

Research Application Summary

Impact of agricultural extension services towards agricultural productivity and rural livelihood development: The case of Arua District, Uganda

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Abstract

The role of Agricultural extension services in teaching farmers how to improve their productivity and markets is key in enhancing farmer livelihoods. Extension is also critical to move research from the lab to the field and to ensure a return on investment in research by translating new knowledge into innovative practices. For sustainable inclusive development to be achieved by rural poor who constitute the majority of farmers, extension services must basically consider improving farmers's livelihoods. To achieve this, extension workers must start by getting the local knowledge and then later introduce new ideas to build on the local ideas. Certainly there are many principles that underline extension services. Unfortunately, most of these principles are deterred leaving farmers unable to increase their productivity through improved farming methods and policies. A key aspect is mainising tream gender-sensitive agricultural Extension through farmer group approaches especially since women provide most labour in agriculture. This paper describes a Farmer-to-Farmer extension approach being implemented by the Farmers' Groups Network (for Arua District Farmers Association (ARUDIFA) in northern Uganda which has promoted women participation in Projects that enhance livelihoods and agricultural productivity. The paper aims to examine the role of agricultural extension *vis-a-vis* the growing economic stagnation in agricultural sector coupled with analysis of policies critical for sustainable livelihood development and transformation of rural communities.

Key words: Agricultural Extension, Arua, gender, livelihoods, knowledge, northern Uganda

Résumé

Le rôle des services de vulgarisation dans la formation des producteurs sur comment améliorer leur productivité et les marchés est la clé dans le renforcement des moyens d'existence du producteur. La vulgarisation est aussi cruciale pour faire déplacer la recherche du laboratoire au champ et pour assurer un retour sur investissement dans la recherche en traduisant la nouvelle connaissance en pratiques innovantes. Pour qu'un développement inclusif durable soit atteint par les populations pauvres rurales que constitue la majorité des producteurs, les services de vulgarisation doivent fondamentalement considérer l'amélioration des moyens d'existence des producteurs. Pour atteindre cela, les agents vulgarisateurs doivent commencer par recueillir les connaissances endogènes

avant d'introduire de nouvelles idées pour améliorer les idées locales. Certainement, il y a beaucoup de principes qui soutiennent les services de vulgarisation. Malheureusement, la plupart de ces principes sont dépassés laissant les producteurs incapables de voir leur rendement augmenté à travers des méthodes et des politiques de production améliorées. L'aspect clé est la prise en compte de la vulgarisation basée sur l'approche genre à travers des groupes de producteurs spécialement puisque les femmes fournissent plus de main d'œuvre en agriculture. Ce papier décrit l'approche de diffusion entre agriculteurs mise en œuvre par le réseau des groupements d'agriculteurs (l'association des agriculteurs du district d'ARUA (ARUDIFA)) dans la région Nord d'Ouganda qui a promu la participation des femmes dans les projets qui renforcent les conditions d'existence et la productivité agricole. Le papier a pour objectif d'examiner le rôle de la vulgarisation agricole vis-à-vis de la stagnation de la croissance économique dans le secteur agricole couplé avec l'analyse des critiques politiques pour le développement durable de l'existence et la transformation des communautés rurales.

Mots clés: Vulgarisation agricole, Arua, approcher genre, existence, connaissance, Nord Ouganda

Introduction

Arua District is found in West Nile region located in Northern Uganda on the border with Sudan and the Democratic of Congo (DRC) to the North and West, respectively. Arua district has several multi stakeholder organizations partnering to champion agricultural growth and development in the district. The stakeholders range from Government parastatal bodies, schools, Agricultural research centers, Non-Governmental Organizations, and many others that do not operate autonomously but rather rely on each other's staff expertise for activity design and implementation. The prominent Agricultural Extension bodies in the district are Arua District Farmers Association (ARUDIFA), Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD), Churches Around Richmond Involved To Assure Shelter (CARITAS), Rural Initiative for Community Empowerment West Nile (RICE West Nile) and Alliance one Limited. These organizations engage in community transformation through various projects that aim to improve livelihoods of the youths and women who are most times vulnerable to social-economic discrimination. The existence of organizations in the area is multifaceted by the fact that farming is the predominant economic activity of the area hence the reason for the existence of many players in the sector of Agriculture in the District.

Majority of the communities in Arua are rural people, largely farmers, characterised by widespread poverty that hinders access to most of modern farming technologies. Hence majority (90%) of the communities practice subsistence farming. Amidst the existence of organizations in the district, majority of the people still languish in poverty, yet one would expect ample extension service delivery to the communities that are so dependent on farming (Lakwo *et al.*, 2008). Unfortunately, farmers in the region have very low access to extension services as compared to the national average score. Hence, with limited exposure to modern agro-technologies from research institutions, limited marketing pathways and product update, subsistence farming will continue to prevail in the rural farming

households. As such the crucial role of Agricultural extension in community transformation needs to be promoted and integrated with suitable policies that support Agricultural trade to bolster social-economic growth in the communities. This is because of the paramount importance of basic knowledge through extension services to supplement local knowledge which is key in transition from subsistence to commercial farming. This paper explores the development status of the rural communities in Arua in relation to the impact of extension services delivery on agricultural production in Arua district.

Methodology

The study employed a rapid data collection technique. This rapid approach was favored because given the data needs for decision-making, conducting a baseline survey in all the districts covering all the development sector is cost prohibitive. The designed rapid data collection template was pre-tested and refined with inputs from representatives from different local government staff, and some information was obtained from Non-Governmental organizations that constitute the majority of the extension service providers in Arua district.

The search for data to fill the templates started with literature review of secondary data sources, notably government ministries and development actors. This was followed by face to face interviews with District Local Governments officials and field extension officers in the region to collect primary data. Contacts were made with various departments including the District Planning Units and the District NGO Forums. Informal discussions were also held with the district leaders and farmer groups on their perception on Agricultural extension services given the fact that they are the beneficiaries of Agricultural projects in their localities.

Results and Discussions

From the preliminary assessments the Agricultural Extension in the district is dominated by Non-Government Organizations whose focus areas change according to the purpose of funding from the donors (Table 1). However, most prioritize Agriculture based activities. Sometimes the availability of extension provision varies from one community to another and even at district level. Hence, with limited exposure to modern agro-technologies from research institutions, subsistence farming will continue to fail to improve the livelihoods of rural farming households. To exert positive influences on agricultural productivity and better livelihood, access to agricultural extension services needs to be significantly bolstered in the district to promote adoption of modern agricultural technologies, promotion of farmer participation in productivity-enhancement practices, facilitating easy access to education and credit facilities, and increasing participation of female farmers. This should be coupled with Governments and various institutions efforts in the District to support training more extension officers, given their essential role on facilitating agricultural technology adoption.

Future studies on adoption of agricultural technologies and access to extension services in developing countries should adopt empirical approaches that take into account inclusivity so as to achieve the impacts of productive agricultural technologies and interventions (Emmanuel *et al.*, 2006). Empirical analysis of determinants of transformative Agricultural

Extension services responsive to farmers needs is a dynamic approach that involves participation from several actors ranging from Governments, Education, Civil society organizations, Research and Training, Policy and Advocacy. The other important actors include community based organizations and the farming communities themselves who engage in income generating and food security programme. This study found out that adequate access to extension services have a higher profitability from quality productivity i.e access to fertilizer has increased production. This suggests that extension delivery should be given the necessary attention by policy makers, the aim is to increase productivity and rural livelihoods in Arua district and west Nile at large.

Table 1. Different extension services provided by community-based farmer organizations in Arua district, northern Uganda

Organizations	Type of service	Relative participation (%)
Arua District Framers Association (ARUDIFA)	Education and Training	45
Rural Initiative Community Empowerment West Nile	Finance and Research	25
Community Empowerment for Rural Development	Research and Education	20
Others	Education, Training, Research	10
Total Percentage		100

Conclusion

Agricultural extension systems provide different types of extension embedded in modern agriculture and principles that co-determine relevant extension, and in this sense allows understanding of the complexity of agricultural extension delievery. However, its holism is also a pitfall as it allows for many unclear interpretations, which complicates clear understanding of extension itself. Hence, more work needs to be done conceptually and empirically to improve extension services delivery not only in Arua district, but also in other agricultural farming communities. The results of this study indicated that access to extension services significantly promoted improvement in rural livelihoods through enhanced agricultural productivity. This finding emphasises the critical role played by agricultural extension in promoting productivity among farmers in Arua district. This study concludes that socio-economic, institutional and tehnological variables are crucial in the delievery of agricultural extension services in Arua district.

Acknowledgment

This paper is the contribution to the Sixth African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference held 22-26 October 2018 in Nairobi, Kenya.

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