

Is Implementing Uganda's Single Spine Agricultural Extension Reform Feasible?

Executive Statement

Uganda has undertaken a number of reforms in extension service provision, ranging from a commodity-focused extension system in the colonial times to a farmer demand-driven extension system (National Agricultural Advisory Services-NAADS). Due to the challenges and unsatisfactory impacts associated with NAADS, in 2014 Cabinet approved MAAIF's position to develop a more integrated, coordinated and harmonized public extension system—the Single Spine agricultural extension service delivery system. However, the feasibility of implementing the Single Spine reform can only be realised if challenges faced by predecessor agricultural extension systems are addressed immediately. This calls for increasing public financing for agricultural extension service delivery or exploring new financing options, recruiting more staff to fill the vacant technical positions, expediting the development of a framework for implementing the Single spine reform, and creating and maintaining good relations among institutions that contribute to delivering extension services to farmers.

Introduction

The fact that agriculture remains critical to Uganda's goal of transforming from a low- to an upper-middle-income country. The presence of an efficient and effective extension system—the means by which farmers acquire knowledge on new improved technologies and practices—remains a critical avenue for achieving this goal. Uganda, like its counterparts in Sub-Saharan Africa, has engaged in numerous reforms in the area of providing extension services, ranging from a commodity-focused extension system (in colonial times) to a farmer demand-driven extension system—National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS). In 2014, compelled by reports on unsatisfactory performance of NAADS programme, the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) spearheaded the development of a more integrated, coordinated and harmonised public extension system—the Single Spine¹ extension service delivery system. Although the Single Spine extension system was approved by Cabinet and is being rolled out, there is inadequate information to ascertain whether this new system will overcome the challenges faced by its predecessor agricultural extension systems. This policy

brief provides insights into the feasibility of effecting the Single Spine extension system reform. The brief is based on a report titled "Uganda's Agricultural Extension Systems: How Appropriate is the Single Spine Structure?" conducted by the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC).

Key findings

The constraint of inadequate financing is likely to persist and stifle the extension reform

Although agricultural extension service provision should have been the core activity at the district level, public expenditures do not reflect these services as a priority. District Agricultural Extension (DAE), the arm of government at the local level, generally did not receive funds to carry out development activities at the grassroots until 2011/12 (Table 1). It is important to note that even the projected public expenditure budget for 2015/16 does not include support to DAE domestic development activities despite the 2014 termination of NAADS' provision of extension services. Nevertheless, Local Governments (LGs) receive a production and marketing grant, which they spend on capital development (e.g., procuring

planting materials) and facilitating extension workers. But, the grant is generally small and conditional—only 45 percent of it is intended to facilitate extension workers. The large number of LGs (over 112), among which the grant is divided, implies that farmers will continue to be deprived of government extension service support, even with the implementation of the Single Spine reform. In addition, lack of an approved budget for the DAE domestic development activities in 2015/2016 indicates that as of 2015, the prospects of the Single Spine extension reform playing a successful role were doomed. Even if other extension support organs such as production and marketing grants are included, the total public funding of extension services remains low. Given that Uganda's previous extension systems suffered from inadequate funding, this challenge is likely to persist in the implementation of the Single Spine extension system.

budgetary limitations are likely to hinder the recruitment of adequate numbers of extension workers to serve the growing number of farming households, extension workers will not be well facilitated, and some critical specialised disciplines (such as entomology and fisheries) might gradually disappear. These foreseen challenges are synonymous with previous public Unified Extension system (UES) and NAADS approaches as factors that partially hindered satisfactory performance—therefore, they should be mitigated urgently.

Currently available human resource is inadequate to implement the reform

There is a human resource crisis that must be urgently addressed to ensure successful implementation of the Single Spine extension reform. This crisis arose when MAAIF adopted

Table 1: Public expenditure on provision of agricultural extension services (Billion shillings)

Vote function ²	Outturns			Approved budget			Projection
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
MAAIF	17.75	17.82	16.88	18.31	19.71	18.54	24.01
DDA	0.00	0.00	1.45	1.33	1.60	1.46	1.30
NAGRCDB	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.10	1.00	1.07
NARO	11.47	12.18	11.83	11.22	10.75	10.70	9.50
NAADS Secretariat	8.31	18.44	17.98	17.41	14.96	46.43	46.10
UCDO	2.79	1.97	1.94	1.19	1.14	1.04	1.37
UCDA	0.43	0.30	0.39	0.96	2.51	2.30	7.19
District Agricultural Extension (DAE)	0.00	0.00	1.11	1.32	1.65	1.32	4.19
NAADS (Districts)	57.29	45.78	44.56	43.19	41.66	12.70	0.00
Production and Marketing Grant	2.47	0.00	3.41	4.98	4.49	4.11	3.64
KCCA Agricultural Grant	0.00	3.51	0.46	0.44	0.43	0.39	1.64
Total	204.64	289.35	294.55	303.92	315.02	344.44	388.25

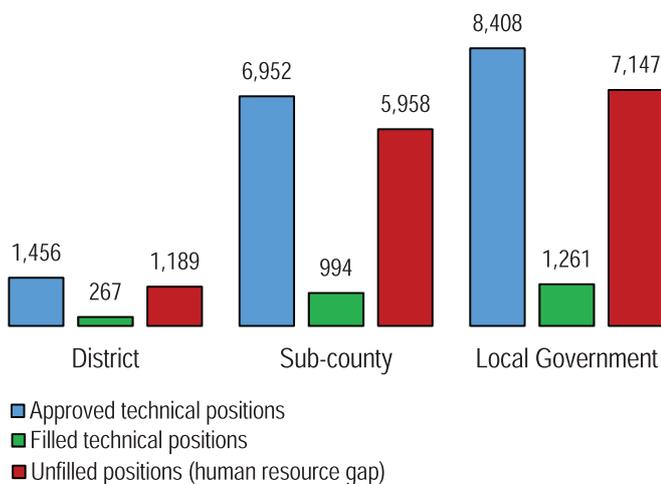
Source: Budget to the Budget Reports, MoFPED

Moreover, in order to start implementing the Single Spine reform, it was estimated that MAAIF required 89.4 billion shillings in its first year of implementation; however, only 36.77 billion shillings was allocated for this purpose. This means that MAAIF experienced a funding gap to the tune of 52.63 billion shillings (i.e. a budget shortfall of approximately 59 percent). Thus, because of budgetary constraints, the farmer-to-extension-worker ratio remains high, leading to limited out-reach, as was the case in the history of Uganda's provision of extension services. During implementation of the Single Spine reform,

the Single Spine reform immediately after Cabinet approval, even though the contracts of the NAADS coordinators and Agricultural Advisory Service Providers (AASPs) had not been renewed. Moreover, since NAADS' launch in 2002, there had been a donor ban on further recruitment of any more public extension staff at the district level; accordingly, extension workers who retired, resigned or died were never replaced. As a result, the Single Spine is being rolled out amidst a massive resource gap in extension workers. According to Figure 1, the human resource gap is highest at the sub-county level

and it is estimated at approximately 86 percent; out of the 6,952 approved technical positions, only 994 have been filled. Nevertheless, the human resource gap will gradually be closed, partly because the ban on recruiting public extension staff was lifted and as a result, staff who previously served in the public extension system before being contracted by NAADS have been recalled. The recall of former public extension staff was partially intended to reduce the burden of recruitment.

Figure 1: Human resource gap in the Single Spine institutional structures



Source: Inter-ministerial Technical Committee, 2013

The Single Spine reform lacks an implementation strategy

The Single Spine agricultural extension service delivery system is already rolling on, but without a framework implementation plan in place to guide the reform. However, cognizant of this missing link, the World Bank (under the ATAAS project) has provided funds to MAAIF to articulate and formulate the strategy for implementing the Single Spine reform. Therefore, MAAIF needs to expedite the development of the single spine implementation strategy.

Constrained linkages between extension and input distribution systems

The ministry (MAAIF) has always perceived the NAADS Secretariat as an independent agency; however, it is not. This perception has often created friction, resentment and fighting between the two institutions. The friction was partly caused by the fact that NAADS Secretariat was receiving more than 50 percent of the agriculture sector's budget, an arrangement that was viewed by MAAIF as unfair and not justified; consequently, some components (e.g., disease control) that were intended to

make NAADS a success were never funded. Despite the reforms in institutional structure and mandates, the NAADS Secretariat continues to command the lion's share of agriculture sector budget (more than 37 percent). Its greater financial muscle makes NAADS Secretariat appear more powerful than its mother ministry (MAAIF); hence the friction might persist and constrain the relationship between the two institutions. Yet, for the agricultural extension system to function properly (MAAIF's mandate), an independent input distribution system (NAADS' new mandate) is crucial; such a system enables farmers to access inputs recommended by extension workers to boost production and productivity.

Linkages between extension and private actors should be defined explicitly

It is not clear in the Single Spine structure how private actors (such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs)) will be leveraged to provide extension services. There is an opportunity in that one of the guiding principles of Single Spine implementation is nurturing and promoting the delivery of extension services by the private sector. Unless this principle is applied, the Single Spine system will be challenged by limited private-sector involvement, as was the case with the public Unified Extension system in the 1990s.

Emerging issues for policy consideration

- a Explore other financing options because budget constraints are likely to persist. Proposals include the following:
 - Funds initially allocated for NAADS districts should be allocated to local governments to deliver extension services to farmers. Indeed, when the Single Spine was adopted, the Cabinet's decision was to integrate both financial and human resources. Currently, only the human resource has been integrated into the Single Spine system.
 - Leveraging, coordinating and consolidating scattered funds in various ministries, departments, and agencies that provide extension services, e.g., UCDA.
 - MAAIF should create and improve linkages with CSOs and NGOs that are already engaged in the delivery of extension services. However, coordination issues should be addressed both to standardise extension messages and to ensure that farmers do not receive conflicting information on a single subject.
 - MAAIF headquarters (the Directorate of Agricultural Extension Services) should minimise duplicative efforts by focusing on coordination and empowering local gov-

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About the Author

Mildred Barungi is a Research Fellow at the Economic Policy Research Centre, Kampala, Uganda.

Annet Adong is a Research Analyst at the Economic Policy Research Centre, Kampala, Uganda.

Madina Guloba is a Research Fellow at the Economic Policy Research Centre, Kampala, Uganda.

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- ernments to deliver extension services.
- b) Prioritise recruitment of more extension workers: Human resource gaps arising out of low staffing levels will definitely stifle service delivery, thus calling for the recruitment of at least enough employees to fill critical technical posts. In the face of severe staffing gaps, MAAIF should leverage existing alternatives for the delivery of extension services, such as ICT and mobile phones, radio talk shows and call centres.
- c) Ensure good governance and coordination: To sufficiently respond to farmers’ needs, MAAIF (and specifically, the Directorate of Agricultural Extension Services) needs to

play its coordination role very well in harnessing inputs from other institution such as NAADS and NARO. This provision needs to be well articulated in the national policy for agricultural extension service delivery and implementation plan. Processes to formulate this policy are on-going and should be expedited.

Reference

This brief is an excerpt from a 2016 report titled “Uganda’s Agricultural Extension Systems: How Appropriate is the Single Spine Structure?” by Mildred Barungi, Madina Guloba and Annet Adong.

Endnotes

- 1 The name Single Spine is derived from its delivery system: in other words, there is a single decision-making process from the top (MAAIF), without subsidiary bodies sharing the final decision about delivery of agricultural extension services.
- 2 The vote functions usually considered by Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) when allocating funds to agriculture sector are: i) Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF); ii) Dairy Development Authority (DDA); iii) National Animal Genetic Resources Centre & Data Bank (NAGRCDB);

- iv) National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO); v) NAADS Secretariat; vi) Uganda Cotton Development Organisation (UCDO); vii) Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA); ix) Non-Sectoral Conditional Grant; x) District Agricultural Extension; xi) NAADS (Districts); xii) Production and Marketing Grant; and xiii) Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) Agriculture Grant. The latter four vote functions (i.e. x, xi, xii and xiii) are considered to be directly related to provision of agricultural extension; and hence, the most relevant for implementation of the Single Spine extension system.

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Address:
Economic Policy Research Centre
51, Pool Road, Makerere University Campus,
P. O. Box 7841 Kampala, Uganda
Tel: +256414541023/4 Fax: +256414541022
Email: eprc@eprcug.org, Website: www.eprc.or.ug

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