

# Policy Brief on the Resilient Pluralistic Agricultural Extension for Food Security and Commercialized Agriculture in Uganda.

## Summary

*In the agricultural extension world, emphasis on participatory, collaborative, inclusive, and multi-stakeholder approach to addressing challenges in the agricultural sector has gained momentum. This gave rise to Innovative Pluralistic Approaches to Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (AEAS). UFAAS through the First Uganda Agricultural Extension Week 2023 (UGNAEW2023) provided a platform for stakeholders to discuss and address critical issues in the AEAS sector in Uganda. During the event, several key issues were raised and discussed, including: the value of public extension services, professionalization and regulation of extension services and inputs, the quality, regulation, funding, harmonization and digitalization of the AEAS sector in Uganda. The event highlighted the need for: more resilience for all actors along the agricultural value chains, bringing back the glory of Agricultural Extension, professionalization of AEAS, increased funding, harmonization of AEAS approaches, adoption of digital delivery solutions, quality control measures for inputs and extension content, and revision of the extension curriculum to address current production constraints and needs.*

## Introduction

Uganda is not an exception to the numerous challenges such as limited access to modern agricultural technologies, market fluctuations, and climate change ravaging the agricultural sector across the African continent. The departure from traditional, top-down extension methods to increased emphasis to participatory, collaborative, inclusive, and multi-stakeholder approach to addressing challenges in the agricultural sector gave birth to innovative pluralistic agricultural extension and advisory services (AEAS) approaches. Innovative pluralistic approaches to AEAS contribute immensely to the promotion of innovation, collaboration, commercialization of agriculture and resilience in achieving food security in Uganda. This creates more inclusive and responsive extension service delivery system through capacity building, Information and Communication technologies, Climate Smart Agriculture and Public-Private Partnerships.

As a country chapter of the African forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS), UFAAS through the Uganda Agricultural Extension Week 2023 (UGNAEW2023) provided a platform for stakeholders to discuss and explore ways to enhance the resilience

and competitiveness of Uganda's agricultural sector. The main activities during the workshop included: keynote addresses and presentations on the theme and sub-themes by subject matter specialists; speeches from partners and government dignitaries; a dialogue on the AEAS system in Uganda; parallel workshops and side events; field visits and Exhibitions. The workshop highlighted the importance of innovative and pluralistic approaches to agricultural extension and advisory services (AEAS) in achieving food security and promoting commercialized agriculture. The key outcomes that are meant to guide future initiatives and drive meaningful change in Uganda's agricultural landscape are presented in the subsequent sections.

## Key Issues

### a. Value of Public Agricultural Extension

The workshop highlighted the dissatisfaction among agricultural extension practitioners, bodies and actors with the unpopular government manifestations which demean the value of public agricultural extension. Among the unpopular manifestations include;

1. Reducing public investment in agricultural extension.

2. Failure to recruit a number of extension workers to reduce the high extension: farmer ratio.
3. Failure to defend the relevance of the extension
4. Pronouncements of how useless ag-extension is to farmers.
5. Farmers branding extension workers “lazy” and non-existent on the ground; and much more.

From the government’s perspective, a critical issue raised during the discussion was the unethical incentives provided by civil society organizations to farmers in order to access them and provide them with services. Accessing such farmers by public extension workers becomes a challenge since they have no incentive to offer.

### **b. Professionalization and Regulation of Public Extension Services and Inputs**

The discussions raised the lack of standardized and harmonized services to beneficiaries as a major issue compromising professionalism and quality compliance in the agricultural extension space. This is attributed to the weak enforcement of most of the guiding laws including the extension bill 2017 which has not been passed yet. In addition, participants noted the high costs of improved technologies such as seed and increased incidences of fake agricultural inputs on the market as a weakness of both policy and science to effectively contribute to agricultural growth and development. Academics raised an alarm in regard to the compromised quality of agricultural extension services delivered due to the liberalization of agricultural extension education and the lack of regulation of the agricultural training curriculum at the tertiary level.

### **c. Thematic issues**

Discussants appreciated the changing food systems and disruptions caused by shocks of natural calamities, economic fluctuations, and unforeseen events. Findings from the discussions revealed that very few AEAS actors and individuals are well-equipped to cope with and address the new situations and changes in the agricultural space. Farmer representatives reported the

different AEAS actors who share either similar, rebranded or completely conflicting extension advisory services which end up confusing the recipient farming communities. The sadness with this comes with the realization that this kind of confusion is bombarded to the same farming communities by those who are deemed to be knowledgeable and educated.

Political interference was listed as a major impediment to extension services delivering tangible results due to the rampant scraping of strategic interventions before the intended objectives can be achieved. Extension workers who were once involved in strongly promoting NAADs, *Entandikwa*, PMA, OWC, *Emyooga*, etc, are currently looped in Parish Development Model (PDM). This not only demoralize public extension workers but also perpetuate the dependency syndrome among farming communities. Unfortunately, the government withdrew resources from public extension to fund the PDM. Unfortunately, the private extension service providers who would carry on with educating farmers are faced with numerous challenges such as limited funding, weak coordination, collaboration, and monitoring. Participants were equally concerned about the delay in the finalizing and commissioning of the second National Agricultural Extension Strategy (NAES 2022-2026).

Provision of extension and advisory services by actors and organizations that do not have reliable data, standards, market linkages, and lack professionalism became eminent while discussing about Business Development Services (BDS). Participants raised concerns about the challenges faced by women and youth such as limited access to land and productive resources, financial services, technical and entrepreneurial skills, and market opportunities yet they are the major players and implementers of agricultural projects. Much as digital extension is being emphasized, participants noted a variety of obstacles that make the realization of this a hoax. They include;

1. The erratic and high cost of internet in many parts of the country.
2. Low dissemination of knowledge due to limited reach and access to internet connectivity.
3. Limited access to timely and relevant information
4. Insufficient facilitation, limited infrastructure, and lack of necessary tools and equipment hinder the effectiveness of the delivery of extension services in agriculture.

## Conclusion

The competitiveness and resilience of agricultural actors in Uganda require concerted efforts if food security and commercialization of agriculture are to be achieved. By adopting innovative pluralistic AEAS approaches, actors across the entire agricultural sector can be looped in developmental collaborations and linkages that are pertinent in achieving food and income security, sustainable agricultural development, and economic growth. Policymakers ought to foster an enabling environment that allows for competitive and respectful collaborations, prioritize the needs of every actor involved, and open avenues for more opportunities and further developments in the agricultural sector without leaving anyone behind.

## Recommendation

### Value of public agricultural extension

- Benchmark with African countries that have effective and efficient public Agricultural Extension and Advisory Systems (AEAS), For example, Ethiopia and Rwanda.
- Measure performance and outcomes of Extension and Advisory Services.
- Evaluate the contribution of agricultural of extension to national development.

## Professionalization and regulation of extension services and inputs

- Strengthen the AEAS policy implementation towards professionalism and accountability of the extension and advisory system.
- Review and fast track the enactment of National Agricultural Extension Bill 2017.
- Register all categories of AEAS providers in order to create a database of their profiles. This should be followed by a review the standardised production and training content for enhanced extension information Dissemination.
- Support the establishment of an independent professional body to take on the responsibility of regulation and professionalization as guided by MAAIF.
- Standardise and regulate the Agricultural Extension curriculum at tertiary training institutions
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- Establishing well-defined roles and responsibilities between political personnel, and technical personnel

## Resilience and competitiveness for food security and commercialized agriculture

- Implement policies and initiatives that facilitate market access for farmers.
- Allocate resources to develop and scale digital extension services that enhance beneficiaries' ability to adapt to changing agricultural conditions efficiently.

## AEAS interventions and support mechanisms for addressing resilience and competitiveness

- Harmonize several extension messages that go farmers - MAAIF.
- Establish a platform or forum where Agricultural Extension service providers can come together to

share information, align their efforts, and avoid conflicting interventions.

- Encourage Agricultural Extension service providers to adopt the already existing approaches and orientate them to their own programs.

### Leveraging on and strengthening public programs and projects

- Sustainable programs: Come up with sustainable strategies and accountability mechanisms, that allow the programmes initiated achieve their intended goals and outcomes.
- Strengthening decentralized public extension services: Allocate adequate resources to support the decentralized public extension services.
- Enhancing collaboration: forge and sustain partnerships and collaborations with the private sector, research institutions, and farmers' associations to leverage resources and knowledge.

### Viable business development and support services for farmers and other users of AEAS services

- MAAIF and registrar of cooperatives should provide guidance on the operationalization of BDS.
- Register all AEAS actors and forming a professional body that includes BDS service providers.
- Training farmers and agricultural enterprises on international market requirements, quality standards, and certifications.
- Providing farmers and farmers organizations with access to tailored financial products and support for agricultural entrepreneurship.

### Women and youth engagement and opportunities in the agricultural value chain as actors and beneficiaries

- Value Addition and Market Access to domestic and international markets should emphasize small-scale processing, providing market intelligence, and facilitating post-harvest handling
- Promote Urban farming because it requires small spaces and targets high value enterprises.
- Setting up of women and youth hubs that can be used as learning centres for incubation.
- Assist women and youth to establish their own enterprises and engage in agribusiness activities can generate income.
- Facilitate access to financial products and services that cater to the specific needs of women and youth in agriculture.

### Digitization of AEAS in agriculture as a driver of for agricultural growth

- NITA-U should improve on the existing digital infrastructure to improve efficiency and timeliness of AEAS information dissemination.
- Enhance digital inclusion by lowering/ subsidizing the costs of internet and phones, especially for low-income farmers for effective use and widespread adoption of digitalization.
- Promote development and scaling up ICT4Agri solutions through innovative engagements, to ensure competitiveness and easy reach to rural communities.

## Contacts

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