

Agricultural Extension Services at Crossroads: present dilemma and possible solutions for future in Uganda

BY

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ABSTRACT

Agricultural extension in Uganda has undergone a number of transformations from regulatory 1920-1956, advisory 1956-1963, advisory Education 1964-1971, dormancy 1972-1981, recovery 1982-1999, Educational 1992-1996, participatory education 1997-1998, Decentralized Education 1997-2001 and now Agricultural services under contract extension systems. Each of those up to 1997-2001 had strengths to build on and weaknesses to change or improve, but had challenges of the socio-economic and political environment. In addition there have been marked changes in the concept of agriculture, which is increasingly seen in terms of commercial or farming for market with emphasis on modernization of agriculture and use of participatory approaches in the process.

The dilemma is that the majority of the Ugandan farming community is predominately peasantry/subsistence with a small fraction that can be regarded emergent farmers. Such population may not respond sustainably to the now farmer owned contract extension system including changing patterns of donors.

The paper examines a range of issues including training needs, identification of these needs for more relevant and responsive curricula, the key role of service provider's development in creating learning organizations, developing a strategy for linkages/ learning webs or net works and for more sustainable donor interventions.

INTRODUCTION

Predicament arising from population facing declining food production pose immense challenges for engaged in promoting food production. Agricultural extension services are under constant pressure to be responsive to ever-growing challenges of, and to show impact in, food production. The pressure in responsiveness is giving rise to calls for changes in the traditional public extension systems which are now seen as outdated, top-down, paternalistic, inflexible, subject to bureaucratic inefficiencies and therefore less able to cope with the dynamic demands of modern day agriculture (Rivera *et al*). There are even calls for re-examining the term '*extension*' as it seems to re-enforce the thinking in terms of downward technology development and transfer (dissemination) processes. In the sub-Saharan African countries, the pressure to change has been exacerbated by the economic structural adjustment programmes that have rendered the traditional extension systems inappropriate. Contracting extension system is increasingly being supported by donors especially the World Bank. This paper explains the concept of extension as a spring board to understanding the transformation agricultural extension services have gone through.. It talks about the past, present and future agricultural extension service in Uganda.

EXTENSION CONCEPT

The original concept of extension was that of bridging the gap between the farmers and the sources of information or knowledge. Such sources included organisations or institutions generating knowledge and technologies such as research centres, universities and administration.

This was based on what Comptom (1989) called traditional model.

Research → Extension → Farmer
(Which is also called technology transfer).

Semana (1998) explained the understanding of extension concept as based on three premises namely being educational, having a philosophy and scope with responsibilities. The educational element of extension is two folds: being informal and non-formal.

The informal type of education is one that has no syllabus. Its syllabus is the farmers' problems and needs. It also has no classroom, as its classroom is the farmer's home or farm. The teaching of the extension worker to the farmers is based on the farmers' conditions and setting. The non-formal type of extension education on the other hand is planned, has written objectives and content, can be examined but in most cases it is not. This type of education is carried out through short courses of one or two days at community centres, sub county headquarters or one to two weeks or one to two months at District Farm Institute (now some called District Agricultural Training and Information Centres and some called District Agricultural Development Centres or rural centers and schools).

Looking at extension as being educational presupposes that doing extension work involves teaching and learning. This means that the extension worker like a teacher needs to prepare and rehearse before hand and teach well like a good teacher. The teaching should stimulate the farmer to learn and understand. The farmer as a learner should have interest and the willingness to learn.

The seriousness and thoroughness of the extension worker is governed by the second premise of the extension concept – the philosophy of extension. The philosophy states.

- (1) **"start where people are"** This means studying the farmers through visits and surveys in order to identify their level of farming knowledge, their communication skills, their attitudes, their social-cultural system, way of life, problems and felt needs.
- (2) **"With what they have"**, such as farm tools and any other capital available and
- (3) **"help them help themselves"** this means teaching farmers how to do better farming using their own efforts and resources following the principles of extension. The principles of extension are stated as follows:

- That extension should not be forced on the people.
- That extension should not be a form of charity.
- That rural people should participate in every effort intended to improve their way of life.
- That the extension workers should do one thing at a time.
- That the extension staff should utilize local leadership.
- That the extension workers should study the job thoroughly.

In line with the above philosophy and principles, the following extension objectives guide the extension workers in their duties to do the following:

- Teach the rural people, to advise them on how to improve their way of living.
- Encourage them to appreciate and recognize rural life as honorable.

- Train the rural people how to make decisions on the use of their resources through their own efforts.

Now that we have seen what extension is let us see it's application in the past, recent past, current and future of extension service in Uganda.

PAST EXTENSION SERVICE

1898—1907: Early Colonial Period

During this period importation of cash crop planting materials namely coffee, cotton, rubber, and tobacco took place. There was also establishment of research stations to carry out agriculture and forestry research in Uganda.

1920—1956: Extension Service through Chiefs

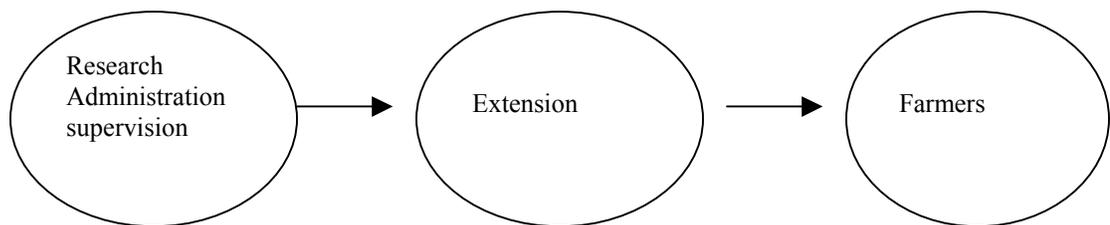
This is the period when extension started in full and as a matter of economic necessity. The colonial administration needed resources to run the protectorate government functions. Uganda, being an agricultural country, was found with very great potential for producing agricultural raw materials for the British industries which provided ready market and foreign income to run the administration.

Chiefs assisted by a few expatriate field officers and African instructors carried out extension work. The emphasis was on distributing planting materials of major cash crops and simple messages on how to grow those crops. This was coupled with enforcing bye-laws requiring households to certain crops in accordance with agricultural practices such as soil conservation and storage of famine food reserves. Something to note here is that the chiefs' status and influence made farmers use good husbandry practices, proper land use and ensured household food security. The extension approach was coercion rather than education.

1956—1963: Extension through Progressive Farmers

The emphasis here concentration on technical advice and support in form of inputs and credit to selected progressive farmers. The expectation was that the improved performance of those farmers would have a demonstration and multiplier effect for increased agricultural production and productivity. The approach was effective in a situation where there was inadequate number of trained extension staff. Some farmers had demonstration effect on others and served as the beginning of improved farming. However, the criteria used for selection of progressive farmers were questionable and produced mixed results. Many of the selected farmers abused the special support given to them in form of credit and subsidized inputs. Some farmers were not cooperative and willing to serve as contact farmers for educating others. Other farmers looked at progressive farmers as a privileged group thus nullifying the intended purpose of being examples to be emulated. This was perpetuated by the past extension model (Technology transfer model).

Figure 1: Past Extension Model



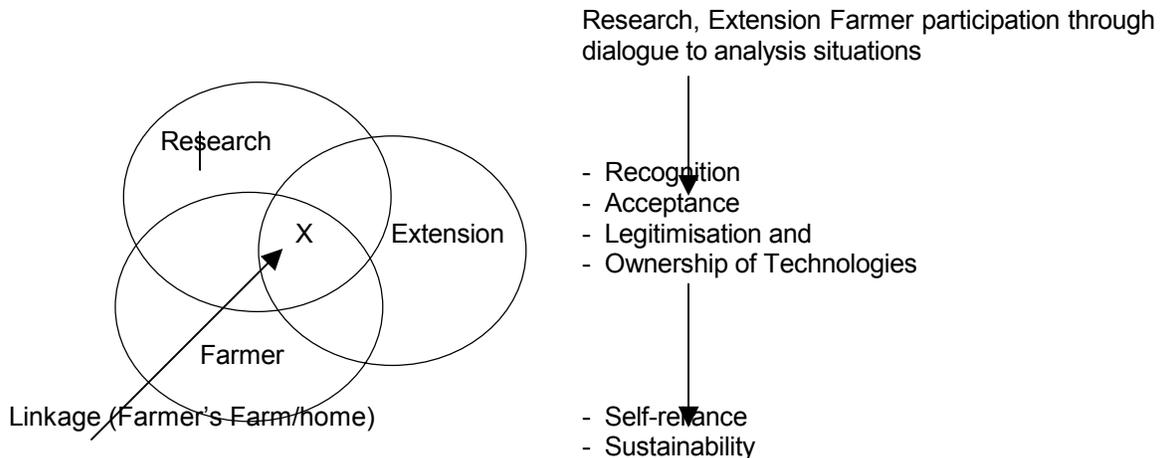
The dissemination of innovations/technologies relied on the extension worker. It was one way communication as a result there was hardly continued any adoption.

1964---1972: Extension Methods Phase

During this period, the extension services became more professional through training and the use of appropriate extension methods. An attempt was made to reach farmers in more rationalized manner.

In 1964, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) came in to aid Uganda through Ministry of Agriculture. The coming of USAID brought with it the philosophy of extension. Uganda's extension approach changed to "helping farmers to help themselves through" education promoting two way communication. The following was the model used.

Figure 2: Research Extension Farmer Linkage



Source: Semana A.R. (1999)

This model promotes technology development and dissemination. This educational process was facilitated by use of tours to similar farmers doing well and field days so that farmers may learn from each other as well as radios, television (cinema, leaflets and posters) to remind or re-enforce knowledge gain.

Reaching farmers was also through projects on irrigation and citrus, group farms, field trials, district farm institutes and experimental stations.

1972—1980: Non—Directional Phase (Dormant phase)

This period was characterized by disruption of the economy and impaired delivery of goods and services. Extension drifted into the staff selling inputs to farmers at the neglect and detriment of delivery of services. This state of affairs together with lack of an agricultural extension policy led to the disorganization, dormancy of extension services and low productivity experienced during the years of political turmoil (from 1970 to 1980).

1981—1991: Recovery Period

In the early part of this period there was marked emphasis on rehabilitation of the infrastructure and restoration of basic services. Later on the organizational and educational aspects of the extension services were given focus. Until 1991, there were parallel extension services in different ministries departments and non government organisations that had mushroomed doing same job. There was no significant improvement in the performance of extension services due to duplication, conflict and confusion.

However, the government arrested the situation by coming up with a new policy on agricultural extension services. The unification was instituted as a result of the recommendation of group B— a Task Force on the improvement of Agricultural Extension in Uganda financed by the World Bank in 1990. The unification was characterized by:

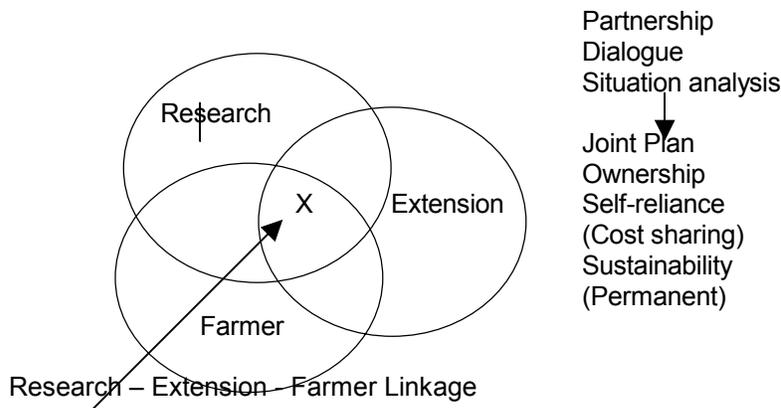
- Merger of Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Animal Industry and Fisheries now called Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries,
- Single chain of command
- Frontline extension worker responsible for teaching and advising farmers

- Programme planning with researchers and farmers through pr-season workshops (farmer oriented)
- Bimonthly training workshops and supervised visits (T & V)

The idea behind unification was to rationalize, integrate and harmonise the use of scarce resources. It was also meant to professionalise extension education through learning and teaching. This was evidenced in pre-season/participatory planning workshops. Face to face interactions brought about change in attitude of the participants.

This approach emphasizes partnership, utilizing dialogue to promote participation. This way farmers' indigenous knowledge was generated through use of participatory approach with research/extension facilitation. The farmer indigenous knowledge and research group knowledge were meshed to start off technology development and eventually technology dissemination. Figure 3 illustrates how this takes place.

Figure 3: Technology development and dissemination model



Source: Semana A.R. (1987,1999)

The above approach was used in southwest Uganda where it enabled participation of pastoralists, researchers and extension workers work together for great improvement of pastoralism especially in Mbarara district. It was also beginning to take root in the nearing districts of Rakai, Sembabule and Masaka.

The farmers were being taught grazing systems such as controlled grazing against continuous grazing, strip grazing, deferred rotational grazing and zero grazing for those with very few animals as well as improved pasture management.

They were also taught methods of harvesting and storing local forage at or prior to the flowering stage to sustain animal nutrition during critical periods of dry season or draught. Use of crop residues was also taught.

This is in line with the logical conclusion drawn by Fiel, (1994) and von der Luhe (1996) who said "We must endeavour to see situations through the eyes of the addressee of advice. This is also the lesson learnt from successful extension services – services which, if necessary, can be sold to clients on cost covering basis. Dialogue, participation, customer orientation, indigenous knowledge have become the new key concepts".

This partnership brought about by participatory approaches is promoted through multimedia such as radio cassettes, microcomputers/video, field days/shows and tours.

Jiggins et al (1997) said, "Farmers are also researchers, teachers and consultants. We can and must learn from them before we teach and advise them. Traditional indigenous knowledge, therefore, together with what can be learned from the research and extension must be the key to a situation based on extension.

This also applies to exchange of knowledge with the target group as most farmers get most of the information from other farmers." The quotation above explains what is happening in Kazzo

county of Mbarara district. The researchers, extensionists and farmers are learning from each other on how to improve the dry land husbandry and pastoral extension service.

1992—1997: Agricultural Extension Education/ Reforms

This is the period when, what has been explained above (farmer education), was done as required but amidst radical reforms (decentralisation, liberalization, privatization, restructuring and retrenchment). The reforms had negative impact on extension education. Down-sizing reduced the in the field. The districts lacked capacity to steer the extension role through staff development, support and reward. As a result the staff lost morale and farmers access to extension services reduced considerably. Coupled with this, farmers' perception of extension staff became and hindered adoption of technologies (Semana 1998, Kibwika and Semana 1998). While this situation was prevailing, a number of government actions such as improving farmers' access to services through village level participator planning under Agricultural Extension Project, Task Force on Plan for Modernization of Agriculture (PMA) and mid-term evaluation of National Agricultural Research Organization activities were taking place. In the process the World Bank withheld the support to extension and research in favour PMA.

1998—2002: Crossroad, Dilemma and Possible Future Solutions Period

This period has witnessed a mixture of conflicting views/ideas and activities concerning extension services. The public extension service virtually was at stand still until 2001 but the non government organizations (NGOS) carried their activities as usual with increased "handouts" and donors increased their support to Government to ensure that the reform policies including PMA work as required. National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), a component of PMA, was put in place by an Act of Parliament in April 2001 with five sub-components (1) Advisory and Information Services to farmers (2) Technology development and Linkage with Markets (3) Quality Assurance—Regulations and Technical Auditing (4) Private Sector Institutional Development and (5) Programme Management and Monitoring. NAADS aims to develop a demand-driven, client oriented and farmer led agricultural service delivery system particularly targeting the poor and the women (Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries 2000). NAADS is now operating in 16 districts on trailblazing phase of two years while the other 40 districts' extension service is handled by the respective districts with some grants from the central government. PMA Secretariat, the Outreach of National Agricultural Research Organization and NGOs are also reaching farmers with similar services contrary to the current government policy on extension.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Agricultural extension in Uganda has evolved over time through transformation into unsustainable service for several reasons. There was no policy on agricultural extension until the establishment of NAADS, the transformation of extension did not build on the strengths of the past, the relied upon expert advice has mainly been foreign more than local and the dependence on donor funding. The policy and mechanisms to empower the farmer to demand, pay and control extension services are in place but the dilemma is will the farmers be ready to manage extension services after the two years of trailblazing of NAADS?

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