INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE UGANDAN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SYSTEM; CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE SMALL HOLDER FARMER

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Introduction

Uganda's agricultural extension system can be traced to the colonial era when the British sought to produce crops for the metropolitan. The crops dubbed "cash crops" because they earned Ugandan farmers money were mainly tea, coffee, cotton, cocoa and tobacco. The colonialists had to train Ugandan farmers in methods of cultivating these crops, hence started the agricultural extension system. Over the century, Uganda's agricultural extension system has evolved through three major phases. These are the colonial era (up to 1962), the post-colonial era (1962-1988) and the neo classical era (1989 to date).

The Colonial Agricultural Extension System

At the time Uganda was colonized, the then development theory in Europe was internationalism. This theory of development was spurred by the industrial revolution and was aimed at obtaining raw materials and markets for the metropolitan. Thus, colonies were curved out of Africa during the 1884 Berlin Conference. In Uganda, the British introduced tea, coffee, cotton, cocoa, spices, tobacco etc. which were needed in Britain. Termed export crops because they were consumed here, extension services focused mostly on these crops at the expense of non export crops like roots, tubers, plantains, cereals, pulses etc. Due to Victorian era gender ideologies that were ultra-patriarchal, cultivation of cash crops was introduced to men who simultaneously were the targets of agricultural extension services. This was the etiology of female exclusion from agricultural extension services in Uganda. Cash crops were also concentrated in the south of the country while the north was designated as a labour reserve for the armed forces and plantation agriculture in the South. Ugandans were however excluded from marketing and agro-processing of the cash crops the preserve for which was left to Asian merchants who operated coffee hullers, tea factories, cotton ginneries etc.

The colonial patterns of exclusion were overall extended to rural areas generally which were excluded from general development compared to urban areas; the agriculture sector which was excluded from the development process compared to education, health, trade and industry etc; farmers who were excluded from development compared to salaried industrial, services and civil service workers; smallholder farmers who were excluded from the development process compared to large scale and plantation farmers; and, females who were excluded from development compared to males. Because of the systematic exclusion and unfavourable inclusion of the agricultural sector, the country was categorized into farmers and "workers", as if farmers are not workers.

Post-Colonial Agricultural Policies

Following the end of the Second World War in 1945, the development theory followed by the West shifted from internationalization to modernization. Especially during the wave of independence in Africa, it was assumed that colonies could develop faster and better if technologies, knowledge and information were transferred from the West to Africa. The immediate post-independence government embarked on modernizing agriculture through creation of Marketing Boards for cash crops namely Lint and coffee Marketing Boards and also established regionally based Cooperative Unions and societies. These included Masaba, Bugisu, Bukedi, Banyankole Kweterana, Lango, West and East Buganda, Nyakatonzi Cooperative Unions etc. The immediate post-independence government further embarked on establishment of Agro-Processing and agro industries such as Soroti meat packers, Nytil, Diary Corporation, Coffee and cotton processors etc to create forward and backward linkages between agriculture and industry.

Empowering the Ugandan Farmer

The modernization theory inspired development efforts particularly between 1963 and 1971 were spectacular that they were refered to by Brett (1997:32) as Uganda's "golden age". Edmonds (1988) qualifies Brett's description by noting that during this period, the economy performed impressively, developing steadily and reducing the problems associated with underdevelopment: poverty, ignorance and disease. There was steady growth in output and income per capita until 1971. Over the period, gross domestic product (at 1966 prices) grew at an average annual rate of 4.5% from Ugshs 5,272 million in 1963 to Ugshs 7,497 million in 1971. Since this rate was greater than the estimated population growth rate, real income per capita increased from Ugshs 694 in 1963 to Ugshs 752 in 1969. Moreover, the structure of the economy was changing, with economic activity becoming broader based, shifting away from agriculture (both monetary and non-monetary) and towards industrial and service related activities. Qualifying his observations, Edmonds (1988: 96) noted that during the period 1963-1971, the share of agriculture in the GDP declined from 53.3% to 49.2% while the share of industry rose from 7.8% to 8.5% and that of services (including those provided by government such as health and education) increased from 27.0% to 30.1% of the GDP.

During this period, export volumes generally increased with the basis for new peak levels being laid for cotton (78,100 tonnes in 1970), coffee (214,000 tonnes in 1972) and tea (20,700 tonnes in 1972). Other non-traditional exports were also flourishing as diversification started to take place. Almost 17,000 tonnes of copper were exported in 1971 and some manufactured goods were starting to find markets in neighbouring countries (Edmonds 1988).

Uganda's *Vision 2025: A Strategic Framework for National Development Vol 1, Main Document for National Dialogue,* (Republic of Uganda 1999), similarly noted that in the 1960s, the country's economic prospects were bright and promising. This was because the macro economy appeared to be internally consistent and stable. Agriculture, manufacturing and the service industries were complementary and mutually reinforcing. Forward and backward linkages between agriculture and the manufacturing industry were strong and increasing, with manufacturing depending on agriculture for its raw materials and the agricultural sector in turn depending on manufactured output like implements for its production as well as providing a ready and growing market for manufactured and processed goods. Republic of Uganda (1999) further added that the service sector was stable and flourishing, serving agriculture, industry and the commercial sector adequately. The tourism sector was equally promising, ranking third in foreign exchange earnings after coffee and cotton.

Growth in the agricultural sector was spurred not only by farm based and farmer centred extension services that reached most farmers but also by existence of vibrant cooperative societies and Marketing Boards that not only provided inputs but further also provided credit, markets and fair prices for agricultural output. In addition, extension services were interlinked with cooperative societies both aiming at improving agricultural production and consequently, the welfare of the farmer.

The modernization theory led development efforts of the 1960s further led to a reduction of exclusion and unfavorable inclusion of agriculture, rural areas and farmers from the development process. Infrastructure, hospitals and schools were established in various parts of the country (Republic of Uganda 1999). Actually, Uganda's *Vision 2025: A Strategic Framework for National Development, Background Papers, Vol 2,* (Republic of Uganda 1998) asserted that in the 1960s, Uganda had one of the best health care systems in Africa. Further, that in the 1960s, Uganda had a well-organized system of education with emphasis on the creation of quality and high level manpower required to meet the needs of a newly independent nation. Makerere University (College), established in 1922 spearheaded the development of high-level human resources development in East Africa. Ugandans entering Makerere University at that time came from a well established secondary school system which was itself fed by graduates of a generally good primary school system that had been largely founded by religious groups. South all (1988:57) summed up that "between 1962 and 1971, popular education and health services were greatly extended".

1972-1977: Period of Political Instability and Socio-Economic Decay

Jamal (1998:32) notes that as "generally agreed, 1972 was the turning point" in Uganda's socio-economic and political development. The period 1972 –1977 not only witnessed a reverse in economic prosperity, it also was a period of socio-economic decay. First, there was a military coup in 1971 that ushered in the reign of Idi Amin who in 1972 proceeded to expel Asians who dominated Uganda's industrial and commercial sectors. According to Lange (2003), Asians owned around 77% of Uganda's industries. The Asians' businesses were given away to the regime's cronies, mostly military officers and people of Idi Amin's ethnic and/or religious affiliations. These cronies lacked business management skills, such that by 1974, the industries and businesses had collapsed leading to severe shortages of essential commodities like sugar, salt, soap, etc. Service delivery including agricultural extension was also affected by rising inflation.

The internal excesses of the Idi Amin regime were exacerbated by several external crises that occurred at about the same time. These were the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, the collapse of world market prices of primary products onto which Uganda was overwhelmingly relying for her foreign exchange earnings and heightened interest rates by international lending institutions. The 1973 Arab-Israeli war in which Israel defeated several Arab states so humiliated the latter that in anger, the Oil Producing Exporting Countries (OPEC), majority of whose members were Arab countries placed an embargo on oil exports which sky rocketed oil prices. For non-oil producing countries like Uganda, this led to near depletion of national foreign exchange reserves in order to meet national oil needs (Newbery 1989). Simultaneously, the plummeting world market prices of primary commodities notably copper, coffee and cotton onto which Uganda was dependent for foreign exchange earnings implied reduced national earnings.

Previous structural changes also started to be reversed. Subsistence agriculture grew sharply in relative importance to account for 32.2% of economic activity in 1977, while as could be expected, the importance of industry, services and monetary agriculture declined. As the monetary economy faltered under the burden of poor economic management placed on it by the military regime, there was a retreat into subsistence activities (Edmonds 1988). Edmonds adds that export earnings started to depend more and more heavily upon coffee and its officially exported volume fell to 132,000 tonnes in 1977, 62% of its peak level. Cotton exports declined precipitously from a peak of 78,000 tonnes in 1971 to only 9,900 tonnes in 1977. Also, tea exports dropped to 8,800 tonnes as bushes were left to grow unprunned.

1978 –1980: The Collapse of the Economy

The economic and political destruction of the Amin era (1971 –1979) contributed to a record decline in national earnings by 14.8% between 1978 and 1980. According to the Library of Congress Country Studies, by the collapse of the Idi Amin regime in 1979, the national GDP was the equivalent of only 80% of the 1970 level (http://www.photius.com). Industrial output had declined sharply as equipment, spare parts and raw materials became scarce. Edmonds (1988) adds that after 1977, the economy collapsed. Monetary agriculture, industry and transport and communications once again fell in importance. Agricultural extension services could not survive the general malaise of the economy and services.

Neo Classical Era

From 1980 onwards, the development theory pursued by the West and imposed onto the Third World countries including Uganda was the neo classical theory that called for wider global restructuring not only of economies but also governance systems. The thirteen years of economic decay in Uganda called for macro-economic reforms aimed at restoring economic stability, establishing more realistic relative prices and rehabilitating the country's productive and social infrastructure (Ochieng 1997). Besides the unquestionable rationale for restructuring the shattered economy, the macro-economic reforms were also part and parcel of the wider global restructuring trends/neo classical theory. Since the early 1980s, most Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries had been under donor pressure to restructure their economies along free market principles. The donor motives for restructuring were mainly three fold. First, the belief that the SSA countries had entered into "over-extended" public sector commitments, associated with large public sector deficits and negative balance of payments (ODI Briefing Paper 1986). Secondly, a (an ideological) preference for a greater role of the private sector in the economy, coupled with a conviction that such a role was superior across all types of economies (Najib and Nindi 1988). Thirdly, that improved incentives and free markets would address policy deficiencies that had hitherto impeded progress towards accelerated growth, hence elicit increased production (Bates 1993; Ochieng 1991; Tumusiime – Mutebile 1991; World Bank 1981).

Liberalization of the Agricultural Sector

As a result of domestic and external shocks, and global trends therefore, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government that had captured power in 1986 initiated an economic recovery programme in May 1987. The programme aimed at restoring economic stability, establishing more realistic relative prices and initiating the rehabilitation of the country's productive and social infrastructure. Several policy reforms have since been implemented. They include restructuring of the civil service; divestiture of public enterprises; and, the liberalisation of prices and markets in the foreign exchange, trade, industrial, and agricultural sectors. Liberalisation of the agricultural sector entailed the abolition of marketing monopolies especially of the Produce Marketing Board in 1989; of the Coffee Marketing Board in 1991; and of the Lint Marketing Board in 1993; (Abdalla and Egesa 2005), de-regulation of price controls, free movement of produce and other goods etc (Bank of Uganda 2000).

The Uganda Government and the World Bank contend that the liberalization of agricultural prices and markets was aimed at increasing the volume of trade, attracting foreign exchange inflows, increasing efficiency in marketing and improving the producer incentives of farmers (Bank of Uganda 2000). Both institutions further argue that this has been one of the most successful economic reform policies which has led to a dramatic improvement in the terms of trade for farmers, especially so for cash crop farmers. The policy is believed to bring about improved terms of trade, which result into improved incomes of the rural population, who are the majority and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. This is because returns to farmers are supposed to reflect a bigger share in terms of world market prices (i.e. much higher local prices) compared to prior to liberalization.

Indeed, Kamanyire (2000) reported that when government removed all price and market controls and the policy of setting pre-announced prices was replaced by announcing floor prices below which buyers were not allowed to go, the new measures led to increases in producer prices from below 30% of world prices to above 50% in the early 1990s. For the monopoly enjoyed by the marketing boards in marketing coffee and cotton were eliminated and private sector participants were licensed to market and export these commodities with parastatals competing equally in the market. Further, private traders were licensed to deal in produce and compete with the produce marketing board (PMB), a one-time monopoly for purchasing all non-traditional export agricultural produce in the country. The consequent competition was supposed to reduce inefficiencies existing in parastatals. Institutions like PMB and the Coffee Marketing Board (CMB) failed to cope with the competition and therefore their share of the market almost declined to zero (Mungyereza, 1998) and private traders dominated agricultural produce markets.

Promotion of Commercial Agriculture and Demand Driven Agricultural Service Delivery System

Liberalization of the agricultural sector did not improve the delivery of extension services that had declined during the 1970s and 19780s. Instead, a move was made towards instituting a demand driven agricultural service delivery system. In 2000, government formulated a comprehensive Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture (PMA) whose main objective was to raise productivity in farming and agro-processing, which was expected to significantly contribute to the efforts for eradicating poverty in the country (Republic of Uganda 2000a). The PMA aimed at overcoming the key factors undermining agricultural productivity, namely: poor husbandry, low use of improved inputs, limited access to technical advice, poor access to credit, poor transportation, communication and marketing infrastructure, and insecure land tenure rights (Republic of Uganda 2000a). The PMA had seven main public intervention areas through which, it is hoped, will lead to poverty eradication and a more productive and commercial agricultural sector. These are: Research and Technology Development; National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS); Rural Finance; Agro-Processing and Marketing; Agricultural Education; Sustainable Natural Resource Management; and Supportive Physical Infrastructure. While the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) and the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) made progress with Acts of Parliament supporting their implementation, the other PMA pillars lagged behind.

The NAADS

The NAADS are guided in their operations by the following principles; empowering the farmers in agricultural advisory processes and building their demand for both research and agricultural advisory services; targeting agricultural services to the poor farmers who constitute the majority; mainstreaming gender issues; deepening decentralization to bring the control of the research and advisory services nearer to the farmers; commercialization including intensification of productivity and specialization; participatory processes in planning, contracting, monitoring and evaluation; managing natural resource productivity; increasing institutional efficiency through contracting out services, better linkages between research, advisors and farmers; harmonisation of donor supported projects with PMA principles (Republic of Uganda 2000b).

The NAADS further seek to redress the problems that have besieged agricultural extension in the past. These include inefficient and unsustainable financing and delivery mechanisms and the exogenous, donor driven and non-participatory nature of past extension efforts. Thus, the common concepts behind NAADS are:

(i) A shift from the concept farmers as beneficiaries to users and clients thus making them play a much larger role in controlling the NAADS, own the system and thus make it more demand driven and committing farmers to specific responsibilities.
(ii) A shift from a system operated by public employees to that largely operated through contracting arrangements and by private institutions thus encouraging partial privatization of provision of advisory services.
(iii) A shift from the public sector as a provider of services to one of stimulating the development of a private sector of advisory services.
(iv) Provision for flexibility and dynamic linkages with other services e.g. marketing, credit research, infrastructure, other assets etc (Republic of Uganda 2000b).

As NAADS implementation expanded to cover all districts in Uganda, glaring gaps had emerged in two main areas:

(i) The need to provide financial services to farmers to enable them to purchase agricultural inputs; and
(ii) The need for farmers to add value to their products as well as to improve access to markets. While both rural financial services and agro-processing and marketing were pillars of the PMA, little progress was made on their implementation (Republic of Uganda 2010).

Stripping of the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF)

Following the adoption of the neo classical theory in the development policy frameworks of Uganda, there are a number of different policy frameworks operating in the agriculture sector, sometimes in parallel, and this has raised concerns with regard to issues of policy consistency and the extent to which this might affect the performance of the sector (Republic of Uganda 2010). The Government of Uganda is still pursuing a private sector led and market-oriented economy. It is in this context that government stripped MAAIF and created seven 'semi-autonomous' agencies.

The Structure of MAAIF and its Agencies

The Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries consists of MAAIF headquarters and seven 'semi-autonomous' agencies. MAAIF headquarters consists of two commodity-based Directorates (Animal Resources and Crop Resources) each with three Departments, two stand-alone Departments (for Planning and Finance and Administration) and three other specialist units. The agencies are NARO, NAADS, the Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA), the Cotton Development Organisation (CDO), the PMA Secretariat, the Dairy Development Authority (DDA), the National Genetic Resource Information Centre and Data Bank (NAGRIC&DB), and the Coordinating Office for the Control of Trypanosomiasis in Uganda (COCTU). Each of these agencies, operating at both national and sub national levels, is responsible for the execution of approved plans and resources in their budgets, leaving MAAIF headquarters to concentrate on agricultural policy formulation, support and supervision (especially of Local Governments), sector planning, regulation, standard setting, quality assurance and sector monitoring and guidance (ibid).

This structure dates back to the 1998 post constitutional restructuring put in place in response to the legal and policy changes that followed the enactment of the Local Governments Act (1997). In a bid to further improve the structure, and in light of changes arising from the establishment of the PMA framework, a Core Functional Analysis of MAAIF was undertaken in 2001. This made clear the sub-optimal nature of the Ministry at that time and proposed a new structure. However, this was not implemented, largely because of lack of consensus within MAAIF and other key ministries. The result is that a structure which was judged inappropriately configured in 2002 is still in place now as MAAIF gears up to address the major challenges ahead (ibid).

The complex nature of the sector institutional setup and the need for engagement with other sectors and institutions places significant coordination responsibilities on MAAIF and its agencies. The design of the PMA multi-sectoral framework recognized this critical need and made elaborate provision for coordination arrangements between and within sectors. However, as has already been made clear, implementation was problematic. The causes have been reported to include fixed mindset, poor role appreciation, and limited commitment to coordination. This coordination problem has led to cases of duplication as, for example, is the case with CDO and UCDA, both still carrying out extension functions that are under the purview of NAADS.

Part of the problem with regard to coordination also revolves around the uncertain relationship between MAAIF headquarters and its semi-autonomous agencies. The legal framework that specifies these relations is not always consistent and a common perception is that, by delegating specific functions to its agencies, the ministry has relinquished control over these functions, which is not the case. Another problem is that the responsibilities for implementation of various MAAIF activities are often shared amongst more than one institution. This does not necessarily reflect a duplication of effort but is simply because some activities are undertaken by more than one institution. In this situation, a specific level of coordination is required which should necessarily be provided by MAAIF headquarters.

Other Agricultural Initiatives Implemented Outside MAAIF

There are a number of agricultural initiatives that are implemented outside MAAIF such as the Poverty Alleviation Programme in the Office of the President; the Promotion of Rice growing in the Office of the Vice President; the IFAD-funded Area-Based Agricultural Modernization Programme, the Community Agriculture Infrastructure Project and the District Livelihoods Support Project, all in the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG). These interventions need to be implemented within the agricultural policy framework for which MAAIF is the lead agency.

Segmentation of Agricultural Service Delivery System

Success in agricultural development requires the contribution of other support sectors including energy, transport, agricultural finance, agricultural training, natural resource use and management. Without action by these support sectors, agriculture is not likely to achieve its objectives. Hence a coordination mechanism that links MAAIF and these relevant support sectors is essential.

As already mentioned, since 2000, investments in the agricultural have been guided by the PMA whose main objective was poverty reduction through agricultural commercialization. The PMA was designed as a multi-sectoral approach to agricultural development, based on the recognition that some of the investments needed to make a difference in agriculture lie outside the mandate of MAAIF. Interventions under the PMA were expected to cover agricultural research, advisory services, rural finance, agro-processing and marketing, rural infrastructure, agricultural education, and sustainable natural resource management. While comprehensive and appealing, interventions were difficult to implement because of problems in coordinating the activities of some thirteen ministries and agencies. Only NARO and the NAADS had Acts of Parliament enacted to support their implementation.

Difficulties in implementing the PMA include fixed mindsets, poor role appreciation and limited commitment to coordination. The coordination problems led to cases of duplication, e.g. the case with CDO and UCDA, both of which still carry out extension functions that are under the mandate of the NAADS. Coordination problems also revolve around the uncertain relationship between MAAIF HQ and its semi-autonomous agencies. The legal framework that specifies these relations is not always consistent and a common perception is that, by delegating specific functions to its agencies MAAIF has relinquished control over these functions. Similarly, responsibilities for implementation of various MAAIF activities are often shared amongst more than one institution. This does not necessarily reflect a duplication of effort but is simply because some activities are undertaken by more than one institution.

Conclusions

Governance of the agricultural sector requires unification under MAAIF. MAAIF ought to take overall responsibility and accountability for agricultural development in the country. A specific level of coordination provided by MAAIF HQs is required. A harmonisation of MAAIF and autonomous bodies' goals, objectives, work plans and budgets is required to maximize efficiency in service delivery and reduction in resource wastage and duplication. Advocacy for unification of governance of the agricultural sector is recommended. The PMA philosophy requires re-visiting since it was theoretically, comprehensively addressing the holistic nature of needs of small holder farmers.

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