

UGANDA'S AGRICULTURE AT CROSSROADS: CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND ADVISORY SERVICES

RESOLUTIONS ON UGANDA'S AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND ADVISORY SERVICES BY THE UGANDA FORUM FOR AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES (UFAAS)

The 126 participants comprising: agricultural extension practitioners from public, private sector and civil society organizations, farmers, members of parliament, researchers, academia, donor agencies and radio and newspaper media; congregated at Grand Imperial Hotel, Kampala, Uganda from 29th to 30th October 2014 for a national annual agricultural extension and advisory services stakeholders' workshop under the theme: "Uganda's agriculture at crossroads: critical issues in the Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (AEAS) system" declared as follows:

RECOGNIZING THAT

- Uganda cannot significantly reduce poverty and transform into a modern economy without serious focused attention on agricultural development.
- Uganda's agriculture is facing numerous challenges including low funding (only about 3% of the budget); high population growth; climate change and declining soil fertility; poor agricultural markets; aging farmers; and low adoption and dissemination of scientific improved technologies.
- Over 70% of human capital in Uganda derives their livelihood directly from agriculture and need information, knowledge, skills, technologies, institutions, partnerships, networks and extension services.
- Agricultural Extension is accorded low value and policy makers and politicians are prioritizing mere distribution of agricultural inputs as opposed to development of farmer capacity for innovation and appropriate use of improved inputs and other technologies.

NOTING ONGOING REFORMS IN THE AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES SECTOR INCLUDING:

- Disbanding of NAADS and laying off of all staff at district and sub-county levels resulting in an acute shortage of extension staff at grassroots. About 52% of the sub-counties have no agricultural extension staff.
- Transfer of the NAADS extension functions to an Extension Directorate of MAAIF which has not yet been operationalized.
- Changing the mandate of NAADS secretariat to procurement of inputs and value addition equipment to support strategic interventions such as seedlings and breeding stock.
- Deployment of army personnel at constituency level to distribute agricultural inputs, monitor and ensure that government interventions reach the beneficiaries.

CONCERNED that:

Institutions, structures and approaches

- The NAADS mandate has been changed without changing the NAADS Act 2001.
- There is no official strategy document to guide agricultural extension hence operational guidelines, approaches, strategies, and roles are not clear.
- The structural framework spelling out how key institutions (i.e. NAADS secretariat, Army, Operation Wealth Creation, local governments, Extension directorate) will relate to achieve the desired agricultural transformation has not been spelled out.

- That NAADS secretariat has been retained with a new mandate yet implementation-related issues that led to failure of the old NAADS have not been deliberately addressed, for example, (i) the wide disparity in salaries of NAADS secretariat and other public service staff in the MAAIF and local government; (ii) Bureaucratic non-result oriented public service work culture within MAAIF; (iii) emphasis on inputs at the expense of advisory services.
- Uganda has a history of government undertaking expensive reforms, only to drop them and start afresh, without building on the existing structures and drawing on the lessons learnt. Consequently, government is reverting back to the old MAAIF based extension system, that due to its failure , necessitated the initiation of NAADS In 2001.

Agricultural input distribution strategy

- The government strategy of unregulated distribution of free planting and stocking materials has flooded the sector with counterfeit and diseased products. This will reduce the competitiveness of Uganda’s agricultural products in the more profitable quality sensitive markets like Europe.
- Emphasis is on planting and stocking materials, yet farmers need a package of inputs for profitable returns on investment, including fertilizers, agro-chemicals, and mechanization that reduces drudgery and optimizes return on labor. Farmers are making losses due to the piecemeal input handouts and planting of poor quality seeds that fail to germinate.
- The distribution of free inputs is not sustainable and will create a dependence syndrome among farmers, undermining farmer empowerment, entrepreneurship, and competitive business spirit.
- Uganda is still spending money on piecemeal interventions as opposed to an integrated service delivery approach yet holistic interventions in all services is essential for agricultural transformation. This financial year, only inputs distribution is funded without considering other key services like disease control, technical advice, and markets.

WE HEREBY CALL UPON GOVERNMENT, PARLIAMENT AND OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO ENSURE THAT:

1. The Ministry (MAAIF) immediately comes up with a concrete policy and strategy document clearly stipulating the modalities of the reform process including roles of the agricultural extension actors/institutions, and approaches in the proposed single spine structure. This should aim at streamlining actors for harmonized and well-coordinated action.
2. Mechanisms through which the farmers will be supported to organize and demand for services, give feedback on the performance and quality of services, undertake collective marketing are clearly streamlined.
3. Deployment of new actors such as the army in agriculture extension is preceded by adequate training and issuance of technical operational guidelines.
4. The Agricultural extension directorate in MAAIF is operationalized to provide much needed leadership to agricultural extension services at national level.
5. Sufficient numbers of extension staff are immediately recruited and equitably facilitated, retooled and oriented to the new roles.
6. Adequate funds are released to operationalize the agricultural extension service this financial year.
7. Funding to the agricultural sector is increased from 3 to 10% in line with the Maputo CAADP declaration.
8. Realistic agricultural extension quality standards are developed, implemented and enforced by a neutral body which is inclusive of competent stakeholders from government, academia, private and other sectors.
9. There is continuous learning through systematic M&E, action research and documentation of lessons from past agricultural extension models.

10. Tested models of effective inputs distribution that sustain the entire value chain should be used instead of government handouts. For example use of the voucher system by Sasakawa Global 2000, the e-wallet example in Nigeria among others.

About UFAAS

The Uganda Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (UFAAS) membership includes individuals and organizations involved in Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (AEAS) in Uganda from the private and public sector, farmers' organizations, local governments, NGOs, and academia. UFAAS is the Uganda chapter of the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS). Launched in May 2011, UFAAS mission is to "Promote an effective, efficient and innovative AAS system through advocacy, capacity building, information sharing and increased professional development among AEAS actors in Uganda.

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