



**For Immediate Release
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Press Release

CARITAS UGANDA URGES GOVERNMENT TO HEIGHTEN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES TO SMALL HOLDER FARMERS

Agricultural extension has potential to generate positive benefit to other productive sectors: Health, Trade & Industry, Water and Environment Kampala.

Caritas Uganda is a social-pastoral and development arm of the Uganda Episcopal Conference, located at the Uganda Catholic Secretariat.

Caritas Uganda through the Uganda Farmers Common Voice Platform in June, 2017 commissioned a study to highlight a co-relation between agricultural extension services and the performance of other sectors of the economy in Uganda such as Health, Trade and Industry, Water and Environment.

It is on that background that Caritas Uganda together with partners (namely, CAPCA, Action Aid International, VEDCO, UFAAS and members from Makerere University) today convene here to interact with the media to popularize the findings of the study.

The report titled '*Adesk study to ascertain the cost of agricultural extension to performance of key productive sectors of the economy besides agriculture*' was conducted by experts from the Department of Agribusiness and Natural Resource Economics at the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences- Makerere; on behalf of Caritas Uganda. The study was set out to provide evidence on the benefits of Agricultural Extension to the performance of key productive sectors of the economy besides agriculture to include trade and industry, health and water and environment; all with the major aim of drumming up advocacy towards increased investments to Extension service delivery in Uganda.

Speaking during a Press Conference held at Sharing Youth Centre at Nsambya-Kampala to release the findings of the study, Ms. Aguti Betty Rose –The Policy and Advocacy Specialist at Caritas Uganda said, that in Uganda, agriculture is the backbone of the economy and is dominated by small holder farmers who occupy majority of the arable land and produce most of the crop and livestock products, with most households directly or indirectly deriving their livelihood from the sector.

Ms. Aguti also added that much as agricultural is crucial to Uganda's economy, it is still faced with challenges such as inadequate financing, unpredictable weather and minimal agricultural extension services.

She said that according to the study findings, the number of farmers accessing agricultural extension is reported to range between 14 - 17%. A good number of farmer i.e.40 - 50% access advisory services from fellow farmers and about 25% access services via the media-especially the radio.

Ms. Aguti also affirmed that through this study therefore, Caritas Uganda and her partners believe that if well executed, Agricultural Extension can play a crucial role in promoting agricultural productivity, increasing food security, and improve rural livelihoods.

a) Link between Agriculture and health

The study found out that Agriculture and health have a two-way; Agriculture can support health by providing food and nutrition and generating income that can be spent on health care.

On the other hand, the study also shows that agriculture can also pose major threats to health through health threats arising from poor agricultural practices and systems.

The study findings also indicate that, health problems can have disastrous effects on agriculture through lose Labour, assets and loss of income.

On that note therefore, the study concludes that Agricultural Extension can be used as a tool of improving health through farmers adopting new methods and techniques of production, efficiently using their resources that result in food security, better nutrition as well as higher incomes that lead to better health outcomes and better health care for the family.

b) Link between Agriculture, water and environment

In-order to feed the ever increasing population amidst reducing farm land, farmers are being encouraged to intensify agriculture to produce more food from the same area of land. This means adoption of high-yielding varieties, more use of pesticides and fertilizers. The use of pesticides and fertilizers has helped considerably to reduce crop losses and get better yield of crops such as maize, vegetables, and cotton. However, pesticide use also imposes unfavorable effects in form of environmental degradation leading to economic losses in the long run.

Mismanagement of pesticides and herbicides causes severe damage to water and environment and health related effects discussed above. Agricultural Extension therefore, comes here handy as it can help build capacity of farmers on proper usage

of pesticides and herbicides as well as alternative practices and techniques such as organic farming that limits use of pesticides and herbicides.

The study also found out that, access to agricultural extension influences farmers to adopted environmentally friendly practices.

c) Linkage between Agriculture and Trade and Industry

The relationship between agriculture, Trade and industry in Uganda is complex. Many goods that Uganda exports to foreign countries are agricultural products in which the country earns foreign exchange from these exports. Likewise, most of the raw materials needed for industries are produced from agriculture sectors. Agricultural Extension which is an input in agriculture is therefore necessary for this strong linkage.

It is worth noting at this point that Agriculture extension can contribute to trade by increasing the quantity of output produced by farmers which directly contributes to proportion of total output supplied to the market. In addition, by promoting good farm practices (farm biosecurity measures) and post-harvest handling, Agriculture extension increases farmer participation in the local and international markets.

Increased market participation increases income of the rural farmers that in turn is re-invested in the economy through purchase of non-tradable goods and services. The impact of increasing agricultural productivity is wide-ranging and leads to economic growth, food security, poverty reduction, and livelihoods.

The Study then highlights the following as key recommendations that will contribute to the improvement of the agricultural extension system in Uganda:

- 1) There is need to advocate for increased funding for extension service delivery especially recruitment and facilitation of the extension service providers to effectively deliver quality extension services to small holder farmers.*
- 2) There is need for strengthened collaboration between Government and NGO for increased and effective extension service delivery.*
- 3) There is need for stronger linkage between extension with research Institutions to enhance farmer's knowledge on existing technologies and agronomic practices.*
- 4) There is need to invest in the training of Para-veterinarians (foot soldiers) because unskilled professionals have taken over the market of animal health hence compromising its quality.*
- 5) There is need to promote nutrition sensitive extension for nutrition sensitive agriculture.*

6) *There is need for investments data collection, utilization and dissemination; especially for livestock, fisheries and environment to support tracking of impacts of extension services.*

Conclusively therefore, in order for the Government of Uganda to achieve its objective of attaining middle income status by 2040, there is need to increase agricultural productivity among small holder farmers, which can be achieved through increased investment to extension service delivery.

For more information, please contact Betty on 0782556337/0782556333

EDITOR'S NOTE

About the Uganda Farmers Common Voice Platform(UFCVP)

Caritas Uganda and the 3 UGOPAP partners spearheaded the formation of the Uganda Farmers Common Voice Platform to effect the function of advocacy. The platform is a coalition of like-minded Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and farmers working on critical issues affecting farmers in Uganda with a view to ensure that policy and legislative issues are responsive to the needs of farmers and Ugandans as a whole.

The platform has four (4) regional chapters i.e. in Northern Uganda, coordinated by Volunteer Efforts and Development Concerns (VEDCO), Eastern Uganda, coordinated by Community Integrated Development Initiatives (CIDI), Western Uganda, coordinated by Caritas Mbarara and Central Uganda coordinated by Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers' Forum (ESSAF), Uganda; all with a 7 member steering committee that in addition to the traditional partners deliver issues for engagement from the local governments and other lower levels.

Caritas Uganda through the Uganda Farmers Common Voice Platform therefore contributes to the achievement of the above advocacy goal by working towards positively influencing policies and laws geared towards enhancing the contribution of agriculture to the economic and social welfare of Ugandans through personal prosperity and economic growth, increased innovation, productivity, investment and trade, employment creation and ensuring food security.