

COPING WITH CHANGES IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN UGANDA AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION: A REVIEW OF RECENT EXPERIENCES¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a review of recent changes in Uganda's agricultural extension service with emphasis on management, co-ordination, and evaluation of agricultural extension organisations. The need for an effective institution in the Country to co-ordinate and evaluate agricultural extension activities is discussed. Whether such an institution should be a public or a private institution is a question that has been widely researched (Umali, 1997:204, Kraft, 1997:29, Picciotto & Anderson, 1997:249-259). However, in Uganda, this question is still one of the most controversial questions to which this paper is, but a small contribution. The solution to this question requires a thorough understanding of the changes that have affected agricultural extension during the recent past. An attempt is made, therefore, to discuss how agricultural extension could cope with the changes emanating from decentralisation, export diversification, privatisation, liberalisation, and agricultural modernisation policies. It is suggested that a national extension co-ordination organisation be formed, with the public extension system taking the lead, to co-ordinate extension activities until such a time when farmers' associations and other private organisations can take the lead in delivery and co-ordination of agricultural extension services in the Country.

1. INTRODUCTION

By 1917 agricultural extension in Uganda was highly organised and effective. However, during the 1970's and '80's the Ugandan economy was wrecked by political turmoil and all sectors of the economy were greatly affected. During the late 1980's the Government started implementing several policies to rehabilitate the economy. Since agriculture is the major sector of the economy (accounting for 44% of overall GDP in 1996/97) most recovery policies have affected agricultural extension services. These policies include but are not

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limited to; decentralisation, privatisation, liberalisation, civil service reform program, unification of extension service, a modified Training and Visit system of extension, and, most recently, modernisation of agriculture.

The above policies, especially liberalisation and privatisation, have encouraged increased participation of private institutions in the delivery of extension services. This is partly the reason for the rapid increase in extension organisations in the Country. Currently there are over 600 extension institutions, which makes co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation of their activities extremely challenging but nonetheless indispensable.

2. GENERAL BACKGROUND TO THE UNPRECEDENTED GLOBAL CHANGES AFFECTING AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

During the 1990's the need for extensionists and extension organisations to undergo substantial transformations in an attempt to satisfactorily meet clientele expectations, has become more indisputable. This is not to contradict the fact that agricultural extension is a dynamic profession that constantly changes in response to changing clientele requirements. However, a distinction needs to be made between response to clientele requirements at the micro level and at the macro or global level. At the moment, whereas there are dramatic changes at both levels (Opio-Odong, 1996:15), they mainly stem from the recent changes in global policies - from central planning (and emphasising the role of the state) to decentralised planning (and promotion of the private sector).

It is amazing to note that some scholars predicted the unprecedented changes affecting agricultural extension, almost three decades ago. Had such predictions been accorded the attention they deserved, probably, agricultural extension in many developing countries and Eastern European countries would have been more effective than it is today. During the early 1970's when the cold war was still raging and complete *laissez faire* was more in principle than in practise, Rogers and Shoemaker, (1971:10) made the following predictions which have become reality during the 1990's.⁴

"In the long range we might wish that the major type of change will be spontaneous, rather than directed. As people become more technically expert and sophisticated in diagnosing their needs, selective change can occur more rapidly and can be effected more

⁴ *Economists have been blamed for earlier policies, that were persuasively designed, but failed so disastrously and did so much harm in the third world. "The biggest economic-policy mistake of the past 50 years,...is to expect too much of government (The Economist, 1997:13).*

efficiently. In this sense change agents may eventually work themselves out of the job, or at least into a different role. Instead of diagnosing needs and then promoting innovations to meet them, change agents would answer requests for innovations from their clients (Ibid., 1971:10)."

It is obvious that "change agents" have no intentions of working themselves out of the job! However, in light of the prevailing changes, their mode of operation has to change to cope with the changes agricultural extension is experiencing. In Uganda several private extension organisations have been set up, some by farmers themselves, in response to clientele's requests for innovations. This transitional situation of shifting emphasis from the public to the private sector extension institutions is a challenge for extensionists. However, established extension management principles (Waldron, 1984:128) could be adapted (through research, for example) and used to formulate appropriate extension policies for the transition period. Moreover, as indicated in the introduction, Government policies have been instrumental in bringing about the current changes (Mercoiret, 1995:35). Similarly, the impact of such changes on agricultural extension services could be guided by well-thought-out Government policies.

3. AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION ORGANIZATIONS IN UGANDA

At the moment there are over 600 organisations involved in the delivery of agricultural extension services in the Country. These include public sector institutions, farmers' associations, private companies, non-governmental organisations, and community based organisations. However, despite the numerous extension organisations that have been set up in the recent past, the traditional public-sector agricultural extension system is still the major extension network in the 45 districts of Uganda. This extension system was originally organised (before decentralisation in 1993) under the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF). A brief description of MAAIF and its mandate is presented below.

3.1 Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) and National Agricultural Policy

MAAIF is comprised of five major departments, namely; crop resources, agricultural extension, animal resources, planning and finance. In 1993, before the civil service reform there were 4300 extension staff in MAAIF, but after the reform the figure stood at 2000 by 1995 (Nygaard, Paarlberg, Sanyu-Mpagi, Matovu, & Babu, 1997:22). The extension staff is comprised of; subject matter specialists, county extension co-ordinators, field extension workers and

extension staff at the district farm institutes. Despite the retrenchment, public extension workers still cover all the 45 districts in the Country. Other than the public extension system the other extension organisation that covers most parts of the Country is the Uganda National Farmers Association (UNFA)⁵.

According to MAAIF (1997a:5) the Government's agricultural sector objective is to stimulate growth to meet the Country's food requirements, generate foreign exchange and improve the living standards of the rural poor. Government also intends to regain its market shares in traditional export crops such as coffee, cotton, tea and tobacco, and diversify into non-traditional agricultural exports (NTAE's). The mandate of MAAIF is to support, promote and guide the production of crops, livestock and fisheries to ensure improved quality and increased quantity of agricultural produce to ensure national food security and generate export revenue.

Given the prevailing changes in Uganda, the Agriculture ministry's mandate does not explicitly empower it to play an active role in Uganda's agricultural policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation (Nygaard, et al., 1997:73). Uganda's Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MPED) has, instead of the Agriculture ministry taken the lead in agricultural policy formulation in the Country. Consequently, the Agriculture ministry's agricultural policy formulation capacity has been impaired. It is therefore imperative that the Agriculture ministry's mandate spells out clearly its obligations with regard to policy formulation and implementation. Based on this, a satisfactory human resource base for agricultural policy formulation and implementation could be developed in MAAIF (Ibid., 1977:73). In response to such challenges MAAIF has come up with plans to restructure the Ministry in an attempt to play its full role as the national institution responsible for agricultural policy formulation and implementation. In addition, the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO), an affiliate of the Agriculture ministry has been charged with the responsibility of technology dissemination in addition to its traditional role of technology generation (NARO, 1998). Whereas this is an innovative development, NARO's role in technology dissemination should be taken as supplemental to, and not a substitute for extension services (Rivera, 1991:6).

⁵ *UNFA is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) formed in 1992 to encourage farmers to work together. The Danish Agency for International Development (DANIDA), the Government, and members support it. The President of Uganda is its Patron*

3.2 Other Organisations and Overall Co-ordination of Agricultural extension

Other extension organisations do not cover the whole Country, with a few exceptions. Some organisations work closely with public extension staff employed by the districts. This kind of collaboration as demonstrated by US Agency for International Development / Uganda's Investment in Developing Export Agriculture (USAID/IDEA) project and SASAKAWA GLOBAL 2000 (SG 2000) is a commendable step towards synchronisation of efforts of the various organisations. In addition, formation of guidelines for collaboration and integration of activities of non-governmental organisations, district agricultural programs and MAAIF started during late 1997. The MAAIF directorate of agricultural extension in collaboration with the World Bank has taken the lead in this initiative. At the moment it is too early to ascertain the efficacy of this initiative. However, in terms of responding to the need for effective co-ordination of extension services in the Country, this is a step in the right direction. On the other hand precautions should be taken not to rush in setting up a completely new institution whereas it could have been more feasible to restructure existing ones such as the directorate of agricultural extension.

An alternative scenario for overall co-ordination of agricultural extension services could be based on the decentralised local governance structure. District local councils could nominate a farmers' representative from each of the 45 districts and these along with the district extension co-ordinators and some representatives from MAAIF and other relevant organisations could form a national agricultural extension co-ordination committee. It is also advisable to have, on such a committee, some impartial extension professionals who are neither farmers nor staff of extension organisations. The committee could ensure that all agricultural extension activities in the Country are well co-ordinated and farmers from one district are encouraged to learn from farmers from other districts. Such a committee could be similar to what Duvall (1995:1) referred to as the central development council. That is, "a framework that can serve as a linkage system at the interface between the target community and the development organisation(s) so as to facilitate the interaction between the various "role players". This could also "provide a basis for self-responsibility, self-determination, and ownership on the part of the community (Ibid., 1995:1)".

4. IMPACT OF DECENTRALIZATION ON AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

With the advent of a decentralised form of local governance in Uganda, the reporting and/or the administrative structure for the extension service changed. Before decentralisation, which started in 1993 with a few pilot districts, all agricultural extension officers in a district reported to a district agricultural officer (DAO). The DAO in-turn reported to the directorate of agricultural extension in the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF). Currently, all agricultural extension workers are answerable, directly or indirectly, to the District Local Council through the District Extension Co-ordinator (DEC). The District Local Council is the governing body in each district. The national agricultural extension service has experienced some advantages and disadvantages emanating from the decentralisation policy. Some of these are mentioned below.

In general there is improved supervision of extension staff owing to the fact that their supervisors/employers, that is, the district councillors, are in close proximity with the extension clientele and the extension staff. Some councillors are part of the clientele. This is completely different from when the employers/supervisors were based at the headquarters of MAAIF.

Other advantages include improved accountability, faster decision making, quick and easier access to funds, and enhanced clientele participation. The disadvantages that require some immediate attention include; reduced staff numbers, inadequate organisational arrangements, poor farmer coverage mainly due to under-staffing, inadequate resource allocations, job insecurity, limited opportunities for staff development, and weak centre-district linkages (MAAIF, 1997b). In some recent recommendations by MAAIF regarding how the above disadvantages could be addressed, it was suggested that district extension co-ordinators' reports to their respective district councils should be copied to MAAIF headquarters for purposes of monitoring and evaluation of extension in the Country. This does not sound like an intrusion in the district administration but rather an ingenious contribution to overall monitoring and evaluation of agricultural extension services in the Country.

5. EXPORT DIVERSIFICATION

The Government policy of export diversification especially the promotion of non-traditional Agricultural Exports (NTAE's) presents new demands on the extension service. If the extension service is to cope with clientele demands with regard to NTAE's one option is to establish close linkages with the NTAE

private sector. Several such linkages have been set up with the facilitation of the USAID-funded IDEA project. The other option is for the training institutions to respond fast enough to meet the demand for extension staff with the required qualifications. With more competent extension staff who meets clientele expectations, extension organisations could become more accountable to their clientele.

In addition to the traditional extension skills, NTAE's producers and exporters require extension workers with relevant marketing extension skills. Most NTAE's are highly perishable and therefore require special attention from production to the market. This also calls for improved personnel management in the extension organisations working with NTAE's. This is especially important when it comes to the public sector extension where management of staff is not as stringent as it is in private sector extension organisations. In one recent publication it was observed that weak management of staff rather than technologies was responsible for the limited agricultural development in Sub-Saharan Africa (Setsoafia, 1997:11). The author emphasised that "it is the people, not technological interventions, that make production and productivity actually happen. These people have to be managed effectively and efficiently (Ibid.,1997:11). This emphasis on enhanced personnel management is so instrumental in coping with changes facing agricultural extension in Uganda.

6. PRIVATIZATION AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Privatisation and a greater role of the private sector in the delivery of agricultural extension services have several implications for the management and evaluation of agricultural extension services in Uganda. First, the relatively more effective supervision associated with the private sector as compared to the public sector, ensures that extension staff are more accountable to their clientele than in public sector extension. This is rooted in the notion that the private sector is more efficient than the public sector (McCaslin, 1995:4) which is in line with current global policies. In Uganda, the Government has privatised several enterprises and encouraged private investment in several areas in the Country. The President of Uganda has taken the lead in encouraging the private sector to solve some problems the Country is facing including limited accountability (Museveni, 1997).

Secondly, with increased promotion of the private sector numerous private extension organisations have emerged. This, however, is not unique to Uganda as indicated in several recent publications (Düvel, 1997:2-11; Kraft, 1997:29-42, Mercoiret, 1995:35-42). Whereas this is not a problem, what seems problematic is the lack of effective co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation of their efforts. As

new extension institutions are formed it is imperative that clear guidelines are available to steer their formation and operations. As indicated in the following quotation from Picciotto and Anderson (1997:253-254), such guidelines should spell out clearly the different roles for the different agricultural extension organisations in the Country.

"... where the knowledge being diffused is ... associated with market goods (for example, plantation crops, tractors, or hybrid seed) it is best to leave the delivery of advisory services to the private sector within an appropriate regulatory framework.

Where, however, the technology ... is associated with a toll good (such as ... marketing information) delivery of extension advice is best handled by a judicious combination of public and private entities (Umali and Schwartz, 1994). If a common-pool good is involved (... common pastures), it is critical to connect the extension effort closely to co-operative or voluntary action. Only where market and participation failures are high -- for example, where subsistence farming dominates, as it does in Sub-Saharan Africa, or where social conditions preclude voluntary action, ... is a pure public-sector approach to agricultural extension desirable (Ibid., 1997:253-254)."

Such partnerships between the public and the private sector remind us of Düvel's (1997:8) article during the 31st South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE) Conference in which he cited "creating new institutional partnerships" as one of the institutional changes for meeting extension challenges in agricultural development in South Africa. He emphasised that "such partnership are essential to overcome the effects of limited resources, to meet the growing demand for food and to sustain the natural resource base during a period of declining public investment in research and extension in South Africa (Ibid.,1997:8)." Such constraints confronting agricultural extension in South Africa are similar to constraints in Uganda. Implicitly, therefore, recommendations can be drawn from other parts of the World to enable agricultural extension administrators in Uganda make informed decisions about the current state of agricultural extension in the Country. For example Duvall pointed out that successful institutional partnership are likely to be those that are done in alignment with or under the direction of local communities or their representatives (Ibid.,1997:8-9)." Such an approach to formation of institutional partnerships could greatly enhance accountability in delivery of agricultural extension services.

7. LIBERALIZATION

It is likely that liberalization will enhance accountability and transparency among extension organisations. The restructuring and/or scraping of state

enterprises/monopolies encouraged competition in the agricultural inputs and produce marketing sectors. Several private companies (foreign and local) have invested in these areas. It is also worth mentioning that substantial efforts have been made to invite South African companies and farmers to invest in agriculture in Uganda in areas such as the seed industry. Currently, farmers in many parts of the Country are enjoying the benefits of a liberalised marketing environment. However, as observed by van den Ban and Hawkins (1996), economic liberalization has not only created new opportunities for farmers, it has at the same time exposed them to more competition. "This has made it more difficult to predict the future and to advise farmers what is the best path for them to follow (Ibid., 1996)." Recent high coffee prices are a dramatic manifestation of the opportunities (and threats) emanating from a liberalised marketing environment. Farmers enjoyed unprecedented high coffee prices in many parts of Uganda. Unfortunately, however, the boom did not last long!

8. MODERNIZATION OF AGRICULTURE AND AGRICULTURAL POLICY FORMULATION

The implementation of the Government policy of "modernisation of agriculture," will undoubtedly affect the organisation and delivery of agricultural extension services. The conception, and design of the modernisation plan along with its implications for agricultural extension management, and monitoring and evaluation are discussed below.

8.1 Genesis of the modernisation strategy

As part of his election manifesto launched in March 1996, the President of the Republic of Uganda, H.E. Yoweri Museveni, promised to modernise Uganda's agriculture. Her excellence the Vice President and Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) was charged with the responsibility of leading in designing, and implementing the agricultural modernisation policy in her capacity as MAAIF minister. Following several meetings and a national workshop a 24-person task force was set up to design the modernisation policy. In April 1997, after consultations with various "stake-holders" in the agricultural sector, the task force published the "Operationalisation of the medium-term plan for modernisation of Agriculture 1996/97 - 2000/2001." The task force identified mainly 5 key intervention areas to address sector constraints for modernisation of agriculture in the five-year period, namely:

- Improving research, extension farmer linkages.
- Developing marketing infrastructure.
- Targeting regional production.

- Improving availability of credit in rural areas.
- Promoting development of agro-based rural enterprises.

According to the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MPED) (1997:1) it is envisaged that through the above intervention areas the modernisation process of Ugandan agriculture will be accomplished by realising the following:

- Shifting from subsistence to commercial agriculture that is responsive to changing market opportunities.
- Shifting from low to high yielding technologies.
- Shifting from low to high value enterprises.
- Sustainable utilisation of soils and other renewable natural resources.

In a recent message to Ugandan Farmers H.E. the President of Uganda, noted that modernisation means introducing specialisation and moving towards commercial (and profitable) agriculture. This implies adoption of appropriate (sustainable and environmentally friendly) agricultural technologies. Modernisation also means "training in skills to ensure that farmers use their land optimally and make profit" (Kyomuhendo, 1997:2). The President further indicated that by offering agricultural advisory services to farmers on a demand-driven basis UNFA was empowering the farmers to take charge of their destiny by making the right choice at the right time and ensuring the future sustainability of the service (Ibid., 1997:2).

The President's message on modernisation of agriculture summarises some important changes agricultural extension is already experiencing and other changes that are eminent. Coping with such changes requires specialised⁶ agricultural extension systems. Systems with a broader knowledge base to handle more work and meet requirements of specialised production systems without compromising the environment. In addition, during the relatively slow process of transformation of production systems from subsistence to commercial agriculture, as stipulated in the modernisation strategy, demand-driven and cost-recovery extension approaches are likely to benefit a small proportion of

⁶ *Thompson (1982) predicted that "the farmer of the future will himself be so capable that only an expert will be able to help him."*

the farming community especially in the short run.⁷ Agricultural extension systems in the Country, therefore, should have a provision for the majority of small scale farmers without effective demand for commercial extension services in the short-run. In the long run it is anticipated that all farmers will contribute directly (the indirect contribution being through taxes) towards the cost of extension services (Botha & Treurnicht, 1997:44).

8.2 Areas for improvement of the modernisation plan

The composition of the task force reveals that MAAIF and its closely associated institutions and the district councils do not seem to be satisfactorily represented on the task force (Nygaard, et al., 1997:24). In addition, whereas there is clear indication of priority commodity/ enterprise focus and purposive selection of districts according to their production potential, it appears there is an attempt to cover almost all major crops and livestock. This is likely to constrain the plan in terms of human and material resources. Weaknesses similar to those of the integrated rural development programs of the 1950's/60's should be avoided (Picciotto and Anderson, 1997:250). The above issues requiring improvement are especially important when it comes to monitoring and evaluation of the modernisation program. Indeed the programme could greatly benefit from the participation of other institutions in the monitoring and evaluation.

9. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

9.1 Policy Implications

Several policy implications can be drawn from the above review of recent experiences related to changes affecting Uganda's agricultural extension systems, however, the following are most outstanding.

- a. At the moment in Uganda, both the private and public sector agricultural extension organisations can play complementary roles. However, private extension accounts for a small proportion of agricultural extension services in the Country. Therefore Government policies should continue to encourage the private sector to expand to take on a larger share of agricultural extension delivery, albeit in a well co-ordinated approach.

⁷ *In support of such an approach to privatisation President Mandela noted that "We shall privatise where necessary. But we shall also set up new state enterprises where market imperfections and failures play themselves out to undermine social programs (Sowetan Newspaper, 1998:11)."*

- b. The agricultural extension systems in Uganda seem to be in a dynamic and delicate transitional state from what prevailed before decentralisation to the current situation. This transformation process should be monitored, evaluated, and co-ordinated, so that the Country does not end up with unnecessary multiplicity of different agricultural extension systems and approaches in the 45 districts.
- c. If agricultural extension is to be well co-ordinated in the Country, there is need for improvement of the agricultural policy formulation process to allow for active participation of clientele representatives, MAAIF, and representatives of other relevant public and private sector institutions in the policy formulation and implementation.
- d. To ensure sustainability of new interventions in the agricultural sector strong training components should be included in all the plans (Semana, 1996:50). Training institutions in the Country should participate actively in interventions.⁸
- e. Based on the current changes extension organisations have to compete for the limited available resources. Hence the need for improved performance and accountability (Botha & Treurnicht, 1997:44).

9.2 Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, it is imperative that as Uganda's agricultural extension systems transform to elicit increased private sector participation, there is an effective institution to oversee the transformation process. This institution should have representation from extension clientele, private and public sector institutions that are involved in delivery of agricultural extension services. Formation of an extension co-ordination committee with representatives from the district councils and district extension staff and other private and public institutions could be a viable option. Alternatively four regional extension co-ordination committees, representing the four regions of the Country, could be formed. And from the regional committees, representatives could form the national extension co-ordination committee (NECC). However, since the public sector still accounts for the majority of agricultural extension staff in the Country, it should take the lead in organising and setting up the national

⁸ For example the new Bachelor of Agricultural Extension degree programme at Makerere University's Department of Agricultural Extension Education, for experienced extension staff with diplomas is a commendable innovation.

extension co-ordination organisation. However, in the long run, when farming systems have substantially transformed from subsistence to commercial, and the private sector extension networks have developed satisfactorily, farmers' organisations and the private sector can independently take over agricultural extension service delivery, co-ordination, monitoring, and evaluation for Ugandan farmers.

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