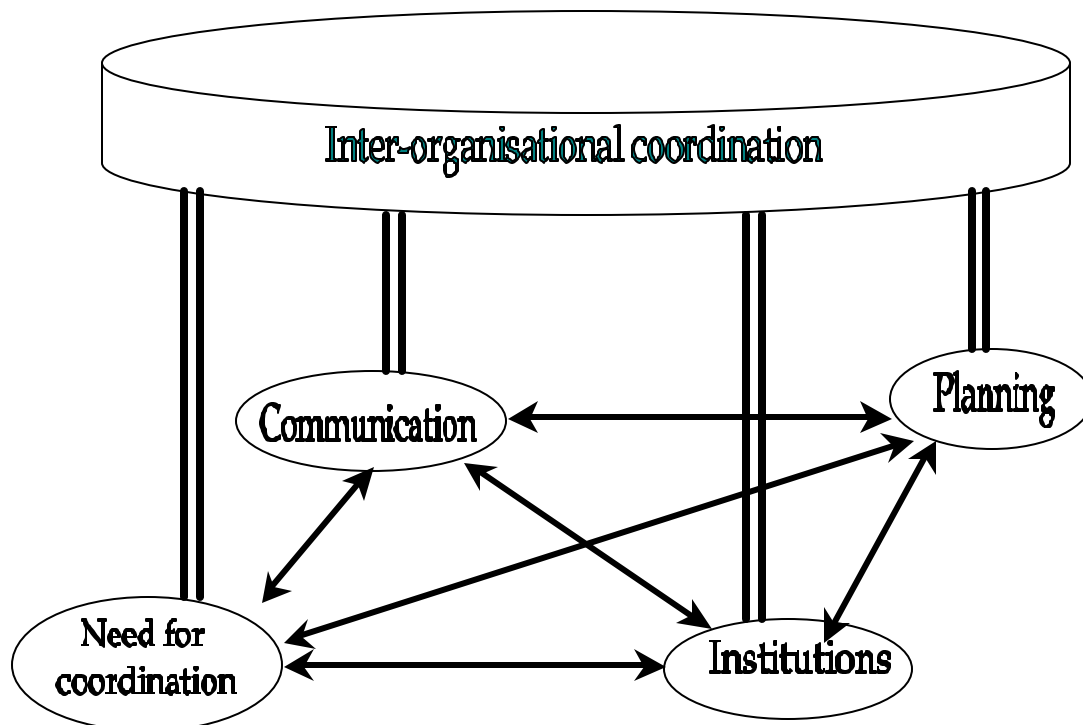


Figure 1: A conceptual model for coordination of pluralistic agricultural extension

The model shows how the coordination between organizations is a product of, four interrelated components, which, like pillars, support it or determine the degree to which it can unfold. The precondition for coordination is a need for it. In communication or interaction with other organizations, a plan or arrangement for coordination can then be agreed upon and implemented. Each of these three components, apart from being in mutual interaction with each other, is also in interaction with or dependent on the type of organization or institution. For example, extension organizations may vary in terms of their nature (public, private or firm-oriented) and their goals, and consequently also in terms of the degree to which their goals overlap with other organizations or the agreed upon goals of coordination. They also vary in terms of their mode of operation and their available resources. This will directly impact on the need for coordination and the communication with other organizations, and the consequent commitment towards the coordination plan or arrangement. The totality of these components and their interactions will have an influence on whether, and to what degree, organizations are involved in the coordination of their activities with other organizations and how effective the coordination is likely to be.

The model implies that organizations will, because of their nature, mandate, goals, and their approaches differ in terms of their interest in coordination and consequently also in their commitment to the agreed upon plan of coordination. These differences should be acknowledged and accepted and accommodated in the coordination plan or process.

4. METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

A descriptive and explanatory survey was used to describe and analyse factors affecting co-ordination of public and private agricultural extension programmes in Rakai District. Semi-structured questionnaires were used for data collection from all agricultural extension staff working in the District - from the public and private sectors (N=173). Respondents were invited to attend data collecting meetings that were organized in various parts of the District. Each respondent has completed the instrument individually based on his or her perceptions of factors affecting coordination. However, any clarifications or questions that were raised by a particular respondent were shared among all respondents in a particular meeting and also shared at subsequent meetings. The results presented below are based on analysis of data from 149 completed instruments (a response rate of 86%).

Review of related literature, design of the conceptual model, and discussions with stakeholders, and a workshop of 37 participants preceded the preparation of the questionnaire and, hence, provided useful information for its preparation. Participants represented major organizations involved in the

delivery of agricultural extension services in the District. The organizations that were considered are elaborated in Table 3. The purpose of the workshop was, first, "to identify major constraints limiting delivery of agricultural extension services and discuss alternative solutions and opportunities that could be used to address the constraints identified. Second, to discuss, with stakeholders in the District's agricultural sector, various researchable problems". A preliminary instrument and a subsequent draft that preceded the final version were pre-tested with the participation of agricultural extension staff from a neighbouring district - Masaka.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Reasons for co-ordination

Various reasons for participation or non-participation in coordination of agricultural extension services were investigated. Notably among them were respondents' perceptions of whether improving coordination in the District was needed or not. Ninety nine percent (99.3%) of respondents reported that there was either a need for coordination or a strong need for coordination of agricultural extension services in the District. In addition, the mean ranking of the problem of lack of effective coordination, as compared to other constraints affecting agricultural extension services in the District, was 7.53 on a ten-point scale where 1 signified that coordination was not important, and 10 signified that lack of coordination was an extremely important constraint. In a workshop discussion that preceded the data collection for this study, participants estimated the existing level of coordination of extension services to be about 50 percent, which they considered to be insufficient and thus undermining effectiveness of extension service delivery.

Table 1 below presents respondents' perceptions of the extent to which they agreed or disagreed (individually) with some of the reasons why coordination of agricultural extension services in Rakai District was needed. The reasons had been generated during earlier group discussions that preceded the preparation of the final data-collection instruments.

According to respondents' perceptions of why coordination was important, the need for avoidance of duplication of services was the most outstanding. Duplication could be avoided, for example, by developing consensual procedures for extension service delivery. In addition, respondents rated highly, the importance of sharing experiences among stakeholders so as to improve efficiency and effectiveness of extension service delivery. The appreciation of this could be attributed to the implementation of privatisation and decentralization policies, which could have resulted in an increase in the

number of service providers, and the consequent increasing tendency of duplication of services.

Table 1: Reasons why coordination is important in the delivery of extension services

Reasons	Average weighted percentage*
Avoid duplication	89.1
Sharing of experiences for effective and efficient extension delivery.	87.4
Development of systematic procedures for delivery of extension services	86.8
Minimising wastage of resources.	82.9
Comparison with others and self-evaluation	81.8
Minimising conflicts and facilitating conflict resolution.	80.4
Specialisation in certain areas of extension service delivery.	74.3

* Average scale assessment expressed as a percentage and based on a scale where; (5) = strongly agree, (4) = agree, (3) = neutral /not decided, (2) = disagree, and (1) = strongly disagree.

5.2 Methods of coordination

In-group discussions that preceded the preparation of the survey questionnaire, selected extension staff, leaders of extension organizations and local leaders identified methods used by organizations to coordinate their activities with other organizations. The frequency with which organizations use these methods, can give an indication of the extent of coordination currently taking place. These frequencies, as judged by respondents, are presented in Table 2 below and are based on a 4-point assessment scale.

According to the findings in Table 2, the use of the various methods varies tremendously, viz. from an average weighted percentage of 10.1 in the case of the *sharing of available resources (with a joint account)*, to as high as 70.7 percent for *working with farmer development committees*. Although the latter appears very satisfactory, this assessment must be seen in perspective and against the background of the scale used, namely that the 70 percent represents hardly more than the scale point 3, which signifies "sometimes". Effectively this means that even the most frequently used methods are, in effect, only used sometimes, and this implies that most of the other methods are only rarely used or not at all. Noteworthy and perhaps positive from a coordination point of view, is that the majority of most frequently used methods are those

that are community focused and thus likely to affect or promote the coordination in an indirect, but often more effective way. However, in general, the findings indicate that there is a tremendous scope for improvement of coordination in extension service delivery.

Table 2: Extent to which various methods are used to co-ordinate agricultural extension services

Means of coordination	Average weighted percentage (n = 149)
Working with farmer development committees.	70.7
Involving the politicians in planning agricultural extension.	63.4
Strengthening relevant associations	56.3
Establishing co-ordination mechanisms at the District level.	55.9
Encouraging extension staff to visit other organisations	48.7
Establishing co-ordination mechanisms at Sub-county levels.	48.3
Improving information flow among extension organisations.	46.2
Establishing co-ordination mechanisms at the Parish level.	41.5
Inviting other organisations to participate in planning sessions.	38.1
Sharing available resources for extension services with other stakeholders (without putting all resources on the same account).	37.5
Exchange of reports with other organisations.	32.2
Harmonisation of plans or programmes to avoid contradictions, duplications, or unnecessary conflicts.	26.1
Sharing available resources (with finances on the same account)	10.1

* Average scale assessment expressed as a percentage and based on a scale where; 4 = always, 3 = sometimes, 2 = rarely/seldom, 1 = never been used.

Respondents were also asked to indicate their perceptions or estimations of the extent to which various organisations coordinated or collaborated with other organizations (Table 3).

Table 3: Extent of coordination or collaboration with other organizations

Name of Organization	Number of respondents from each organization	Number of respondents who evaluated a particular organization*	Average weighted percentage**
1. Rakai District Production and Marketing Department (Public)	81	111	68.2
2. World Vision (NGO)	5	67	63.1
3. Irish Foundation for Cooperative Development (NGO)	1	73	62.3
4. VI Agro-forestry Project (NGO)	40	89	61.0
5. Rakai District Farmers' Association (NGO)	4	83	59.3
6. Concern World-wide (NGO)	1	10	57.5
7. International Care and Relief (NGO)	1	55	56.4
8. Lutheran World Federation (NGO)	2	76	53.9
9. Masaka Diocese Development Organization (NGO)	0	18	41.7
10. Kitovu Mobile (NGO)	2	32	38.3
11. Investment in Developing Export Agriculture Project (NGO)	0	9	77.8
12. Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans (UWESO) (NGO)	0	7	21.4
13. Zeulia Family Alliance for Development (ZEFAD). (NGO)	3	10	75.0

* All respondents who were conversant with a particular organization were eligible to indicate their perception of the extent to which a particular organization coordinates its services with other organizations.

** Average scale assessment expressed as a percentage and based on a scale where; 5 = always, 4= often, 3 = sometimes 2 = seldom/rarely, 1 = never.

The results show a tremendous variation in the assessment of coordination, viz. from as low as 21.4 percent (average weighted percentage) to 77.8 percent. However, most of the 13 organizations received assessments that correspond with the scale points “sometimes” or “rarely”, which again emphasizes the tremendous scope for improvement as far as coordination is concerned.

The above variation in the assessment of organisations and thus the degree to which some organizations are perceived to be more effective in coordinating their activities with other organizations, could imply that the type of organization and the mandate are important determinants of respondents' perceptions. For example, it does appear as if organizations whose mandates are more focused on funding of agricultural extension services, are less likely to be perceived to coordinate effectively compared to organizations that are directly involved in service delivery.

5.3 Recommendations for improving co-ordination

Respondents were requested to evaluate a series of proposals for improving co-ordination of agricultural extension services in the District. The proposals had been generated during earlier discussions with stakeholders in agricultural extension operating in the District. Each respondent indicated the extent to which he or she agreed or disagreed with each of the proposals.

Table 4: Recommendations for improving coordination of agricultural extension services

Proposals for improving co-ordination of agricultural extension services	Average scale assessment*
(1) Co-ordination mechanisms at District, sub-county and parish levels.	82.4
(2) Harmonisation of plans to avoid unnecessary contradictions, duplications, or conflicts.	81.6
(3) A common forum for information exchange.	81.3
(4) Exchange visits among organisations	81.3
(5) Joint planning	80.1
(6) Strengthening relevant associations.	77.9
(7) Participatory development and adoption of a code of conduct/practice	71.7
(8) Sharing available resources by stakeholders without putting resources on same account	70.5
(9) Farmer committees at a sub-county to increase farmer participation in extension	70.1
(10) Involving local political leaders in planning agricultural extension programmes.	62.8
(11) Privatisation of delivery of agricultural extension services	44.2
(12) Sharing available resources, but having all financial resources on the same account	39.6

* Average scale assessment expressed as a percentage and based on a scale where; 4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree.

The results above indicate that with exception of two recommendations (number 11 and 12 in the table above) respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the rest of the proposals as indicated by average weighted percentage scores ranging from 62.8 to 82.4 percent. A closer look at the strongly supported proposals indicates a close relationship between the proposals and the conceptual model. Hence, based on these recommendations, improving communication, planning for coordination, and establishing coordination structures at different district levels should significantly enhance coordination. The least supported proposals reflect some disagreements regarding recent policy changes in agricultural extension, such as channelling of funds to joint accounts and privatisation of service delivery. They signal a warning that it might be counter productive to ignore or in any way impair the identity of an independent organization that has the right to pursue its own goals in a manner it deems fit.

In addition, out of the above 12 proposals, respondents were requested to select the three proposals that they perceived to be the most effective in promoting coordination. The three proposals selected, and their rank order of importance is given below:

- Harmonisation of plans and programmes among organisations to avoid unnecessary contradictions, duplications, or conflicts.
- Establishing a common forum for exchange of information periodically (such as annually, biannually, and quarterly).
- Establishing co-ordination mechanisms at District, sub-county and parish levels.

5.4 Educational importance, application and conclusion

- According to the results of this study there are few organizations with reasonable numbers of agricultural extension staff (working directly with farmers). For example, 81 percent of all respondents worked for either of two organizations, namely the District's Production and Marketing Department (RDPMD) with 81 extensionists (54.4 %) and VI Agro-forestry Project (VI) (26.8%, f = 40). One implication of this is that, whereas there are over a dozen organizations involved in delivery of agricultural extension or advisory services, in the District, apart from the above two (RDPMD and VI) the others are either depending on extension staff of the other organizations for delivery of their services or they are catering for some specialised needs of certain small segments of the District's community. Indeed there is no doubt that some organizations implement their projects jointly with other organizations using various means such as providing resources for joint planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of selected projects. This situation has enforced

coordination and is likely to have had an influence on the findings or their interpretation.

- In spite of the above, the findings regarding the level or degree of coordination, leads to the conclusion that there is still tremendous scope for improvement. This is likely to be the case in other parts of the Country and serves to show that the overall impact of extension can be substantially increased with improved coordination.
- The need for coordination is likely to increase as the implementation of privatisation and decentralization policies advances.
- Among frontline extensionists there appears to be much consensus regarding the necessity of coordination, but this may not be enough for the process to be sustainable. It will need to be formalised in the form of memoranda of agreement, stipulating clearly the process or *modus operandi*.
- The potential role of community structures in the coordination of extension or inputs of service providers must be emphasized. This may ultimately prove to be the most effective and sustainable way for effectively coordinated extension and calls for further investigation. It is possible that institutions representing the community and its interests could ensure that service providers adopt a more coordinated approach.

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