

Linking Farmers and Policymakers: Experiences from Kabale District, Uganda



One of the envisioned outcomes of more participatory, demand-driven agricultural research and development is direct input from farmers into policy formulation and implementation. This represents a significant challenge from the standpoint of organizing farmers and civil society to lobby for policy change given a long history of top-down policy formulation and implementation. Similarly, policymakers are challenged to enhance their responsiveness to civil society.

The National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) was first implemented in 2002 as part of Uganda's Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture (PMA). Broadly, it aims to decentralize agricultural services and to foster a farmer-owned and private sector-serviced extension system.

During the pilot phase of NAADS, farmers and stakeholders at the country level selected non-government organizations (NGOs) to help in sensitizing people about NAADS, in group formation and registration, and in agroenterprise selection. Upon completion, the contracted organizations felt that the process had created more questions than answers. Farmers voiced concern over financial management of service contracts and the need to prioritize single

NAADS envisions a decentralized, farmer-owned and private sector-serviced extension system that contributes to a more market-oriented, specialized and privatized agricultural sector. Principles intended to guide the implementation of NAADS include: (a) a pro-poor focus; (b) more effective service delivery; (c) market-oriented production; (d) farmer empowerment; (e) gender mainstreaming; and (f) sustainable natural resource management.



enterprises given the complexity of their farming systems and production goals, while NGOs were concerned about lack of clarity on how to integrate “cross-cutting principles” (gender, equity, sustainability) and ensure farmer representation. A shared vision emerged from these discussions, leading to the formation of the Coalition for Effective Extension Delivery (CEED) by research and development organizations involved in NAADS implementation in Kabale District. These include the African Highlands Initiative, CARE International, Kabale District Farmers’ Association and Africa 2000 Network.

CEED’s aim is to enable demand-driven development in Kabale District, and to share the experiences derived from this with other development actors. The Coalition’s immediate focus was to operationalize the NAADS framework through a participatory action learning (PAL) process at the local level, enabling farmers to identify and address structural bottlenecks hindering the implementation of NAADS.

Facilitating Grassroots Participation

The following steps were followed in facilitating or encouraging grassroots participation:

1. Identifying Stakeholder Concerns

The Coalition began to formulate an intervention strategy by systematically documenting the concerns of diverse actors about the NAADS process. This was desirable because it captured priority issues that are situation- or actor-specific. This was needed at the local level where wealth, age, gender and levels of political prestige are likely to influence what priority issues emerge. It is equally important at other levels within the NAADS structure, where one’s position influences how problems are perceived.



Representatives of different actors within the NAADS system were interviewed to identify key “hot spots” by listing and prioritizing the problems that have arisen throughout the NAADS implementation process. Significant overlap in the issues identified by different stakeholders (Table 1) indicate that the issues are systemic (felt throughout the system) and of high priority.

Table 1. 'Hot Spots' Identified by Diverse Actors in the NAADS System

Hot Spot	Dimensions of the Problem
Agroenterprise selection/development	Time is too short to address complex selection criteria (sustainability, equity, profitability, capital); the principle of enterprise specialization is questioned.
Roles and responsibilities	Ambiguity of roles and responsibilities in NAADS implementation manual and absence of clear checks and balances in operations, contributing to abuse of funds and usurpation of decision-making authority.
Funding and financial accountability	Capital for inputs does not accompany service provision; disbursement not synchronous with agricultural cycle; distribution is inequitable (flat rate irrespective of sub-county population) and insufficient; sub-county fund allocation not transparent.
Inclusiveness and empowerment	Farmer fora not considered representative; equity is not operationalized for agroenterprise or within program design; farmer capacity to effect change and awareness of legal basis for empowerment is still lacking.
Service delivery	Insufficient quality of service providers; required qualifications (diploma) limit use of local experts; coverage is biased toward more accessible villages and farms; farmers lack control over contracting; monitoring of services is ineffective.

2. Identify Critical Bottlenecks

Two primary bottlenecks were found to contribute to identified “Hot Spots” and hinder the spontaneous decentralization of decision-making under NAADS:

- ❑ **Ineffective information flow.** While NAADS policy dictates decentralization of roles and responsibilities, poor communication of policy guidelines hindered farmers’ understanding of their rights and roles.
- ❑ **Usurpation of decision-making authority.** The failure of actors to fully internalize their new roles and responsibilities under a decentralized decision-making model allowed the process to be co-opted (both intentionally and unintentionally) by more powerful actors at all levels.



3. Formalize Partnership

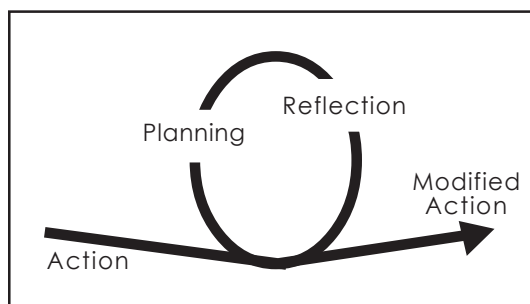
CEED members formalized their partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding that clearly specified the objective of the partnership, its guiding values, and the responsibilities of member organizations. The primary objective as defined by CEED members is to build people’s capacity to influence policies, structures and systems that affect their livelihood and access to agricultural services.

4. Participatory Action Learning (PAL)

The core approach to engage communities in analysis and improvement of policy formulation and implementation has been the PAL process at the sub-county level. The objective of PAL has been to work through major hot spots, focusing on critical bottlenecks that hinder effective implementation of either NAADS policy or of the values underpinning these policies (in cases where the policy itself is somehow deficient).

Participatory action learning is composed of a series of steps, including: planning, action, reflection and re-planning (Figure 1). Facilitating farmers through critical reflection and action enabled them to target the “power and information bottleneck” at sub-county level and within the farmer forum itself. This led to the formation of parish-level councils composed of representatives of farmers’ groups in each village. This independent council links the grassroots with the sub-county farmer fora, providing a means for farmers to advocate for greater representation within the farmer fora as well as upward throughout the NAADS structure.

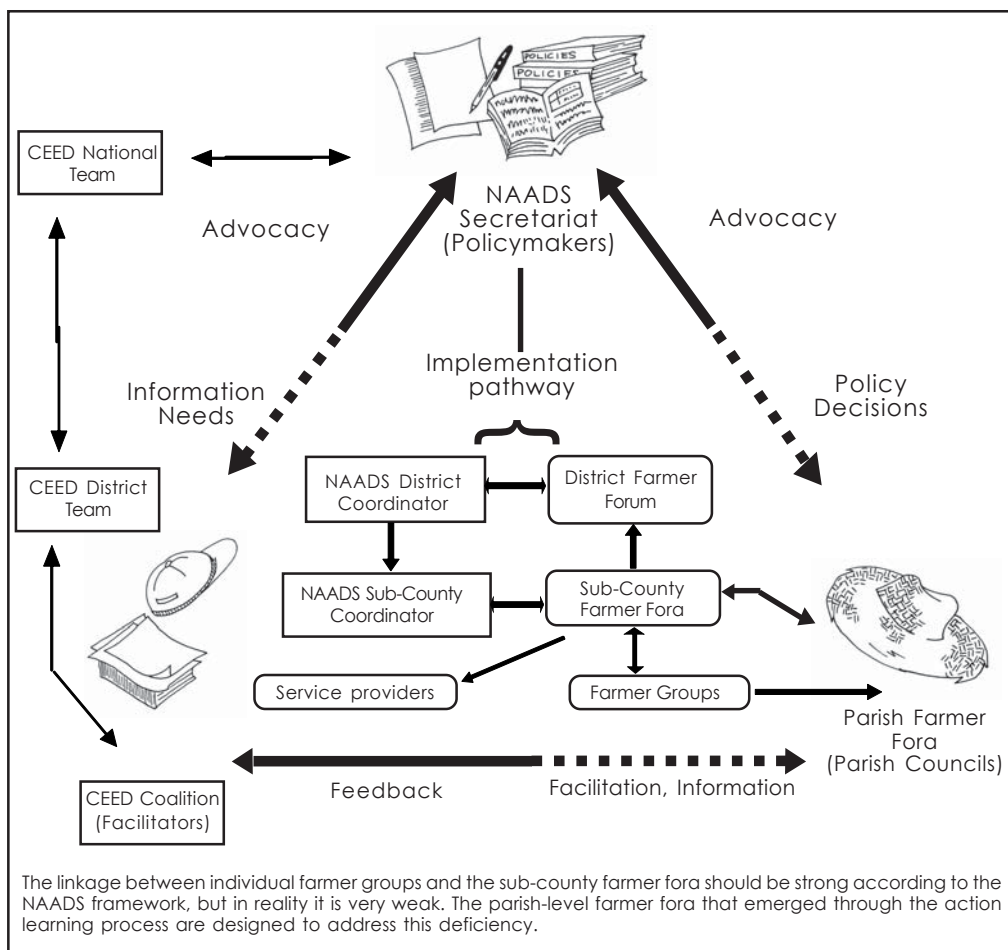
Figure 1. Participatory Action Learning Loop



5. Interfacing and Advocacy

The Coalition interfaces with both the NAADS Secretariat and farmers’ organizations at the sub-county level. Figure 2 shows the linkage between civil society and policymakers under NAADS, as facilitated by CEED.

Figure 2. An Organizational Model of CEED-Facilitated Linkages Between Civil Society and Policymakers under NAADS.



This approach yielded the following successes/accomplishments:

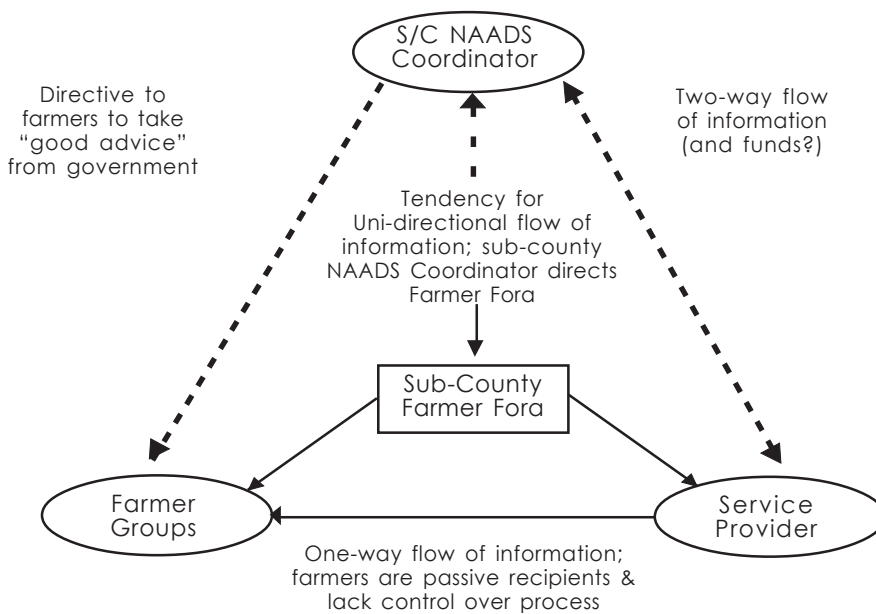
- ❑ Led to the emergence of new farmer institutions (parish-level farmer fora and councils) to improve farmer representation
- ❑ Opened a gateway for bringing in the views of farmers' groups and forging better representation within the farmer fora
- ❑ Formalized the linkage mechanisms between CEED, the NAADS secretariat, and farmers' groups
- ❑ Secured NAADS' funding for the Participatory Action Learning (PAL) process in Kabale District and a national survey on key lessons from roll-out of the NAADS program
- ❑ Addressed the concerns of the NAADS secretariat to strengthen the linkage between localized learning and national policies



Case Examples

A critical bottleneck was identified at the sub-county level, where funds are disbursed by the Secretariat, contracts are made, and several key actors (NAADS, local government, farmer representatives) interact. The lack of clear roles, and thus of clear monitoring criteria, has enabled the abuse of roles, authority and funds.

Staff from the top-down extension organizations that NAADS is designed to replace now work for NAADS, and continue to give directives on how farmers should proceed. Service providers and farmers' fora - accustomed to such top-down directives - often adhere to them, further undermining the program's aims. Lack of transparency in the use of funds has also opened the door to corruption and limited quality assurance in service contracting. This is now being addressed through PAL processes in which farmers test approaches to overcome these bottlenecks.



Sub-County (S/C) Bottleneck to Demand-Driven Service Provision

Successes and Challenges

Some of the key successes and challenges of the Coalition’s experiences are outlined below, and serve as the basis for ongoing learning as CEED works to enhance farmer-owned development processes in Kabale District and beyond.

Several important successes have emerged from the PAL process. Of key importance is the decision of farmers to advocate directly with the Secretariat for policy reforms, and to contest the usurpation of power and decision-making at the sub-county level. The Secretariat has now expressed a willingness to consider farmer service providers and have allocated funds for the development of processes for overcoming the power dynamics currently hindering program success.

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="212 643 673 765">❑ Farmers are able to identify structural constraints to empowerment, are engaged in PAL & seeking solutions, and advocate directly with Secretariat. <li data-bbox="212 788 673 909">❑ Negotiation within the Coalition to bridge member organizations' worldviews on approaches (research and facilitation), resources and skill base. <li data-bbox="212 933 673 1010">❑ NAADS Secretariat is open to restructuring implementation and policy guidelines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="712 643 1173 720">❑ Summarizing results quickly, so as to influence policies implemented during program roll-out. <li data-bbox="712 743 1173 865">❑ The tendency for farmers to see the PAL process as external to farmer groups & farmer fora makes its legitimacy and full participation a challenge. <li data-bbox="712 888 1173 1010">❑ Maintaining legitimacy vis-à-vis NAADS and powerful sub-county actors, given the tendency of vested interests to try to de-legitimize the PAL process.

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Contributed by:
Laura German, Ann Stroud, Chris Opondo
 and **Beda Mwebesa**
 Email: l.german@cgjar.org