



SYNTHESIS OF THE ISSUES AND RECOMMENDAIONS OUT OF THE UGANDA NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION WEEK (UGNAEW2023)

Held on 23-26 May AT KABIRA COUNTRY CLUB HOTEL

Note: Report on Proceedings Available

1.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE EVENT

The Uganda Forum for Agricultural Extension Services (UFAAS), the Africa Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), successfully organized the First National Agricultural Extension Week 2023 (UGNAEW). The event, was one of the annual agricultural extension conferences that have been held since 2013, bringing together all AEAS actors and stakeholders in Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (AEAS) provision. This year's theme was **"Unveiling innovative pluralistic AEAS approaches: Actors' resilience and competitiveness for food security and commercialized agriculture."**

This event brought together over 400 AEAS actors and stakeholders who participated in the regional pre-events and at the national level (physically or virtually). These were from central and local governments, civil society organizations, private sector entities, academia, and development partners. The regional workshops, guided by the theme and sub-themes of UGNAEW2023, aimed at increasing its outreach and ensuring that the regions have tangible inputs into this main event. In each of them; critical regional-context extension issues were explored, priority AEAS policies, practices raised, and recommendations for building actors' resilience and competitiveness. The main 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; an award ceremony; field visits and Exhibitions. The discussions focused on critical issues affecting the AEAS sector in Uganda and proposed practical solutions that required further attention from policymakers.

During the event, several key issues were raised and discussed, including: the quality, regulation, funding, harmonization and digitalization of the AEAS sector in Uganda. In summary, the First National Agricultural Extension Week 2023 provided a platform for stakeholders to discuss and address critical issues in 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. These recommendations and more, if implemented, will contribute to the resilience, competitiveness, and sustainable development of the agricultural sector in Uganda.

2.0 BACKGROUND TO THE EVENT

In June 2014, the Government of Uganda adopted an agricultural extension reform dubbed 'Single Spine Extension System' and restructured the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) that had hitherto been implementing a demand driven agricultural extension and advisory services delivery model for more than a decade. The National Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP2016) and the National Agricultural Extension strategy (NAES2016) were formulated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF). The NAES2016 was reviewed last year and the NAES 2022 draft exists, yet to be commissioned.





The overall policy goal is to establish and strengthen a sustainable farmer-centered agricultural extension system for increased productivity, household incomes and exports. The new policy provisions as provided for in NDPIII necessitates that the new strategy puts into consideration. The policy advocated for a pluralistic approach to extension services delivery with the public extension system at the heart of the delivery system. The policy was adopted to address the underlying agricultural development challenges linked to production, markets and governance. It is a recognized fact that no country has undergone an agricultural revolution without a well-functioning agricultural extension system and strong farmer organisations. The pluralistic extension approach was to reinforce the relationships between public and Non-state actors that had been and continues to be weak and, in some instances, non-existent.

Over time, many other strategies, documents and applications were put in place to aid the unpacking and implementation of the NAEP2016. For example:

- Supporting / complementary policies and strategies on: inputs, youth, Gender, Communication,
- Professionalization documents for coordination and regulation: Extension Guidelines and Standards; The Ethical Code of Conduct for Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services Providers; and the Process of Registration and Accreditation of AEAS Providers
- Guidelines on the harmonization of agricultural extension materials
- Thematic manuals on Agricultural Extension, Value Chain Development, Sustainable Land management, etc.
- Specific enterprise manuals, like on: Maize, beans and more by different partners
- E-Extension applications like: the e-Diary, the e-Registration of Agricultural extension workers, E-Knowledge Management, E- Advisory, E-Weather Advisory, Outbreaks & Crises, E-Grievance Redress Mechanism and E-profile
- And many more

Much as Agricultural extension services have had such a strong policy support, Uganda has not fully reaped the benefits of the sector, due to the issues that were highlighted during the Uganda National Agricultural Extension Week 2023. Some of them have been echoed over time in different fora. The key issues have been categorized as below, together with the proposed recommendations for addressing them.

3.0 KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 CROSS-CUTTING POLICY RELATED ISSUES

3.1.1 Value of Public Agricultural Extension

Issue: There has been a declining appreciation of contribution of the public agricultural extension to the national development by the policy makers and beneficiaries. This has been manifested through a number of factors like: reducing public investment in agricultural extension to facilitate operations; failure to recruit the appropriate number of extension workers to reduce on the high extension: farmer ratio; failure to defend the relevance of the extension; pronouncements of how useless ag-extension is to farmers; farmers branding extension workers “lazy” and non-existent on the ground; and much more. Furthermore, the incentives given to the beneficiaries by some of the Civil Society organisations, affects the operations of the public workers who don’t have anything to give.

Recommendations:

- There is need to benchmark with African countries that have effective and efficient public Agricultural Extension and Advisory Systems (AEAS), to facilitate the improvement and bringing back the glory of Uganda’s system as a country. For example, South Africa, Rwanda, Ethiopia.
- Measure performance and outcomes of Extension and Advisory Services along the agricultural value chain (using the FAO developed indicators, scoring tool) This will facilitate the in showing the empirical evidence of the benefit of extension to the farmers.



- iii. Evaluate the contribution of agricultural extension to national development.
- iv. Re-instate the extension fund and support to facilitate operations at district and national level, respectively.
- v. Recruit more extension workers to reduce the Extension: farmer's ratio and fully facilitate them with the relevant skills and equipment.
- vi. Work on the mind-set change of the different stakeholders, including the farmers to bring back the value of Agricultural extension and also recognise the presence of the non-state actors within given localities.
- vii. Remove free handouts and encourage farmers to invest in agricultural inputs
- viii. Provide full financial institutional support to the private sector in agriculture for sustainability of agricultural interventions.

3.1.2 Professionalization and Regulation of Extension Services and inputs

Issue 1: Despite the little efforts to coordinate and regulate the extension services of the pluralistic AEAS system, there is still lack of standardised and harmonised services to the beneficiaries. This has resulted into compromised professionalism and quality compliance, leading to everyone becoming an expert in extension service provision. There is a weak enforcement on most of the guiding laws and also the extension bill 2017 has not been passed.

Issue 2: Despite existence of policy guidelines on inputs, science is failing to effectively contribute to agriculture through improved technologies. This is due to the failure to effectively implement the policies as well as the high costs of the inputs especially seeds and poor control of pest and disease control. This is making the whole process costly with no cost benefit balance from the technologies available and an increased amount of fake Agricultural inputs on the market.

Issue 3: The liberalization of agricultural extension education and lack of regulation of the agriculture training curriculum at tertiary level, is significantly compromising the quality of agricultural extension services delivered.

Recommendations:

- i. Strengthen the AEAS policy implementation towards professionalism and accountability of the extension and advisory system, through capacity building, awareness and advocacy campaigns.
- ii. Review and fast track the enactment of National Agricultural Extension Bill 2017 to foster institutional governance.
- iii. Register all categories of AEAS providers at the appropriate levels, in order to create a database of their profiles that can be used by government and other stakeholders for coordination and regulation.
- iv. Support the establishment of an independent professional body to take on the responsibility of regulation and professionalization as guided in the registration and accreditation document that was commissioned by MAAIF.
- v. All organisations and individuals involved in AEAS need to be accredited, basing on their key areas of operation and qualification, respectively
- vi. Standardise and regulate the Agricultural Extension curriculum at tertiary training institutions
- vii. Review the standardised production and training content for enhanced extension information Dissemination
- viii. Establishing well-defined roles and responsibilities between political personnel, who provide policy direction and strategic oversight, and technical personnel, who offer specialized expertise and advisory support, is crucial for effective and efficient AEAS

3.2 THEMATIC ISSUES

3.2.1 Resilience and competitiveness for food security and commercialized agriculture

Issue: Given the disruptions and shocks of natural calamities and economic fluctuations and their effects on agriculture and the food systems in Uganda, agricultural extension needs to position itself well in this new situation, if it is to remain relevant. AEAS providers and policy implementers have to be open-minded so that they accommodate the changing landscape and this calls for refreshing strategy and rebranding for better resilience & competitiveness. However, very few AEAS actors (organisations and individuals) are well equipped to address and cope with various challenges, including climate change, market fluctuations, and resource constraints.

Recommendations

- i. Create a comprehensive training program for agricultural extension workers and practitioners focused on building resilience and adaptive capacities. The training programs should be always tailored to the needs of extension workers to enhance their technical skills, knowledge, and competencies providing climate smart extension services so as to enhance their resilience and competitiveness.
- ii. Implement policies and initiatives that facilitate market access for farmers and encourage diversification of agricultural products.
- iii. Allocate resources to develop and scale digital extension services, leveraging mobile technology and digital platforms that enhance beneficiaries' ability to adapt to changing agricultural conditions efficiently

3.2.2 AEAS interventions and support mechanisms for addressing resilience and competitiveness

Issue: Several interventions and approaches are being used by the different AEAS actors within the same farming communities. However, some of them tend to be either similar or a modification/ rebranding, while others are completely conflicting. This scenario of events, definitely confuses the targeted beneficiaries who receive them.

Recommendations

- i. MAAIF should come up with a mechanism of validating and managing the harmonization of the several extension messages that go to all agricultural value chain beneficiaries, especially farmers.
- ii. Establish a platform or forum where Agricultural Extension service providers, farming communities, and value chain beneficiaries can come together to share information, align their efforts, and avoid conflicting interventions. This platform should facilitate regular communication and collaboration, promoting a cohesive and coordinated approach to agricultural extension activities
- iii. Encourage Agricultural Extension service providers to adopt the already existing approaches and orientate them to their own programmes

3.2.3 Leveraging on and strengthening public programmes and projects

Key Issues 1: Constantly ever changing government programmes: The rampant scrapping of strategic interventions before they achieve intended objectives, coupled with lack of accountability mechanisms, fails extension service to deliver tangible results and creates loss of trust among the NSA actors and beneficiaries. For instance

Entandikwa, PMA, NAADS, OWC, Emyooga, etc. Currently, the extension workers are involved in the promotion of the Parish Development Model (PDM), but they are not sure whether it will last the test of time. Furthermore, scenario creates a dependence/ expectancy syndrome among the beneficiaries, limiting their potential to be creative and productive.

Key Issues 2: Parish Development model (PDM) and Extension Services: The current efforts of PDM seem to be concentrating more on Pillar 3 (Financial Inclusion) where the beneficiaries are selecting enterprises and forming SACCOs. All the selected enterprises are agriculture in nature and the extension workers are currently facilitating the development of business plans. However, the government has withdrawn the extension grant which would enable them to further support the PDM.

Key Issues 3: Decentralized Public Extension Services: Given the crucial role of decentralized public extension services in promoting market-oriented farming, the system still has issues having, limited funding, weak coordination, collaboration and monitoring of the various stakeholders involved in the pluralistic extension services.

Key Issues 4: Strategic direction: The actors are concerned about the delay in the finalizing and commissioning of the second National Agricultural Extension Strategy (NAES 2022-2026)

Recommendations to Government:

- i. **Sustainable programmes:** Come up with sustainable strategies and accountability mechanisms, that allow the programmes initiated achieve their intended goals and outcomes in order to: also avoid confusion of extension messages at the grassroots; and effectively contribute to resilience and competitiveness of the beneficiaries.
- ii. **Strengthening decentralized public extension services:** Allocate adequate resources to support the decentralized public extension services to ensure their effectiveness in reaching their clientele to address challenge and enhance their opportunities.
- iii. **Enhancing Collaboration:** The actors in the pluralistic extension services should forge and sustain partnerships and collaborations with the private sector, research institutions, and farmers' associations to leverage resources, knowledge, and market opportunities.

3.2.4 Viable Business development and support services for farmers and other users of AEAS services

Issue: There is a disorganized system of BDS and advisory services delivery to farmers and farmers organizations with no data, standards, and market linkages in efficient business development services. Currently the quality of these services and the professionalization of the service providers are not streamlined.

Recommendations

1. MAAIF and registrar of cooperatives should provide guidance on the operationalization of BDS.
2. The MAAIF-UFAAS arrangement of registering all AEAS actors and eventually forming a professional body, should ensure that BDS service providers are included and recognised. Note: This is already outlined in the AMEA-UFAAS Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
3. Develop training programmes and resources to educate farmers and agricultural enterprises on international market requirements, quality standards, and certifications.
4. Public programmes and projects should prioritize providing farmers and farmers organizations with access to tailored financial products and support for agricultural entrepreneurship.

3.2.5 Women and Youth engagement and opportunities in the agricultural value chain as actors and beneficiaries

Issue: The lack or limited access to land and productive resources, affordable credit and financial services, decision-making processes, technical and entrepreneurial skills and market opportunities continue to be key factors that affect the full engagement of women and youths as actors and beneficiaries in the agricultural value chain. These limit their ability to invest in and expand their agricultural enterprises.

Recommendations:

All government policies and programs should always focus on creating an enabling environment that supports and promotes women and youth engagement in agriculture. They should prioritize gender equality ensure that women have equal access to resources, decision-making processes, and market opportunities. The private sector, government agencies, and development partners, who target to enhance the engagement of women and youths as actors and beneficiaries within the agricultural value chain, should promote some of interventions below.

- i. Value Addition and Market Access to domestic and international markets. This should include: Small-scale processing (eg. Juice making, dairy sector); strengthening market linkages; providing market intelligence; and facilitating post-harvest handling and value addition will enhance farmers' competitiveness.
- ii. Urban farming because it requires small spaces and targets high value enterprises.
- iii. Setting up of women and youth hubs that can be used as learning centres for incubation, as well as boosting their technical capacity in agricultural practices, financial management, and entrepreneurship.
- iv. Assist women and youth to establish their own enterprises and engage in agribusiness activities can generate income, create employment opportunities and contribute to economic growth.
- v. Facilitate access to financial products and services that cater to the specific needs of women and youth in agriculture, including flexible loan repayment options and lower interest rates.

3.2.6 Digitalization AEAS in Agriculture as a driver for agricultural growth

Key issues related to digitalization for extension service providers include:

- The cost of internet is still high and erratic in many parts of the country.
- There is low dissemination of knowledge and best practices especially in the remote and marginalized farming communities, due to limited reach and access to internet connectivity.
- Limited access to timely and relevant information on weather conditions, market prices, pest and disease control, and effective agricultural techniques due to low adaptation to new technological innovations and inappropriate method of relaying it to the last mile. This hinders them from making informed decisions and effectively planning their farming activities.
- Insufficient facilitation, limited infrastructure (eg. power, broad-band network) and lack of necessary tools and equipment hinder the effectiveness of the delivery of extension services in agriculture.

Recommendations

- i. NITA-U should improve on the existing digital infrastructure (eg. power, broad-band network) to improve efficiency and timeliness of AEAS information dissemination
- ii. 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.
- iii. Promote development and scaling up ICT4Agri. solutions through innovative engagements, for example organising Hackathon, promoting AEAS digital connectors to ensure competitiveness and easy reach of rural communities
- iv. The adoption of digital solutions, such as mobile applications and online platforms, should be promoted to facilitate information sharing, market linkages, and farmer engagement.