

# Boundaries of community engagement in enhancing performance of government programs at the local level: a lesson drawing from National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), Uganda

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## Abstract

*The National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) programme in Uganda arises out of the Poverty Eradication Plan of 1997, a framework aimed at ensuring sustainable development of the Ugandan economy. NAADS was launched as one of the seven pillars of the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture meant to commercialise agriculture through improved agricultural service delivery. The NAADS Implementation Framework consists of multiple actors. Most notable of these are the farmer institutions formed with the cardinal aim of controlling and gaining access to the intended agricultural advisory services.*

*NAADS was structured to deliver agricultural extension services as a private sector-led programme in line with government agricultural sector policy that hinges on farmer groups. Although farmer groups are formed at local government level, they do not always have the required numbers and their formation has lagged behind in successive years. This has been attributed to farmers' false expectations of remuneration and their failure to pay group fees. The frequent split of districts and sub-counties into new local governments has stunted group formation, which in turn has reduced the farmers' capacity to effectively enhance NAADS's performance. The paper reveals that community engagement in government programmes may fully realise its potential in a well-designed approach that considers public participation as a continuum of well-coordinated rather than isolated activities. It concludes that the principles of community empowerment need to be appreciated by engaging organisations.*

**Key words:** NAADS, farmer institutions, community Engagement, public participation

## Sumário

*O Programa Nacional de Serviço de Consultoria Agrícola (NAADS) em Uganda decorre do Plano de 1997, um quadro destinado a assegurar o desenvolvimento sustentável da economia de Uganda e a erradicação da pobreza. NAADS foi lançado como um dos sete pilares do Plano de modernização da agricultura, pretendendo a melhoria da comercialização dos produtos agrícolas através da melhoria da prestação de serviços. O quadro de implementação do NAADS consiste em múltiplos atores. Os mais notáveis deles são as instituições de agricultores formados com o objetivo fundamental de controle e acesso aos serviços de aconselhamento agrícola pretendidos.*

*NAADS foi estruturado para oferecer serviços de extensão agrícola como um programa*



*liderado pelo setor privado, de acordo com a política do governo no setor agrícola. Entretanto, estes grupos de agricultores nem sempre tem os números necessários e sua formação têm ficado para trás em anos sucessivos. Isto tem sido atribuído às expectativas não realizáveis de remuneração e de sua incapacidade de pagar as taxas. A divisão frequente de distritos e sub-distritos em novos governos locais tem entravado a formação do grupo, que por sua vez, reduziu a capacidade dos agricultores para efetivamente melhorar o desempenho do NAADS. O documento revela que o envolvimento da comunidade em programas governamentais podem realizar plenamente o seu potencial em uma abordagem bem concebida, que considera a participação do público de forma coordenada em vez de atividades isoladas. Conclui-se que os princípios de empoderamento da comunidade precisam ser apreciados por organizações envolvidas.*

**Palavras chave:** NAADS, instituições de agricultores, o envolvimento da comunidade, participação pública

## Introduction

Since the late 1980s, the government of Uganda, like most of sub-Saharan Africa, has implemented macroeconomic and development reforms, with some noticeable improved economic performance indicators. In spite of the achievements in the macroeconomic sphere, over the years, poverty levels among the majority of the people remained high, especially in the rural areas where the majority live, a large number of whom are employed in agriculture.

Despite considerable advances being realised in the macroeconomic sector by the close of the 20th Century, most people had not benefited from the economic growth and a vast portion of Uganda's population remained poor. According to the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) Programme Implementation Manual (2001), by the end of the 1990s, the gross domestic product (GDP) per person averaged only about US\$330 per year and at least 40% of the population was living in extreme poverty. The economy also remained largely dependent on low input/output cycles of subsistence agricultural production for both food and cash crops.

To guide the agricultural sector planning and in a bid to meet the challenges of high poverty levels in the rural areas, the government of Uganda put in place the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) in 1997, a framework aimed at eradicating poverty, especially among the rural people where the majority live. PEAP implementation was to benefit from decentralised governance structures consolidated by the Uganda 1995 Constitution and the 1997 Local Governments Act.

## Decentralisation and plan for modernisation of agriculture

The PEAP was launched at a time when the country was enacting the Local Government Act 1997 (Local Government Act 1997, Chapter 243). The act aimed to amend, consolidate and streamline the then existing law on local governments in line with the 1995 Constitution of Uganda to give effect to the decentralisation and devolution of functions, powers and services to local governments. In regard to agriculture, under the PEAP, the government instituted Plan for the

Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA), which constituted of five core programmes. Agriculture modernisation under PMA would be attained through policy formulation and strategic planning; institutional reform and strengthening for improved efficiency and effectiveness of agricultural service delivery; provision of agricultural advisory services to farmers; provision of regulatory services; agricultural research and technology development for farmers; agricultural statistical data collection; analysis and provision of market information for agricultural inputs and outputs; formulation of a land use policy; and implementation of the Land Act and others (MAAIF, at <http://www.agriculture.go.ug>).

Subsequently, the other national and local agencies, sometimes referred to as 'components', were initiated. These included: the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO), NAADS, the Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA), the Cotton Development Organisation (CDO), 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 had its own mandate to contribute to improved agricultural production aiming at poverty eradication, especially for the rural population.

The modernisation of agriculture would benefit from decentralised government structures. Decentralisation had been adopted to ensure good governance, democratic participation, and control of decision-making by the people; to provide for revenue and the political and administrative setup of local governments; and to provide for election of local councils and to improve service delivery and accountability. Decentralisation of governance was also meant to empower the local governments (districts, sub-counties and urban authorities) to undertake increased responsibilities for the delivery of services and the promotion of popular participation of local communities in decision-making (Local Government Act 1997, chapter 243; Kauzya 2007). The premise for decentralised governance was that local authorities are better placed to respond to the needs of local communities who can, in turn, easily hold implementers of public activities, projects and programmes (including delivery of agricultural services) accountable for the use of public resources. The implication of local governance to modernisation of agriculture would therefore suggest a full engagement of politically and administratively organised local communities.

## National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS)

NAADS, as one of the seven components under the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA), is the planning framework of the government for the transformation of subsistence agriculture to a market oriented for commercial production. It derives its mandate from an Act of Parliament (NAADS Act 2001) and aims at redressing past shortcomings in the provision of the agricultural extension services through far reaching reforms and innovative approaches in service delivery. NAADS was structured to deliver agricultural extension services as a private sector-led programme in line with government agricultural sector policy under five components: (i) advisory and information services to farmers – designed to support farmers' initiatives, contract private agricultural advisors to deliver identified priority services, mobilise farmers to undertake participatory planning, provide

farm advisory services and disseminate related information; (ii) technology development and linkages with markets – focusing on making funds available at the local governments to contract the services of researchers and all stakeholders for specific technology, market development and adaptation; (iii) quality assurance concerning the regulation and technical auditing of service providers in liaison with MAAIF, to set up and enforce standards for qualification and performance; (iv) private sector institutional development – aimed at establishing a programme to assist firms and other institutions to become eligible for award of service provider contracts through NAADS financing, and; (v) programme management and monitoring and evaluation aimed at establishing and supporting entities at both the national and district levels, as well as coordinating and administering NAADS through its Board and Secretariat.

In order to control and gain access to NAADS services and make their voice heard in decision-making (in planning, control and monitoring and evaluation), the NAADS implementation guidelines (revised in August 2007) support the establishment and development of the following farmer institutions through which they can perform their participatory/engagement roles:

- (i) Farmers' groups
- (ii) Parish coordination committees
- (iii) Sub-county farmers forum
- (iv) District farmers forum
- (v) Community-based facilitators
- (vi) National farmers forum
- (vii) Higher level farmers' organisation.

While all these farmer institutions are instrumental in the NAADS programme, this paper focuses on the analyses of farmers' groups, and sub-county farmers' forum as core grassroots participants in the NAADS community engagement.

## Paper objectives

The cardinal objective of this paper is to assess the extent to which community engagement approach may enable the performance of government programmes. The discussion will explore the relevance of community participation in Uganda's NAADS programme as a single case of the many other programmes operating in Uganda's decentralised framework. The paper will reveal whether local communities, through their institutions, have enhanced the performance of NAADS to achieve its overall goal of commercialising agriculture and increasing total factor productivity of both land and labour for the benefit of the farmers, as envisaged in the programme design.

## Methodology

The paper is an outcome of desk research in which a thorough review of numerous documents related to government legislation and NAADS programme's periodic performance reports was done. The core documents include NAADS Act 2001, NAADS Programme Implementation

Manual September 2001, NAADS Implementation Guidelines August 2007, NAADS Monitoring & Evaluation Manual 2004, NAADS M&E Manual, 2004, and NAADS Value for Money Audits (2007, 2008), as indicated in the list of references. The paper further involved an intensive theoretical and literature review related to community engagement in order to come up with an ideal conclusion on the relevance of this approach in governance.

## The conceptual understanding of community engagement

Broadly conceived, community engagement denotes a process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well being of those people. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilise resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programmes, and practices (Fawcett et al., 1995). A science committee on community engagement comprising of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (CDC/ATSDR1997), held that community engagement process means working with and through constituents to achieve common goals. This process demands that those implementing the engagement effort should communicate with community leaders and members who have diverse backgrounds, values, priorities, and concerns.

## Community engagement principles and theoretical framework

Several underlying principles can help guide community leaders in designing, implementing, and evaluating community engagement efforts. These principles may be perceived in three broad categories: considerations before starting the engagement effort, the necessity for engagement to occur, and what to consider for the engagement to be successful (CDC/ATSDR Committee for Community Engagement, 1997).

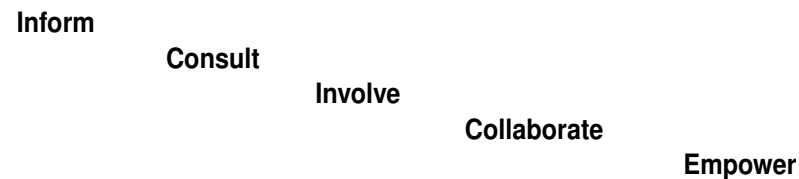
The principles to consider before community development efforts include: a) being clear about the purposes or goals of the engagement effort, and the populations and/or communities you want to engage; and b) becoming knowledgeable about the community in terms of its economic conditions, political structures, norms and values, demographic trends, history, and experience with engagement efforts. Learning about the community's perceptions of those initiating the engagement activities is also considered to be critical.

CDC/ATSDR Committee for Community Engagement further observes that before actual engagement occurs, the following principles should be adhered to: a) go into the community, establish relationships, build trust, work with the formal and informal leadership, and seek commitment from community organisations and leaders to create processes for mobilising the community, and; b) remember and accept community self-determination as the responsibility and right of all people who comprise a community. Thus, no external entity should assume that it could bestow on a community the power to act in its own self-interest.

The success of community engagement is further conceived as being dependent on: a) the

principle of partnering with the community to create change and improve situations; b) all aspects of community engagement must recognise and respect community diversity. Awareness of the various cultures of a community and other factors of diversity must be paramount in designing and implementing community engagement approaches; c) community engagement can only be sustained by identifying and mobilising community assets, and by developing capacities and resources for community decisions and action; d) an engaging organisation or individual change agent must be prepared to release control of actions or interventions to the community, and be flexible enough to meet the changing needs of the community; and, e) community collaboration requires long-term commitment by the engaging organisation and its partners.

Relatedly, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) developed a Public Participation Spectrum representing community engagement as a continuum of activities, as shown in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum**

At one end of the spectrum, community engagement may involve no more than a basic level of interaction with the local community, such as providing information about the operation. This is often facilitated through diverse communication channels, including media releases, newsletters, brochures and websites. The use of these techniques is often perceived as a way to present basic information to the widest range of stakeholders. As the engagement process moves towards a more directed method of stakeholder interaction, consultation may be employed to ascertain specific areas of risk and opportunity. This interaction can involve public meetings, discussion groups, polls, surveys and focus groups.

Once key stakeholders have been identified, the process becomes more than information gathering and dissemination and moves towards a two-way interactive mode. The involvement and collaborative steps represent more active and, at times, stakeholder-driven interaction. Activities in these areas can include workshops and discussion groups, learning circles, interviews, reference groups and community consultative committees. At the other end of the spectrum, empowerment represents a level of engagement that can extend to participation in planning and decision-making, not only on issues related to operational impacts, but also on decisions regarding the community's future (IAP2, 2007).

The above engagement spectrum offers a great explanation of the entire process through which the communities are integrated in government programmes. The model suggests that there is an increasing level of impact as we move towards the edge of the continuum where communities

are empowered. It suggests that community participation does not involve isolated engagement activities, but rather it is a continuous process whose impact can be realised when all these activities are sequentially executed to the end. However, much as there appears to be a likelihood that community engagement will be successful in meeting pro-community goals, Community and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) Consortium recognised that the engagement process faces challenges related to continuous engaging and maintaining of community involvement due to mistrust of the motives and techniques employed in the engagement process. This argument depicts a lack of the community's full participation as a genesis of the failures of community engagement approaches.

## **Structural arrangements and the relevance of citizen engagement in the NAADS programme**

According to NAADS Programme Implementation Manual (2001), local communities in decentralised governments are expected to enhance the effectiveness of NAADS through their farmer groups and participation in decision-making when zoning or selecting the right enterprises for their area, and getting involved in the promotion and production of the selected enterprises. Through the sub-county farmer group, NAADS is required to support capacity development and to enhance the linkage of farmers to markets. Farmer institutions therefore should be pivotal to the success of the NAADS programme. The composition and roles of the farmer institutions are summarised in Table 1 over the page.

**Table 1: Engagement roles of farmer institutions in NAADS**

Farmer institutions	Membership & management	Role in NAADS planning & selection of enterprises	Role in NAADS control	Role in monitoring and evaluation
<b>Farmers' groups</b>	Group of individual farmers, association, cooperative or any legal entity of farmers with common interests, a distinct address, constitution, membership roll, and regular meetings. Lead by a chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and others elected	Registered at the sub-county for common/ similar farming activity	Individual farmers manage their own farms, leaders of associations cooperatives and other entities follow group constitution for the management of group enterprises	Groups hold regular meetings to discuss the progress of their businesses, constraints and solutions
<b>Parish Coordination Committee</b>	Parish leaders and committee members; Parish Chief, Area SC Councillors	Planning, enterprise selection, capacity building, procurement	Supervision, coordination, mobilisation	M&E, reporting feedback
<b>Sub-county (SC) Farmers' Forum (SCFF)</b>	Representatives of all various farmer interest groups in the SC; one per parish, women; youth, SC procurement committee; SC Chief, SC NAADS Coordinator	Planning, selection of enterprises, approval of annual work plan and budgets; advice on strategies for implementation of NAADS; procure NAADS goods and services	Support and facilitate farmers' groups;	M&E of NAADS in SC: the financial performance of FGs, private service providers; gender involvement in SC
<b>District Farmers Forum</b>	Chairpersons of the SCFF, LCV secretary for development; district NAADS coordinator	Planning and budgeting for NAADS in the district; coordination with NAADS Secretariat	Supervise NAADS implementation	M & E, reporting to NAADS, MAAIF, MoLG
<b>Community-based facilitators (CBFs) in SCs</b>	Experienced in field, skilled, knowledgeable farmer volunteers	Participate in needs assessment advisory services, supplement private service providers	Training and guiding farmers in SC in specific areas; promote farmer to farmer extension; upscale technologies	Assist in M&E of technology development stations, trainings, others
<b>National Farmers Forum and higher level farmers organisations</b>	Intergroup association by farmer; two or more groups in similar or different enterprises	Help in dealing with challenges of planning and budgeting, funding	Help in dealing with challenges of production and marketing	M&E of overall sector performance; farmers support; policy issues

Source: NAADS Act 2001 and NAADS Implementation Guidelines (revised August 2007).

**Abbreviations:** SC = Subcounty; SCFC = Subcounty Farmers' Forum; LCV = Local Council Five (District), M&E = Monitoring and evaluation; FGs = Farmer Groups; MAAIF = Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries; MoLG = Ministry of Local Government; NAADS = National Agricultural Advisory Services, M & E = Monitoring and Evaluation.

Initiation of farmer groups according to the provisions of the NAADS Act 2001 aims at creating grassroots structures for identifying and prioritising members' needs for advisory services; developing operational plans for meeting members' needs for advisory services; and raising financial contributions for the operation of advisory services at group level. Other objectives include monitoring and evaluating the performance of agricultural service providers; the election of representatives to the Farmer Forum; and participation (through elected representatives) in the Farmer Forum and activities of higher-level NAADS organs. The Farmer Groups also aid in developing linkages and partnerships with other stakeholders for purposes of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of advisory services. Indeed the NAADS implementation guidelines (2007) clearly indicate that farmer groups are important for empowerment, demonstration and adoption of new technologies, sharing and dissemination of information, and for achieving advisory services outreach.

The Sub-county Farmers' Forum on the other hand, is meant to consider and approve proposed annual work plans and budgets at the sub-county level for implementation of NAADS in their area, for incorporation into the sub-county development plan; to advise the NAADS Organisation on suitable strategies for implementation of NAADS; to support and facilitate the operations of the farmer groups in the sub-county; to monitor and report the establishment, registration, physical and financial performance of the farmer groups, Forum and service providers in the sub-county (NAADS Act 2001, Sec 18). The forum serves as an assembly of farmer group representatives elected to provide a mechanism in which farmers consult, discuss issues of interest to the farming profession and prepare a common viewpoint to interact with stakeholders and the administration. Through their farmer groups and Farmers' Forum, the farmers at the sub-county level participate in the planning and procurement of services, setting standards for quality control, in regulation, monitoring and evaluation of development processes (NAADS Implementation Guidelines, 2007).

### From theory to reality: exploring the significance of community engagement on NAADS performance

The above discussion highlights the essence of farmer institutions at different levels in ensuring the success of NAADS. Specifically, it depicts good intent of grassroots farmer groups and sub-county Farmer Forum. Critical analyses of the roles of the farmer groups in the NAADS programme suggest that the public participation activities according to the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum exist. The identification and prioritisation of members' needs for advisory services means that there is information and consultation. Developing operational plans and raising financial contributions for the operation of advisory services, and monitoring and evaluating the performance of

agricultural service providers suggest involvement and empowerment. Also, developing linkages and partnerships with other stakeholders for the purposes of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness, implies that there is collaboration.

Public participation at the level of sub-county Farmers' Forum also seems to reflect the activities of informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering. The duty of consideration and approval of proposed annual work plans and budgets implies 'involvement' and 'empowerment'; while advising on suitable strategies for implementation of NAADS signifies 'consultation'. Further, we may perceive the Farmers' Forum role of supporting and facilitating the operations of the farmer groups as 'collaboration'; and the monitoring and reporting of the establishment, registration, physical and financial performance of farmer groups as 'information'.

From the above interpretation of the ways in which community engagement is effected at grassroots level through farmer groups and sub-county farmer forum, it is implied that there is a commendable community engagement in the NAADS programme. The conceptual description of community engagement – of involving people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting them – as noted earlier in the paper, seem to fit appropriately in the involvement of the grassroots farmers in the NAADS process. It is surprising, however, that over time, the NAADS programme evaluation has consistently indicated poor performance. What therefore went off beam?

Explanations for the poor NAADS performance largely relate to the implementation design. Initially, the programme hinged on the assumption that the desirable performance of NAADS would be a function of the membership composition as well as the actual members' duties in the planning and enterprise selection, control and monitoring and evaluation of the programme to ensure programme success. The underlying suggestion was that these duties should enable improved performance and accountability of the NAADS programme. The principle of farmer empowerment was to have the farmers access and control the agricultural agenda through their institutions in which they are expected to act collectively. Through their institutions, the farmers were expected to acquire skills and capacity to identify their agricultural advisory needs, setting priorities, formulating plans, and monitoring and evaluating NAADS outputs and outcomes. Through procurement and contract management and control, the farmers were expected to involve the private sector in the provision of services (NAADS Implementation Manual 2001).

The review of various NAADS reports, however, indicate that the number of farmer groups formed per district and sub-county was higher during the first five years (up to 2006), but drastically declined in the successive years as depicted in the Mid-term Evaluation of NAADS by the International Food Research Institute (IFRI) and other related evaluation (Opondo, *et al.* 2006; IFRI 2007). This was attributed to farmers' false expectation of remuneration, their failure to pay group fees and a frequent split of districts and sub-counties into new ones. By failing to form the required groups in the successive years, this meant that the farmers were unable to effectively enhance NAADS performance in their areas. Functions such as contracting private sector service providers to promote specific enterprises and provide advisory services lagged behind, affecting overall NAADS performance.

The design also focused on zoning of enterprises, which was challenged by the reality that the selection of enterprises was subsequently influenced by market opportunities, and disregarded the strategic need to enhance food security (NAADS VFM Audits 2007; 2008). Selection of enterprises was done mainly by the NAADS Secretariat under the influence of politicians where mainly crop enterprises are zoned for districts without the engagement of the farmers and yet, according to the NAADS Assessment by IFPRI (2007), livestock enterprises were in greater demand than crop enterprises. Poor enterprise selection contributed to low new technology adoption and the farmer groups could not effectively enhance performance of NAADS in their areas. Moreover, food security concerns were not prioritised since the selection of enterprises was based on profitability enhancement with little concerns about food security.

On funding, the NAADS Programme Implementation Manual (2001) provided for co-funding and cost estimates per component at each level – national, district and sub-county. Co-funding was procured from the donor basket fund (68%), Central Government of Uganda (20%), participating district (5%), sub-counties (5%) and the farmers through their groups (2%). The donor and government funds were transferred from the government's Grants Collection Account to districts and sub-county NAADS accounts, based on contributions from the farmers and local governments. Reviewed documents indicated critical challenges faced by local governments in meeting their obligations to fund NAADS, which include (i) a low financial resource base due to limited sources of local tax revenue leading to their failure to adhere to the co-funding obligations (ii) their overdependence on the late release of central government grants for the districts' and sub-counties' accounts; and (iii) failure to prepare and submit accountability reports to trigger the release of matching grants from the centre so as to coincide with the beginning of the farming seasons (IFPRI 2012).

Realities surrounding attempts to enhance NAADS' performance in increasing farmers' access to knowledge, information and communication, was equally problematic. The farmers' low levels of knowledge and skills made it difficult to make the government officials in charge of the NAADS programme accountable. The NAADS officers included the Chief Administrative Officer of the district – the principle accounting officer for the NAADS funds – and the district and sub-county NAADS coordinators who were responsible for making work plans, releasing funds and any NAADS inputs to the beneficiaries, and supervising and monitoring the implementation of NAADS activities. An apt question to pose here is to what extent could the grassroots farmer groups enhance the performance of NAADS, especially in areas where they have knowledge gaps? The NAADS farmers are not only meant to provide research information, but they also should serve as relevant collegial partners to other stakeholders.

NAADS' implementation design further embedded training programmes aimed at exposing farmers to agricultural knowledge and information that would enable them to understand, practice and sustain modern agricultural methods. The review of reports indicated that districts and sub-counties did not conduct all the themes required and moreover, the logical sequence of topics to empower farmers in a systematic manner was not always followed. In some cases,

training topics were picked randomly and gender implications were not always given due attention as expected (MAAIF 2005; NAADS VFM Audits 2007, 2008). The implication of this was that farmer groups lacked adequate knowledge to undertake their NAADS-supported activities and were not adequately empowered to engage other NAADS stakeholders to enhance the overall implementation.

Further, the NAADS aim of increasing farmers' access to effective and efficient productivity-enhancing technologies, was also marginally realised. According to the NAADS' implementation manual, Technology Development and Linkages with Markets, the second component of NAADS, was designed to make funds available at the local government level to enable contracting of private researchers for on-farm technology development, adoption and marketing. Rosetti Nabbumba and Godfrey Bahigwa in their publication, *Agricultural Productivity Constraints in Uganda* (2003), emphasised the need to strengthen NAADS to ensure technology adoption by farmers. Farmers were supposed to adopt new technologies after viewing their performance in technology development sites. A number of documents indicate that many NAADS technology development sites were poorly managed due to inadequate training and poor group leadership of the host farmers leading to neglect of the technology development sites as indicated in the performance of (NAADS Evaluation by ITAD-2008). The choices made by host farmers, which ought to have been the responsibility of NAADS structures at local government level and farmer groups, were reportedly influenced by political patronage, not by their own experience and capacity (NAADS VFM Audit 2009). The consequences of this have been poor management of NAADS technology development sites resulting into poor technology adoption and of course, slow NAADS performance and impact.

Another considerable NAADS design challenge concerned the alignment and maintenance of linkages and co-ordination with government policies. The government of Uganda initiated and followed policies of privatisation, liberalisation, and decentralisation. Through the NAADS Act (2001), NAADS was launched to take agricultural services closer to the people, and was designed for implementation through the local government and farmer groups. The number of groups formed was higher in early years of NAADS' entry up to the period when many districts were split (between 2003/2004 and 2005/2006) and after this period, the number of groups declined in most districts (MAAIF 2005). This was attributed to: (i) false expectations of cash as opposed to provision of technology and skills development in kind; (ii) the split of districts into the new districts and sub-counties, thus taking away the groups already formed in the mother district; and lastly (iii) stagnation or saturation of the number of farming households and potential members of new groups. Some farmers were unable to pay group fees because of either a lack of cash due to high poverty levels, or some non-NAADS farmers receiving benefits from the technology development sites without the obligation of group co-funding. The farmer groups however, maintained linkages and co-ordination with government policies such as liberalised marketing of their produce where there were no price controls.

## Conclusion and recommendations

NAADS was structured to deliver agricultural extension services as a private sector-led programme in line with government agricultural sector policy under five components. The overall goal was to commercialise agriculture and improve food security. The review of a number of NAADS documents and reports has shown that to date, NAADS has not achieved its objective of commercialising agriculture in the country and improving food security levels. It has not been cost-effective as it has not achieved maximum output and outcome as observed in the current NAADS reality discussion above.

The paper has clearly revealed that NAADS' implementation hinged on farmer groups whose role was to participate in decision-making regarding planning, controlling, monitoring and evaluating of NAADS performance so as to ensure the success of the programme and access to NAADS services. It has been observed in the discussion that farmer groups and the Sub-county Farmer Forum were given opportunities for community empowerment that involved informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering. While the extent to which each of these participatory opportunities has not been assessed, it is realised that a number of exogenous factors worsened the situation. Technically and financially ill-capacitated farmer groups constituted membership of the Sub-county Farmers Forum and yet they were subjected to highly technical administrators of local government and to the NAADS co-ordinators. This definitely hampered accountability in the programme.

Our final thesis is that the principles of community participation need to be observed if the approach is to yield desirable results. Before community development efforts ensue, there should be a clear purpose for the engagement effort, and knowledge about the community to be engaged (economic conditions, political structures, norms and values, demographic trends, history, and experience with engagement efforts). The actual engagement should involve establishing relationships, building trust, working with the formal and informal leadership, and seeking commitment from community organisations and leaders to create processes for mobilising the community. It needs to be acknowledged that no external entity should assume that it can bestow on a community the power to act in its own self-interest. Finally, the success of community engagement will be determined by the principle of partnering with the community to create change, improve situations and ensure respect to community diversity. There is a need to identify and mobilise community assets, and develop capacities and resources for community decisions and action. Also, organisations must be prepared to release interventions to the community, while exhibiting a long-term commitment.

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