

PRIORITISING FARMERS' EXTENSION NEEDS IN A PUBLICLY-FUNDED CONTRACT SYSTEM OF EXTENSION: A CASE STUDY FROM MUKONO DISTRICT, UGANDA

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Abstract

Uganda is phasing out its public extension system and replacing it with a 'private service provider advisory' system. However, there is no evidence that the new extension system will be more effective than the one currently being phased out. This paper reports on a case study conducted in Mukono District to assess the new system's effectiveness in engendering grassroots participation and control of the extension agenda. Data on the process of identifying farmers' needs was collected through observation of the enterprise priority-setting and selection meetings. In addition, 120 farmers were surveyed for their perceptions of the new system. The paper discusses how the farmers' needs were identified and prioritised for delivery of extension services under the new system, and what farmers felt about it. The paper also highlights problems experienced in translating the system's lofty objectives into reality, and draws lessons for the new system as it covers more districts.

Research findings

- The needs identification process for the new contract extension system tended to assume a high degree of homogeneity among farmers and overlooked the needs of minority and primary groups.
- There was a mismatch between the time-bound contracts for service providers and the lengthy and complicated enterprise selection process, leading to service providers short-circuiting the process on a number of occasions.
- Some of the enterprise selection criteria tended to be academic, with no real practical value.
- While provision of knowledge to farmers is important, it is not a sufficient prerequisite to move agriculture forward. Other elements of the mix have to be present in sufficient quantities.

Policy implications

- There is a need to promote broad-based multipurpose farmers' organisations as a strategy for building strong farmers' institutions. The new extension organisation needs to look beyond the narrow focus of institutional mandates as it sets up 'farmer-controlled institutional structures'.
- There is a need for more flexibility in the system to reach and cater for a broader range of farmers, by means such as decentralising extension programme planning from sub-county level to primary farmers' group level.
- The enterprise selection criteria for the contract extension system should be greatly simplified to enable farmers to engage meaningfully in the process. There should be more emphasis on the use of the farmers' own criteria.
- The farmers' needs for credit and inputs should be critically examined and suitable arrangements made for their provision.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

GOU	Government of Uganda
MAAIF	Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries
NAADS	National Agricultural Advisory Services
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PMA	Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture

PRIORITISING FARMERS' EXTENSION NEEDS IN A PUBLICLY-FUNDED CONTRACT SYSTEM OF EXTENSION: A CASE STUDY FROM MUKONO DISTRICT, UGANDA

1 INTRODUCTION

Background

The predicament arising from declining per capita food production poses immense challenges for organisations engaged in promoting agricultural development. Agricultural extension services are under constant pressure to respond to the ever-growing challenges of increasing food production. This pressure 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 unable to cope with the dynamic demands of modern agriculture (Rivera et al., 2000). Processes of change have been under way for some time but in many developing countries these have been accelerated by structural adjustment reforms aimed at reducing public-sector spending (Chapman and Tripp, 2003). In the sub-Saharan African countries, the pressure to change has been exacerbated by structural adjustment programmes that have rendered the traditional public extension systems unsustainable.

In response to the growing criticism of its cost, lack of efficiency and failure to pursue programmes that foster equity, public extension systems are experimenting with a variety of approaches aimed at improving accountability and efficiency. Contracting, decentralising, cost sharing, cost recovery and withdrawal from selected services are some of the options being adopted by various governments in privatising government services (Sulaiman and Van den Ban, 2003). 'Contracting extension' is one strategy increasingly being promoted by the World Bank and other donors to expand extension coverage and improve performance and impact.

The Government of Uganda (GOU) is taking a lead in reforming its public extension system in conformity with the rest of its economic transformation programme. The Government's strategy for this transformation is spelt out in its Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) which was launched in 1997. PEAP is a medium-term development plan to guide policy and provide a framework for detailed sector and district plans. It aims to eliminate poverty, increase the incomes of poor people and ensure good governance. It is based on four pillars – one of which is directly increasing the ability of the poor to raise their incomes. Based on this pillar, the government launched the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA) in the year 2000, with a mission to eradicate poverty by transforming agriculture from a subsistence to a commercial activity. The priority areas for government action on PMA are: research and technology development, agricultural advisory services, agricultural education, access to

rural finance, agro-processing and marketing, natural resource utilisation and management, and supportive physical infrastructure.

To improve the relevance and effectiveness of agricultural advisory services under the PMA, the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) was created by an Act of Parliament in 2001 to spearhead the privatisation of the public extension system (GOU, 2001). The system is, therefore, gradually being phased out and replaced by a contract extension system or 'private service provider advisory system' coordinated by NAADS. Essentially, these service providers operate on contractual bases with farmers' organisations. They may be non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or private individuals, or firms offering advice or training on agricultural production.

NAADS is further guided by, and indeed fulfils, government policies on decentralisation, liberalisation, privatisation and increased participation of the people in decision-making. According to the Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), NAADS aims to develop a demand-driven, client-oriented and farmer-led agricultural advisory service delivery system particularly targeting the poor and women (MAAIF, 2000). The specific objectives of NAADS are to:

- increase the availability of appropriate advice and information to categories of farmers in an equitable and cost-effective manner;
- avail appropriate technologies in sufficient quantities to meet identified farmers' needs;
- assure the quality of advice and information provided to farmers by service providers;
- enhance the capacity of private-sector service providers to meet farmers' advice and information needs; and
- develop appropriate farmer-controlled institutional structures and processes for managing NAADS at all levels.

NAADS plans to achieve these objectives by providing public funds to farmers' groups on a scaled counterpart contribution basis that foresees the proportion of the farmers' contribution gradually increase. The funds are used to enable the farmers to engage private-sector agricultural advisors to provide farmer-identified priority services and to engage researchers to develop technologies at their district and sub-county level. To ensure the effectiveness of the new approach, NAADS plans to:

- provide needs-based training to service providers and farmers' leaders;
- set and enforce standards for qualification and

- performance of service providers; and
- encourage farmers to form groups from the grassroots level up to national level, to enable articulation and support of farmers' needs.

The actual implementation of the NAADS programme began with a pilot programme in 24 sub-counties, scattered over six districts (including Mukono). Since then, the number of districts has been increasing and the plan is to cover them all over a period of 25 years.

The problem

Little is known about systems for contracting extension. They are generally too new to show evidence of impact on the farming community or service provision. Case studies commissioned by the World Bank (Rivera et al., 2000) focused mainly on implementation without sound impact evaluation being done. In a related study, White and Eicher (1999) observed that there was lack of conclusive evidence that NGOs are more efficient than government or private agencies in delivering farmer support services. There is, therefore, no existing evidence to show that the new extension system set up by NAADS will be more effective than the public system being phased out. There is a need, therefore, for empirical evidence of the effectiveness of the new system. This paper reports on a study that was focused on the system's effectiveness in engendering grassroots participation and control of the extension priority-setting agenda.

Significance of the study

Contractual extension is new in Africa, so there is no experience to borrow from. As a corollary, NAADS is charting its own course and developing its own experience as it spreads across the country. Its performance will improve by self-reflection, through drawing from its own lessons and using them to make adjustments. Accordingly, this study set out to generate and provide information that could be used to improve upon the programme as it covers more districts and sub-counties. The findings can enhance NAADS activity delivery and provide valuable material for teaching at agricultural training institutions.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study was to assess the effectiveness of the contract system of extension in facilitating demand-driven processes in Mukono District. Specifically, the study sought to establish how farmers' needs are identified and prioritised for delivery of extension services under the new system, and what farmers felt about it.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Mukono District, which is located in the central region of the country, 25 km from the capital, Kampala. The district has about 800,000¹ inhabitants, 83% of whom are rural, predominantly involved in small-scale and subsistence farming. Crops

cultivated include: cassava, maize, sweet potatoes, bananas, beans and groundnuts as major food crops, and coffee, vanilla, cocoa, sugar cane and tea as the main cash crops.

The district was selected purposively for its central location, relatively well developed infrastructure and accessibility to market. Due to these characteristics, Mukono was expected to be very receptive to the new contractual extension and to provide valuable experiences for districts with similar conditions as NAADS spreads across the country. The study was done in three sub-counties – Kasawo, Nakisunga and Wakisi.

Data on the process of identifying farmers' needs was collected between October 2002 and March 2004 through direct observation of the enterprise priority-setting and selection meetings at parish and sub-county levels. In addition, 120 farmers were surveyed for their perceptions of NAADS.

NAADS operational procedure

Uganda is divided into 56 districts, each of which is divided into a number of sub-counties, depending on the size of the district. Mukono District, for example, is divided into 24 sub-counties. Each sub-county, in turn, is divided into a number of parishes. The parishes are further divided into villages. Villages, parishes, sub-counties and districts are local government administrative units.

NAADS is managing the process of shifting from a public to a private extension delivery system through a small secretariat. As a strategy for achieving its objectives, NAADS supports the establishment and development of farmers' institutions, starting with groups at village level² feeding into forums at the sub-county level. Thus a sub-county farmers' forum is composed of representatives from its various farmers' groups. The intention is to form farmers' forums at district and national levels as well.

The process through which farmers' priorities are translated into funded NAADS activities is complex. When NAADS moves into a district, its initial major activities include sensitisation of the leadership at various levels about the NAADS programme and what the conditions are for farmers participating in it. This is usually followed by institutional development activities. To assist with these, NAADS generally recruits NGOs and other suitable service providers to: mobilise the farmers; either form new groups where they do not exist already or transform existing groups to ensure compliance with the NAADS programme; form sub-county farmer forums; and provide training. Part of the training involves improving the farmers' capacity to articulate their own needs.

This is followed by the selection and prioritisation of enterprises, also facilitated by the NGOs or other suitable service providers. Enterprises are defined as crop or livestock species about whose production or post-harvest management farmers may require advice. At group level, farmers select four to six such

enterprises. (The actual number of enterprises selected is set by the NAADS secretariat, depending on what it feels would be feasible given the resources available. The criteria for identifying priorities are also given by NAADS.)

The priority lists of all the groups in a parish are then submitted to the parish level where they are subjected to a further selection and prioritisation process to produce a single priority list for the parish. In turn, the parish priority lists are submitted to the sub-county farmers' forum where the process is repeated in order to come up with a sub-county priority list.

Once the priority list has been established, each sub-county works out a budget for providing advisory services and submits it to the NAADS executive. NAADS then allocates funds to the districts based on the consolidated sub-county plans and budgets. From the funds allocated to them, the sub-counties identify suitable advisory service providers and award them contracts to organise appropriate extension activities.

2 MANAGEMENT OF THE PRIORITY-SETTING PROCESS

Criteria for selecting enterprises

The selection of enterprises is based on guidelines developed by the NAADS secretariat and disseminated to the districts and sub-counties. The actual selection process is contracted out to NGOs who organise farmers' meetings and facilitate the process of compiling the priority enterprises, which are then consolidated at parish and sub-county levels. The NGOs are also responsible for identifying and compiling a list of the major constraints for the selected priority enterprises for the sub-county.

The enterprise selection guidelines are based on key attributes considered to be important for the various enterprises. The attributes are weighted according to their perceived relative importance. Below are the attributes with their weightings in parentheses.

- Profitability of the enterprise (4): Factors considered under this attribute are costs of production, consumer demand for the product, yields, scale of production, and efficiency of resource use.
- Availability of market, including size and requirement of markets, (3): Consideration of this attribute is based on the perception that some enterprises are more 'marketable' than others, depending on factors like location, infrastructure, processing skills and climate.
- Low financial outlay (2): i.e. initial capital needs (including land), variable production costs (raw materials, hired labour, etc.) and market research.
- Low risks (2): Factors considered under this attribute include ecological and climatic requirements, conflict trends, and elasticity of demand, storage requirements, perishability, and availability of inputs.
- Farmers' production knowledge (1): i.e. whether farmers have the necessary experience.

The total score for each enterprise is calculated by (a) multiplying the number of farmers who mention the attribute by the weight of that attribute, and (b) totalling these weighted attributes. The enterprises are then ranked in order of their total scores. The first six (or however many NAADS is prepared to fund) are then given priority at the respective level (group, parish, or sub-county).

The facilitators are expected to prepare a matrix showing all the enterprises against the enterprise selection criteria explained above. The following questions guide the process of completing the matrix for each enterprise:

- How many farmers know that this enterprise is profitable?
- How many farmers agree that the products from the enterprise are easy to market?
- How many farmers agree that the financial outlay is low?
- How many farmers agree that the risks from the enterprise are low?
- How many farmers have experience in the enterprise?

Positive responses to the questions are indicated by a show of hands.

The priority enterprises are subjected to an additional analysis to identify major constraints for each one, using guidelines also set by NAADS.

Criteria for identifying major constraints to selected enterprises

After selecting the enterprises, the farmers consider each one and highlight two or three priority constraints that are preventing, or could prevent, its success. The facilitators give some help with this process:

- The farmers are guided to list the problems related to each enterprise. Each problem can be written on a separate piece of paper or card (or an agreed symbol may be used to represent each).
- It may be necessary to group the problems into themes such as soil, water, pests and diseases, production process, post-harvest, marketing, etc.
- The farmers are helped to discuss and link the problems to identify their root causes. Asking how the problem comes about and how many farmers are affected by it leads to an understanding of the extent of a problem and which categories of farmers it affects.
- During the process a problem tree is constructed to identify the constraints.
- The farmers are guided to rank these constraints. This helps to determine the three to six priority constraints for which the farmers can request advisory or technology development services.

The selected enterprises and their constraints are compiled in a format designed by NAADS and submitted to the next level in the hierarchy (parish or sub-county).

Selecting sub-county priority enterprises from parish proposals

Once the parish proposals, including priority enterprises and related constraints, have been received at the sub-county offices, the farmers' forum, assisted by technical experts and local government staff, work through them, using matrix scoring and ranking, to identify the priorities for sub-county advisory services and technology development in each enterprise. The priorities thus identified eventually go into the sub-county NAADS plans and are translated into contracts for service providers.

The selected sub-county priorities are also subjected to yet another set of analysis of cross-cutting issues.

Analysis of sub-county priority enterprises for cross-cutting issues

The selected sub-county priorities are subjected to three different types of analysis: poverty targeting, gender mainstreaming, and natural resources management and productivity.

Concerning poverty targeting, the following questions are asked about each enterprise in the sub-county meeting:

- Who are in the target group (the vulnerable or not)? By what proportion?
- Who are the participants (stakeholders, semi-commercial or commercial)? At what level (as owners or labourers)?
- What are the major resources required? Do the poor have access to them?
- What are the specific constraints to the poor being involved in the enterprise? How can these constraints be addressed?
- What are the specific opportunities for the poor?
- Who are the major beneficiaries?

The gender mainstreaming enterprises are analysed using the following guidelines:

- Who are the participants (men, women or children)?
- What are the roles involved in this enterprise?
- What are the major resources required?
- Who has access to the required resources?
- Who has control over the required resources?
- What are the specific constraints for each? How can these constraints be addressed?
- What are the specific opportunities for each?
- Who are the major beneficiaries?
- Does the enterprise promote balanced development? If not, why should it be supported (its strong points)?
- How will the gaps be addressed?

With respect to natural resources management and productivity, the analysis involves two aspects: impact of the enterprise on the natural resources and activities involved in the enterprise. On a scale of +5 (significant positive impact) to -5 (significant negative impact), and where 0 is 'no impact' or 'irrelevant', each enterprise is assessed for its impact on: soils, water, wetlands, natural

forests and forest products, capture fisheries, and biodiversity/wild life.

To assess the enterprise activities, particularly involvement of input use, a scale similar to the one above is used. For each enterprise, the facilitators establish if the enterprise involves agro-chemicals (fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides), water storage (tanks, dams) for livestock or aquaculture, water extraction (pumping), irrigation, and agro-forestry.

3 ENTERPRISE SELECTION PROCESS AS OBSERVED IN MUKONO DISTRICT

An overview of the actual enterprise selection process in three sub-counties

As pointed out earlier, this paper is based on a study carried out in three sub-counties of Mukono District – Kasawo, Nakisunga and Wakisi. The actual application of the NAADS guidelines varied substantially between these sub-counties, depending on the facilitators. In Nakisunga the process started with farmers' groups then proceeded to parish and sub-county levels. In Kasawo and Wakisi, enterprise selection took place only at parish and sub-county levels. Whereas, in Nakisunga, farmers' groups identified their priorities which their leaders then took to (and defended at) the parish level, in Kasawo and Wakisi, farmers' groups had no opportunity to discuss their needs among themselves. Instead, individual farmers from various village-level groups registered in the parish who managed to attend the parish meetings were asked to list the crops and animals of interest to them. The enterprise lists generated were then analysed using the guidelines discussed above. If there were two or more selection meetings within the same parish, the selections from the various meetings were compiled to form the parish proposal.

Progression from parish to Kasawo sub-county

Parish enterprise selection meetings in Kasawo sub-county

In Kasawo sub-county, the needs identification process began at parish level. Two to three enterprise selection meetings were organised by a local NGO contracted by NAADS in each of Kasawo's six parishes. The lists generated at these meetings were consolidated into a single parish proposal which was then forwarded to the sub-county.

The following account is based on observations made in one of three parish meetings held in Namaliri parish. The meeting was attended by 17 farmers (11 women and six men) representing five farmers' groups. This attendance was poor considering that each group had an average membership of 20. Asked why this was so, one of the group chairpersons replied that most farmers had lost hope because NAADS activities were not taking place as fast as they had anticipated. Some farmers also felt they were involved in a worthless exercise and that

Table 1 Enterprise selection process matrix for Namaliri parish

Enterprise	Profitability-high (weight=4)	Ease of market (weight=3)	Low risks (weight = 2)	Financial outlay low (weight=2)	Production knowledge (weight =1)	Total score
Banana	12 = 48	20 = 60	19 = 38	18 = 36	14 = 14	296
Pigs	11 = 44	13 = 39	10 = 20	13 = 26	14 = 14	143
Local goats	04 = 16	14 = 42	15 = 15	14 = 28	13 = 13	129
Maize	15 = 60	02 = 06	09 = 18	13 = 26	13 = 13	123
Vanilla	15 = 60	10 = 30	02 = 04	07 = 14	09 = 09	117
Pumpkin	06 = 24	18 = 54	10 = 20	15 = 30	09 = 09	107
Local cattle	06 = 24	10 = 30	10 = 20	04 = 08	11 = 11	93
Rice	05 = 20	11 = 33	14 = 28	00 = 00	04 = 04	85
Melon	06 = 24	04 = 12	04 = 08	08 = 16	05 = 05	65
Exotic cattle	10 = 40	07 = 21	00 = 00	00 = 00	03 = 03	64
Moringa	03 = 12	06 = 18	06 = 12	03 = 06	03 = 03	51
Fish farming	04 = 16	08 = 24	01 = 01	00 = 00	02 = 02	44
Chickens	06 = 24	03 = 09	00 = 00	00 = 00	04 = 04	37
Tomato	05 = 20	00 = 00	00 = 00	00 = 00	06 = 06	26
Exotic goats	03 = 12	02 = 06	01 = 02	00 = 00	05 = 05	25
Passion fruit	02 = 08	02 = 06	01 = 02	00 = 00	03 = 03	20
Eucalyptus	02 = 08	02 = 06	01 = 02	01 = 02	02 = 02	20
Coffee	00 = 00	01 = 03	00 = 00	00 = 00	17 = 17	20
Pineapple	02 = 08	03 = 09	00 = 00	00 = 00	02 = 02	19
Mushroom	00 = 00	01 = 03	01 = 02	02 = 04	01 = 01	10

the things they were selecting would be turned down at the sub-county meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting, the facilitator requested the farmers present to list all the crop and livestock enterprises of interest to them. The farmers randomly mentioned the enterprises listed in Table 1. These enterprises were then analysed using the five factors prescribed by NAADS, described above. The resulting matrix, in order of priority, is shown in Table 1. The score of each criterion is the number of farmers agreeing that the criterion characterises the particular enterprise, multiplied by the criterion weight.

The six highest-scoring enterprises became the priorities in this meeting. These were banana, pigs, local goats, maize, vanilla and pumpkin. According to NAADS, the justification for using their criteria was to focus on commercially-oriented enterprises. However, the ability of the criteria to deliver the intended outcome is questionable. For instance, in none of the enterprises mentioned was the farmers' production knowledge established. Instead, 'experience' was determined by simply recording the number of those involved in the production of the enterprises. It was assumed that thorough knowledge of an enterprise was the same as simply having experience of its management. Some of the farmers complained that the arithmetic involved in the whole exercise was too complex and that they did not know how they came up with the priorities.

The next stage in the Namaliri meeting was to identify problems and suggest possible solutions to them. Almost in a chorus, some of the farmers shouted, 'We want money'. They complained that they had gained nothing so far, yet NAADS was in its second year of operation. 'Why do you always tell us there is no money when you come in expensive vehicles like this?' shouted some farmers. They complained that NAADS concentrates on the management of crops and animals, which they said they knew enough about already. They mentioned that the Uganda National Farmers Association and other NGOs had already conducted training courses on these subjects for the farmers, so NAADS was contributing nothing new. Instead of superfluous knowledge, they wanted inputs and money.

The meeting ended inconclusively shortly after this confusion without analysis of all the enterprises. Some of the farmers said they were tired of the tedious planning process without seeing any substantial benefits.

The report from this meeting, with the incomplete analysis, was combined with reports from the other two meetings in the parish to produce a single parish report, and the top six enterprises were forwarded to the sub-county.

The sub-county enterprise selection meeting

The Kasawo sub-county enterprise selection meeting was attended by 10 people, including members of the

Table 2 Sub-county priority list developed from parish lists

Enterprise	Kabimbiri	Namaliri	Kakunakulu	Kigogola	Kasana	Kitovu	Total scores
Banana	161	296	289	94	341	104	1284
Chicken	250		284	125	388	202	1249
Vanilla	202	117			498		817
Cattle	180			104	415	99	798
Pigs	165	143		77	355		740
Beans	222		311				533
Potato					352		352
Coffee			283	54			337
Goats		129		84		95	308
Vegetable			302				302
Maize		123				113	236
Passion fruit			232				232
Pumpkin		107					107
Cocoa						102	102

NB: Total scores = Sum of scores from the six parishes

sub-county forum, the sub-county NAADS Coordinator, other sub-county extension workers and some advisory service providers. Reports from all the parishes were summarised and presented. The scores from each of the six parishes in Kasawo, including Namaliri, were summed up and a sub-county priority list worked out from them (Table 2).

The six highest-scoring enterprises became the sub-county priority. Participants agreed to combine beans, pumpkins and vegetables to form one enterprise – vegetables. This raised the ranking of vegetables from number six to three. In the end, Kasawo sub-county's six enterprises for 2003–4 were, in order of importance, bananas, local chicken, vegetables, vanilla, cattle and pigs.

Comparison of priority lists generated at parish level with the final sub-county list (Table 3) reveals that some parishes failed to obtain support for a number of their preferred enterprises and in some cases were going to get services for enterprises they had not considered as priorities. Only one parish, Kabimbiri, got all that it wanted. Kitovu missed 50% of its preferred enterprises, three of which, goats, maize and cocoa, were not approved. Instead, they were going to get advisory services on beans (vegetables), vanilla and pigs.

No prioritisation method is without its problems and the process will always involve compromises. The comments of some of the farmers at the parish meeting reveal that they are aware that they are participating in a voting exercise that involves much time-consuming work at the parish and village level to derive a small set of priorities for the entire sub-county. It is thus easy to sympathise with their frustration. In addition, the scoring method appears to have serious flaws. First, although it is understood that the final sub-county list can only include six enterprises, there seems no good reason not to allow scores from more than six enterprises to be carried forward from the parish level, where they might influence the final sub-county ranking. Second, each parish's score for a particular enterprise is influenced in part by the number of farmers that vote. Thus a high score for an enterprise is partly a function of the total number of farmers available in a parish meeting to raise their hands. Some form of 'proportional representation' may be relevant, but it should presumably be based on

Table 3 Extent to which the selection process met farmers' needs

Parish	No. submitted by parish	No. approved by sub-county	% priorities approved	Total score of top six enterprises (see Table 2)
Kabimbiri	6	6	100	1180
Kasana	6	5	83	2349
Kakunakulu	6	5	83	1701
Namaliri	6	4	67	915
Kigogola	6	4	67	538
Kitovu	6	3	50	715

Table 4 Enterprise analysis for impact on natural resources in Kasawo

Criteria	Banana	Chicken	Vegetable	Vanilla	Cattle	Pigs
What is the effect of the enterprise on?						
Soil	+2	+1	+2	+4	+1	+2
Water	+3	0	+3	+3	+1	+3
Wetland	-5	0	+4	-5	+1	-2
Natural forests/ products	+4	+2	+4	+2	+2	+1
Captive fishes	-5	+1	+1	-5	+2	+1
Bio-diversity	0	+1	+3	+1	+1	+1

-5 significant negative impact; 0 no impact or not relevant; +5 significant positive effect

Table 5 Enterprise analysis for 'other' issues in Kasawo

Issue	Banana	Chicken	Vegetable	Vanilla	Cattle	Pigs
Access to information	4	3	3	4	4	4
Improve access to inputs	3	4	3	4	3	4
Increase employment	3	3	4	4	4	4
Increase market information	4	4	4	4	4	4
Reduce market susceptibility	2	3	2	3	2	3
The disabled	2	3	2	2	1	2
Women	4	4	4	4	2	4
The elderly	2	2	2	3	2	4
The young	2	3	4	4	2	4

0 will not address the issue; 5 strongly addresses the issue

parish population rather than meeting attendance. The problem is illustrated by the final column in Table 3, which simply sums the parish columns in Table 2. It is evident that those parishes that had a higher number of total votes were those that were more likely to see a higher percentage of their priorities approved at the sub-county level.

The sub-county priority list was subjected to another analysis based on the impact of each enterprise on natural resources (Table 4). The facilitator in the sub-county meeting asked the effect of each enterprise on soil, water, wetland, natural forests, captive fishes and bio-diversity. The table indicates that banana and vanilla were the enterprises considered to have a negative influence on wetlands and captive fisheries, although these were thought to have a positive impact on soils and forest products. Vegetable production was considered to have a very positive influence on natural resources. In this analysis, enterprises that involved the use of agrochemicals – fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides – were thought to negatively influence natural resources, whereas those that involve water storage (tanks and dams), water extraction (pumping), irrigation and agro-forestry were considered to have a positive impact on natural resources.

The priority list was subjected to further analysis for yet more concerns. For each enterprise, the facilitator asked whether advisory services would be likely to address the issues of: access to information, access to inputs, employment, market information use, reducing susceptibility to market, and addressing issues of disabled persons, women, the elderly and the young. A summary of their analysis is presented in Table 5 below.

According to the facilitator, the objective of this analysis was to identify issues that needed to be addressed by the service providers which had to be included in their terms of reference. In this case, the lower the score, the stronger the need. However, this did not seem to be the case when designing the advisory needs of the farmers. The emphasis was more on using the prescribed procedure in a mechanical fashion as opposed to using the outcome to improve service provision. In general, the analysis based on the above two additional sets of criteria failed to generate meaningful outcomes. Neither the service providers nor

the farmers had a full understanding of the purpose of these two exercises and the analysis was done simply to comply with the guidelines provided by NAADS.

4 FARMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEW APPROACH

A survey was conducted of 120 farmers in three sub-counties (Nakisunga, Wakisi and Kasawo) for their perceptions of the new approach to providing agricultural advisory services. Their reactions are based on various experiences with NAADS to date, including participation in some training, mobilisation and planning activities. The farmers' responses are summarised in Table 6.

Need for inputs and credit

By far the most frequent response involved a call to link service provision to inputs and credit. The majority (72%) of the farmers interviewed felt that NAADS should provide agricultural credit and inputs for them to be able to apply the knowledge and skills they had received. One farmer asked what was the point of spending a lot of money on advice when there were no seeds available at the start of the rains. The chairperson of one group predicted that, if three years of NAADS activity passed without any loans, then activities would stall. He stressed that very few farmers were looking for knowledge, and felt that NAADS was not serious; instead of the expected assistance, it was only providing knowledge. A 60-year-old farmer, who was also a sub-county councillor, suggested that instead of providing food and drink at meetings, farmers should be given

Table 6 Survey of 120 farmers' perceptions of the contract system*

Perception	Frequency	%
NAADS should provide credit and inputs	86	72
The system is good	42	35
The system does not benefit the poor	16	13
Monitoring and follow-up should be improved	14	12
Food and drink should be provided	08	07

*Multiple responses possible

seeds instead, otherwise NAADS would not succeed. He added that the farmers were too poor to apply the knowledge it was providing.

In general, the farmers asked for free agricultural inputs, loans or credit facilities for all group members with little or no interest. They suggested provision of improved seeds, agro-chemicals and planting materials free or at reduced prices. Some of them asked for money to pay for wheelbarrows, farm labour, or tractor hire services, or to fund individual members' activities. Many of the farmers were pleased with a bull servicing scheme that had been introduced earlier in which local breeds were improved by crossing them with improved breeds. This had led them to ask for free dairy cattle and cross-bred chicken for group members as well.

It is of course not unusual to find farmers requesting credit and inputs when asked for their reactions to any agricultural service scheme, but these responses certainly also reflect frustration with an elaborate consultation process that has so far delivered little that is tangible. To the farmers, the most important issue was not really access to agricultural knowledge and information but how to apply the two on their farms. That is why many of them felt separating advisory service provision and agricultural input provision was a mistake.

The system is good and performing well

On the other hand, 35% of the farmers interviewed had a favourable attitude towards NAADS. They believed it was doing well in its present form. In particular, they appreciated the training, seminars, sensitisation and mobilisation activities provided through the new system. Some of them called for more sensitisation workshops, training in cattle management and high-value crops such as vanilla and cardamom, as well as training in group dynamics and leadership, especially at village level. Many of these farmers had been able to take advantage of various training activities and were in hopes that these might continue (and expand into broader service provision).

The poor do not benefit from the system

Several farmers (13%) did not think NAADS had conferred any benefits on them, and complained about the way programme resources were being spent. Some of them suggested that the service providers and NAADS employees were benefiting from NAADS at the expense of the farmers. They also felt that farmers' representatives at sub-county level were benefiting from the allowances they got for attending meetings, while the poor farmers were left out.

Monitoring should be improved

About 12% of the respondents emphasised the need for NAADS to monitor field activities, as a means of following up training. They suggested that NAADS staff should visit farmers' fields for them to understand the farmers' diverse needs, and encourage them to adopt what they had been trained in, as well as to monitor

projects already implemented by farmers' groups. They also suggested that the service providers should check whether what they had taught was being adopted. They argued that lack of follow-up by service providers leads to lack of continuity. In addition, they suggested that some individuals could be identified and trained as local trainers. Such individuals would then be available at the village level to give technical guidance after the service provider's contract had expired.

Food and drink should be provided

Whereas some of the demand for more training meetings was genuinely motivated, the food and drink provided at meetings in the early stages of the NAADS awareness campaign may have been the attraction. During this period, meetings were held in the mornings and farmers were given lunch or lunch money. This practice was particularly encouraged by an external consultant from International Service Group, who insisted that farmers should be paid lunch and transport allowances. It was later realised that this practice tended to attract artificial interest (with some farmers bringing along their spouses so that they could have lunch together) and that it was not sustainable. The meetings were then changed to the afternoon to allow farmers to eat at home before the meetings. Even then, farmers still expected, and continued to demand, lunch allowances. About 7% of the farmers interviewed regretted the decision to stop serving food and drink during training meetings, pointing out that some NGOs which have maintained the practice continue to benefit from good attendance at their meetings.

5 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An indispensable factor for the protection and enhancement of the smallholder agricultural sector is the existence of strong farmers' organisations that are capable, motivated and sufficiently independent to effectively represent the interests of their membership. However, the current NAADS efforts at establishing such organisations appear to be focused merely on fulfilling institutional mandates. Groups are formed as vehicles for providing agricultural advisory services. This is unlikely to lead to strong, independent institutions that are sustainable beyond NAADS. There is a need to aim for broader multi-purpose groups that will work in pursuit of a comprehensive range of farmers' needs. An umbrella farmer organisation, the Uganda National Farmers' Federation, already exists. This could provide a useful framework for developing a strong farmers' movement in the country.

The selection of priority enterprises for attention by the sub-county involves a high level of farmer participation. The farmers had a chance to debate enterprises of interest to them and discuss the type of advice they needed. The advisory service agenda was based on these debates. However, the management of the process of enterprise selection tended to be externally driven and exceptionally rigid and mechanical. The number of

enterprises to be selected, the criteria for selecting them, the advisory administrative unit to be covered (sub-county), and farmers to participate in the process were all determined by NAADS. In this regard, therefore, the system was found to be top-down and prescriptive – a factor which tended to cause problems with translating some of the new system's lofty objectives into actual practice. For example, the prescribed criteria tended to be too mathematical and abstract for farmers to make sense of the process. It required relatively high levels of literacy, and the lengthy debates precluded women and the poor. Some of the criteria were so abstract that even the facilitators did not understand them well. In the end they were used as an academic exercise (because the facilitator had to be seen to have used the criteria), but did not add any value to the prioritisation and design process.

Perhaps the major weakness observed in the system was the idea of limiting the number of enterprises to between three and six. This not only reduced the amount of advice farmers could get, contrary to NAADS's stated objective of '...increasing the availability of appropriate advice...', but also tended to treat farmers in a sub-county as a homogeneous group and ignored individual group needs therein. As the study showed, some farmers' group missed receiving advice on up to 50% of the enterprises they had wanted, and got advice on some other enterprise instead. In addition, the less specialised food growers, who are not linked to affiliated farmers' organisations, are not reached by the prioritisation process.

Many farmers appreciated the knowledge they were getting through the new system, but they also felt that knowledge alone was not sufficient for increasing agricultural production. They wanted NAADS to provide agricultural credit and inputs to enable them to put any new knowledge into practice. The farmers also wanted to see a more continuous presence of advisory service providers rather than that provided by a time-bound, short-term contract system. They suggested the training of local paraprofessionals who could be available to farmers when the short-term contracts were over, to monitor the application of the new knowledge and provide advice as the need arose.

From the above discussion, it can be said that:

- There is a need to promote broad-based multipurpose farmers' organisations as a strategy for building strong farmers' institutions. NAADS, therefore, needs to look

beyond the narrow focus of institutional mandates as it sets up 'farmer-controlled institutional structures'.

- There is a need for more flexibility in the system, such as decentralising extension programme planning from sub-county level to primary farmers' group level, in order to reach and cater for a broader range of farmers.
- The enterprise selection criteria in the planning process should be greatly simplified to enable farmers to engage in the process meaningfully. The best option may be to adopt the farmers' own criteria.
- Farmers' needs for credit and inputs should be critically examined and suitable arrangements made for their provision.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Based on the national census of 2002
- 2 Farmers' groups are usually formed within single villages, although they can also cut across village boundaries depending on the interests and proximity of members.

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