

Lessons from Using Participatory Action Research to Enhance Farmer-Led Research and Extension in Southwestern Uganda

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Abstract

The linear model of technology generation and transfer from researcher to extensionist to farmers has been the dominant approach to improve agrarian livelihoods, with rural development failing to result in the impacts envisioned. There are problems with both generation of inappropriate technologies that are not suited to farming conditions or social circumstances, as well as weak links between research and extension. Information flows are poor and skill bases weak, while extension contacts with farmers are relatively sparse. Ineffective participation of the end user or 'client' at various stages in the process has limited farmers' ability to proactively seek information and step up innovation. In Uganda, the government has initiated a public-private "service delivery" system called the National Agriculture Advisory Services (NAADS) towards the end of 2001 which sought to reverse this supply-driven orientation by placing emphasis on farmer-demanded service delivery. Given its history of local involvement on a wide range of issues, AHI was chosen in late 2001 by the farmers to assist them in preparing proposals for service delivery for consideration by the NAADS program in Kabale District, southwestern Uganda. AHI used a participatory action learning process to facilitate farmer groups in their institutional development process, encompassing community visioning and planning, strengthening group organizational dynamics, agroenterprise selection and skill-building for farmer forum members. Through farmer groups and farmer fora, communities are taking on new roles and expectations with enthusiasm, although competencies in group management, agroenterprise development and monitoring of the implementation processes are still needed. A coalition of research and development partners has been formed to strengthen local organization to enable farmers better 'own' the development process. The coalition has used participatory action research as a means of influencing and learning from the activities undertaken toward NAADS' effective implementation in the District. This paper discusses preliminary outcomes from building farmers' competencies and the use of participatory action research to learn from and further the NAADS program through action-based learning with various actors involved in 'organizing the demand side' of demand-driven development.

Key Words: Participatory action research; Farmer institutional development; NAADS; CEED coalition

Introduction

The African Highlands Initiative (AHI) fosters collaborations between national and international research organizations and NGOs. AHI is hosted by the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) in Uganda and works in the southwestern highlands of Kabale District with farmer groups to undertake research for sustainable natural resources management and increased agricultural productivity. AHI has been working with farmers since 1996 in Rubaya sub-county (of Kabale district) on various technologies, improved communication and collective action for various aspects of farm and landscape improvement and sustainable development (AHI, 1998; 2001). As a result of AHI's broad-based activities, farmer groups in Rubaya selected AHI late in 2001 as a key partner to assist them in preparative stages to link with the new National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) program. NAADS is set up to support services that farmer groups request regarding enterprise development and NRM. The sub-county and parish are the lowest administrative units of project implementation. Farmer groups are represented by a farmer fora which is made up of representatives from the groups and operate at sub-county level to make decisions on service provision

allocation. They work hand-in-hand with local government and NAADs representatives at the sub-county and district levels.

Background

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION REFORMS: AN OVERVIEW

Agricultural extension is being critically examined and assessed for its usefulness more than ever before to speed up service and impact delivery. This has led to world-wide demand for reforming national agricultural extension systems (Venkatesan and Kampen, 1998; FAO/Worldbank, 2000; Anderson and Feder, 2003; Anderson and Crowder, 2004; IAC 2004). The reforms are bringing major changes in the mandate, organisation, working modalities and collaboration scope of extension institutions. The narrow, and passive traditional role of improved agricultural technology transfer from research to farmers being played by extension services for decades is being challenged in view of changing situation both inside and outside developing countries (Adhikarya, 1994; Anderson and Feder, 2003). Public sector extension has come under increasing pressure to downsize and reform. Consequently, in a number of countries including Indonesia, Philippines, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, Colombia, Mozambique and Mexico (Anderson and Crowder, 2004). Other countries such as Iran, Malawi and Zimbabwe are considering decentralization of their extension systems (Venkatesan and Kampen, 2998).

Both reduced funding and manpower of public agricultural extension departments, and to some extent their questionable efficiency and supply-driven approach have created a push for privatisation of extension services (Christoplos and Nitsch.1996). Privatisation essentially means that farmers should pay for extension advice. Private companies, individual extension specialists, contracted agencies (through contracting-out and outsourcing modalities) and farmers associations are main service providers. Total privatisation of extension services has already occurred in England and Wales, New Zealand and The Netherlands. Partial privatisation has been done in Estonia, Chile, Hungary, Venezuela and Nicaragua. "Cost-recovery" or fee-based extension systems have been adopted in countries reforming their extension systems. The Government of Costa Rica gives extension vouchers to farmers, which they can use for obtaining extension advice from private practitioners. In Israel, the extension service is provided by the government, but at the same time privatisation is encouraged for extension specialist through meeting special extension needs of farmers and growers' associations. Case studies from Uganda and Mozambique indicate that on the ground attempts to come up with solutions to providing services to farmers are resulting in innovative contracting approaches and combined public and private institutional arrangements (Anderson and Crowder, 2004; Friis-Hansen, 2005).

In order to prepare extension staff to play their new role effectively, revised curricula, updated training content, competent training specialists and fresh instructional materials will be required both for in-service and pre-service training (Anderson and Feder, 2003). Then, there is another major group that needs to be prepared for properly benefiting from reformed extension services: the clientele of extension services. These include NGOS, the private sectors and rural communities themselves.

NAADS VISION, OBJECTIVES AND MANDATE IN UGANDA

Uganda is rapidly reforming its extension in line with these global trends. This has led to the development of many new and reformed government programs. Semana (1999) noted that Agricultural extension in Uganda has undergone a number of transformations from regulatory 1920- 1956, advisory 1956-1963, advisory Education 1964-1971, dormancy 1972-1981, recovery 1982- 1999, Educational 1992-1996, participatory education 1997-1998, Decentralized Education 1997- 2001 and now Agricultural services under contract extension systems. Each of those up to 1997- 2001 had strengths to build on and weaknesses to change or improve, but had challenges of the socio-economic and political environment. In addition there have been marked changes in the concept of agriculture, which is increasingly seen in terms of commercial or farming for market with emphasis on modernization of agriculture and use of participatory approaches in the process.

NAADS is a government program designed to increase farmers' access to technologies and information. The NAADS program started in six pilot districts and is envisioned to cover the whole country in the next five years (Semana, 1999; NAADS, 2001; Friis-Hansen 2005). The expectations are that NAADS will operate as a decentralized system of extension delivery that is farmer owned and managed where privately serviced extension will be paid for by farmer-managed public funds. Farmers are seen as the primary implementers and beneficiaries of the NAADS program. It is envisioned that by strengthening farmer institutions as well as service provider capacity that access to information, knowledge and technology for profitable agricultural production will increase, particularly for the resource poor. In strategic terms, the government program, Plan for Modernization of Agriculture (PMA) through NAADS promotes market oriented or commercial farming (that is engaging in farming as business); empowerment of subsistence farmers to access privately delivered agricultural advisory services and foundation technology from various sources such as NAROs research stations and their Agriculture Research Development Centers (ARDCs).

If all were operating optimally, farmers should be empowered to democratically prioritize services they desire; to prioritize their needs; to develop and implement plans; and to monitor and evaluate their progress, as well as the progress of the NAADS system. Farmer groups would be able to contact services and other information sources. Service providers would be more active in providing farmers with information that they need and research organizations clearly involved in working with farmers on the technologies and other information that farmers and other clients require.

NAADS IMPLEMENTATION

AHI and other NGOs were involved from January to July 2002 in piloting the NAADS programme in pilot Districts of Uganda. AHI started the work by identifying and negotiating a work plan and budget that eventually led to a memorandum of understanding between AHI and NAADS in the district. AHI subcontracted community facilitators¹ that worked with the farmer groups and the Rubaya community to prepare for NAADS implementation. During this period, AHI sensitised and mobilised communities and groups about NAADS, inventorized the existing farmer groups, facilitated the strengthening and formation of groups to enable them to select effective agroenterprises, and supported the development of these groups for advisory service provision, marketing and procurement of inputs. Cohesive and organized groups are instrumental for propelling development initiatives for their communities. And in the NAADS program, farmers are the primary clients, managers and owners of the agricultural services. As was expected, this pilot activity met with numerous challenges: farmers' understanding of NAADS and group management requires more time; understanding of roles and responsibilities were weak; and poor accountability, among others.

Following this preliminary stage, AHI and other district-level development organizations shared their perceptions of the challenges and opportunities under NAADS, and in mid-2002 decided to form a Coalition for Effective Extension Delivery (CEED) composed of AHI, CARE International, Africa 2000 Network (A2N) and the Kabale District Farmers' Association (KADFA). The CEED Coalition has since worked in two sub-counties in a research-development partnership to strengthen the representation and effectiveness of farmer organizations, and to facilitate farmers to address perceived bottlenecks effecting implementation of the NAADS and other development programs.

EMBEDDING PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS IN NAADS "ROLL-OUT"

Participatory Action Research Process

Participatory action research (PAR) is emphatic on the need to include farmers and their aspirations, interests and priorities improving their engagement with development processes. Returns to research aims become joined but secondary. AHI promotes the use PAR as a way to develop and test development process

¹ AHI recruited 5 and 17 senior and junior facilitators respectively. The facilitators lived within the communities and worked on a daily basis with the farmer groups on NAADS implementation.

modalities, and reflections on the process and its apparent results are used to inform the process as well as other actors who might be implementing similar processes elsewhere. The PAR process fosters local capacity building and given that it is a relatively new process for AHI's partners, these partners also learn by doing. The fact that it is managed as a process and provides iterative and flexible ways of working with farmer groups and communities on multiple dimensions. Coxhead and Buenavista, eds, (2001) observed that PAR enhances deeper involvement of farmers and relevant stakeholders in research process, transforming them from information providers to collegial partners. AHI uses an 'experiential learning approach' in that PAR has planning, action, reflection and replanning stages, and at each point documentation of the stages occurs. Implementers who include researchers, facilitators, and other development partners are involved in periodic reflection sessions that then drives the next stages of implementation. Research involvement enhances the data collection and documentation compared to what many NGOs use, and this strengthens the inputs into reflection and analysis that in turn influences planning and advocacy.

It is with these principles and values that participatory action research process was employed in the inception of NAADS work with the farmer research groups and the community at large. In the NAADS program, AHI facilitated the communities through farmer groups to develop their vision and action plans and improved competencies of the farmers to discuss and prioritize their enterprises for funding towards the realization of the groups' objectives. AHI also built relationships with the NAADS and other development actors at sub-county, district and national levels to influence and provide feedback on the processes and implementation issues arising from NAADS Program.

AHI hired 20 facilitators' to interact with more than 400 groups that had signed up for the NAADS program in Rubaya sub-county alone. This was a substantial increase over the 25 groups that AHI had currently been assisting since 1996. Therefore, a new mode had to be adopted and tested to address this large number of groups. The facilitators were trained to interact with community groups and farmer forum members on a continuous basis to catalyze discussions on issues regarding the goals and objectives of NAADS and how the community would benefit. The process towards inventorying the groups, establishing collective consensus, visioning, building capacity to select enterprises and write proposals was time consuming and patience was required. At the onset, it was realized that the time frame of six months for this process to unfold for this large number of groups was unrealistic and became the first issue to address – that is to build awareness of the NAADS teams that group processes and quality services take much more time to develop.

Steps were designed and used in implementation and monitoring of progress. The six steps involved using workshops coupled with smaller, more frequent follow up meetings organized by community facilitators with farmer groups. The community meetings kept the momentum and community interest high, and provided the opportunity to discuss and reach consensus on the priority issues for development. The steps are outlined below:

Chronology of the Implementation Process

Step 1: A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between AHI and the local government in Rubaya sub-county to implement work as indicated in a work plan and budget. It was targeted at working with existing groups that had signed up for participating in the NAADS program or to form new groups. The main task was to ensure that groups were sensitised about NAADS and that they were able to choose enterprises where services providing production and marketing information would be required from NAADS.

Step 2: Given the large number of groups in Rubaya sub-county that had registered, AHI decided to recruit 20 community facilitators who would work directly with the groups. They were contracted and oriented on their roles and expected outcomes for their work with farmer groups and farmer fora. Monthly competence development and review workshops reflected on field data collected and actions taken and helped focus community facilitators on their next phase of work. Feedback from these workshops was shared with the NAAD sub-county and district coordinators and the secretariat. AHI regional office got similar reports on progress from the field. The 2-way feedback from the NAADS coordinators, and the facilitators and

resource people that AHI engaged was communicated to the farmer groups and farmer fora for their action and visa versa.

Step 3: An inventory of the 400 farmer groups was taken and provided the baseline information on the existing and functional social groups and whether they were viable enough to take up NAADS activities. Hagmann (1999), argues that studying local organizations with regard to how members understand them, what their capacities and limitations are is an obligation of development projects before they engage communities. The communities in Rubaya have traditionally had self-help groups for meeting their social and economic needs. AHI's task was to identify the strengths of the farmer groups and build upon those so that there were viable and cohesive farmer groups for NAADS. The original NAADS guidelines called for formation of new agriculturally oriented farmer groups disregarding or assuming that there were no existing groups. However, since this area was 'rich' in existing groups, a departure from the guideline was made. The challenge was finding a way to ensure that the farmer groups are cohesive, organized and representative of the communities. Some groups were formed opportunistically. About 3/4 of the groups proved to be operationally sound.

Step 4: Community meetings were held with farmer groups to discuss various aspects of the NAADS program. For example, a combination of group and community meetings provided platforms and opportunities for local people to learn from each other and consolidate their ideas around priority issues of interest such as production and marketing of Irish potatoes and registration of groups with the sub-county. Normally facilitators meetings with farmer groups started with "ice breaking session". Community facilitators then led the group discussions about their status including (whether the groups operated in reality or not, registration with the sub-county office, gender issues, training needs, organizational capacity (in terms of how often they meet, leadership structure, financial management, members' contact with the officials), group links with outside development agencies, and overall assessment of the group performance in terms of the Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)². A checklist developed by the facilitators, with the input from the NAADS resource people and farmer forum members in the inception meetings, was used to capture this information.

Step 5: Next, groups were led through participatory visioning, planning, enterprise selection and work plan development. This step came in one month after step 3 and entailed development of work plans based on priority and effective enterprises, which were then sent to the farmers' fora for prioritization and development of the sub-county work plan.

The AHI team facilitated farmer groups, using the appreciative inquiry process, to develop their desired vision for social change based on the NAADS vision of market oriented farming practices that also maintained the natural resource base. Six basic steps were used: (i) community facilitators encouraged the farmer groups think about the desired future state (and provided an example of a vision); (ii) to reflect on the current situation of their enterprises; (iii) reflect on the past situation of the enterprises; (iv) to come up with the desired change (vision); (v) to outline the obstacles to reaching the vision; and, (vi) what actions would be needed to tackle the obstacles, the actors that needed to be involved and their respective roles. These steps are analogous with the 'Four-D' model used by proponents of appreciate inquiry. The four Ds are: Discover, Dream, Design and Deliver (Cooperider and Whitney, 2002). AI enabled community facilitators to steer groups in reflection on their strengths, assets and contributions they could make to the NAADS process.

Another principle that evolved through early deliberations within CEED was to shift from suggesting ideas to farmers to facilitate community groups to identify their own priority actions that would enable NAADS to fulfill its potential, with minimal or (zero) external support. The idea was to build a strong sense of ownership of the processes for sustainability reasons and to reduce dependency and the culture of receiving handouts from donor projects. By looking at the positive contributions the groups can make to facilitate their own development, AHI argues that they have the potential to think and act on constraints that affect their own

² Strengths (encompassing what the groups felt were the value addition when they worked in groups like accumulated social and human capital), Weaknesses (encompassing what affected group cohesion such as poor leadership weak by-laws), Opportunities (including avenues that could be exploited to building cohesive groups) and Threats (including internal and external factors that are likely to led to groups collapsing such as theft and insecurity).

development and draw upon NAADS and other opportunities to assist. What has been lacking is the training and community group facilitation so they can see their strengths and resources at their disposal and develop innovative development strategies. Russell and Harshbarger (2003), argue that people are not problems to be fixed, but rather they are capable of imaging, embracing and building positive futures.

Step 6: Evaluate the above process to deduce lessons and propose suggestions for the way forward. This happened at the end of the interim period (seven months) that AHI worked with the communities. In addition to hindsight reflection and analysis, lessons from the field were shared with the NAADS operatives at the various levels. For example, the guide on how farmer groups should be formed was reviewed and reformulated. More specifically, the need to form new farmer groups or merge the existing ones as requested by the NAADS secretariat was not required in this circumstance. Communities observed that they had worked and shared benefits by being in groups on their own without external support and did not need to form new groups nor adjust their gender balance, as originally suggested in the NAADS group guidelines. After several discussions with the NAADS policy makers it was agreed that existing groups could be considered to participate in the NAADS activities as long as they have profitable activities going on.

Case Studies

In this section, several case studies of various phases in the NAADS implementation process are discussed. The section concludes with a synthesis of key lessons learnt.

CASE NO. 1: FARMER INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Farmer Group Formation and Membership

By the end of the seven months of AHI work with groups in Rubaya, over four hundred groups were 'sensitized' about NAADS Program. Although some groups existed before the onset of NAADS program, the number of new groups that formed and registered at the sub-county offices rose sharply; hence, emergence of many new groups whose sustainability was questionable.

In earlier AHI experience of working with farmer research groups, it was noted that the number of farmer groups normally goes high when a new development program is being introduced (Sanginga, et al, 2002). This is because of expectations for handouts from the new development programs, and many such groups collapse once they realize that the new program is not providing handouts. These expectations have arisen because of previous NGO and government programs providing handouts. In the Rubaya case, farmers had benefited from an NGO that provided seed and storage facilities at no cost to the farmers. Another ongoing initiative by PMA had just provided piglets and potato seed at no cost to selected farmers. Even in the start-up of NAADS payments had been made by government to farmers who attended the sensitization meetings until NGOs complained about this dependency creating practice. Hence, there has been a contradiction in operational policies in terms of the processes of building the farmer's capacity to develop their own development initiatives versus creating dependency by some of these actions.

The community perception that NAADS had abundant financial resources created high expectations and mushrooming of farmer groups in the rural community. Both the government personnel and interim farmer forum members who participated in the inception meetings of NAADS created the impression that NAADS had funds which needed to be spent before the end of the government financial year 2002. Over three hundred groups developed workplans based on priority enterprises and expected services to be provided.

Group membership took three forms; groups whose members were only women, secondly, men only groups and thirdly mixed groups because of different group objectives and past experiences (Table 1). For example, the 'women' only' group had improving the social welfare of their members as their first priority and engaging in agricultural productive enterprises (e.g. growing potatoes for sale) as the second priority. The 'men only' groups engaged in bee keeping activities because these activities were conducted in the highland terrain and were associated with high income. The 'mixed' groups viewed the inclusion of men and women as being complementary to each other in terms of skills, labour and knowledge.

Table 1: Categories of Farmer Groups

Parish	No. of Men's Groups	No. of women's Groups	No. of Mixed Groups
Bigaga	8	18	26
Mugandu	11	12	38
Kitooma	6	20	32
Kibuga	16	21	36
Kahungye	4	37	12
Karujanga	6	34	30
Buramba	9	27	27
Rwanyana	5	15	35
<i>Total</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>236</i>

On many occasions the expectation by the NAADS program that the groups should be mixed where resisted. Some women groups resisted the inclusion of men in their groups because they feared being cheated by the men; men preferred being in leadership roles and tended to dominate in the group discussions; and there is the loss of privacy for women when the men participate in their discussions. In such a scenario, the freedom for women to express their views is curtailed by the societal expectation that women should be respectful in front of their in-laws.

At the onset of NAADS the guidelines for group size required that the groups should not have more than thirty members and not less than ten members. The community facilitator observed that some groups had less than ten members, while other some groups had more than thirty members. Additionally, some people were members of several groups given expectations from NAADS. Attempts to merge groups or discuss size issues with these groups did not yield change as NAADS had anticipated. For example, large groups were needed in some cases to pool social and financial capital to invest in physical assets needed for implementing plans. Some groups had assets, such as plots or buildings, that they had jointly purchased. Hence, reducing the number of members to a set number was not realistic. The sizes of the groups varied between less than ten and above fifty members are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Size of farmer groups organized under NAADS in Rubaya Sub-County, Kabale District

Size Of Farmer Groups

Name of Parishes	<10 members	10-29 members	30-49 members	50> members	Total
Rwanyana	1	38	10	6	55
Kitooma	2	19	30	7	58
Mugandu	1	24	26	10	61
Buramba	0	38	17	8	63
Bigaaga	1	25	18	8	52
Kahungye	0	27	24	2	53
Kibuga	0	32	30	11	73
Karujanga	0	29	34	7	70
<i>Total</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>232</i>	<i>189</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>485</i>

Competence Building for Farmer Groups

Once the inventory of the “old” and “new” groups were completed, training to build the capacity of farmer groups in preparation for NAADS were organized by the community facilitators. The groups were organized around common objectives and group members interacted frequently. The meetings were organized by the officials or leaders of farmer groups who used group bylaws to bind members to the intention of the groups. First, the capacity of the community facilitators to work with farmer groups was built in terms of what

facilitation entailed, presentation and documentation skills, visioning and planning, enterprise selection, gender mainstreaming in farmer groups and workplan development. With the community facilitators trained, the next level of training targeted farmer groups.

The community facilitators identified and agreed with the groups on when to conduct training session. First, the facilitators established whether the groups existed and were operational. Secondly, training groups on what NAADS was all about (as discussed in the foregoing sections). Three training modules as per NAADS guidelines were conducted and their contexts are summarized in Boxes 1 through 3, below.

Box 1. Farmer Visioning Process

The desired change was crafted through group visioning. The following steps were used to develop the vision for specific groups:

- Discussion about the desired future state if all activities went as per the groups' expectations.
- Agreement on the current status of enterprises that the group would like to develop
- Deliberations on the historical evolution of the enterprise
- Agreement on the desired change (VISION)
- Identification of likely obstacles to be faced in reaching the vision
- Identification of actions to be taken to tackle these obstacles, partners to involve and their roles

Once the group developed their VISION starting with what they desired to achieve, they developed action plans that formed the basis of achieving the needed change. The action plans revolved around identification of profitable enterprises as shown below.

Box 2. Enterprise Selection Process

Given the need to orient farming practices to be more business like, the NAADS programs emphasized the need for farmer groups to select and prioritize their activities and focus on enterprises that would generate income for the group. This was followed with intensive training of the groups on how to make selection of profitable enterprises from their current activities with guidance from community facilitators. The discussions with the groups revolved about the issues summarized below.

- Why Enterprise selection and development
- Review and list the enterprises or activities of the farmer group (s)
- Compare enterprise based on production and productivity, economic characterization and market characterization.

In the last stage of the NAADS work, the farmer groups developed workplans based on the priority enterprise of the farmer group as discussed in the box below.

Box 3. Workplan Development

Four main steps were used to stimulate the groups to develop their workplans:

1. Reviewing and adapting the NAADS Secretariat guidelines for developing workplans;
2. Community facilitators catalyze farmers to write their own workplans;
3. Group members reach consensus on items to include in the workplan; and
4. Workplans are developed and submitted to the farmer fora for funding.

Farmer fora members collated the workplans and facilitated the recruitment of the private service providers that worked with the farmer groups to implement workplans developed by farmer groups based on enterprises.

Enterprise Selection Dilemmas

The majority of farmer groups selected potato growing as their main enterprises for which NAADS support was needed (Table 3). The fact that a large percentage of farmers selected the same enterprise given the ‘quick’ process followed brought up a number of issues. There was need to diversify options of enterprises that farmers would engage in. The risk with many groups going for potato growing would be saturating the markets leading to low prices and profits to the farmers. Secondly, there are ecological concerns: diversified systems are ecologically and economically more sound and given the hillside farming in Kabale, potato farming is not necessarily good for conserving soils on steep slopes. It also requires inputs such as fungicidal sprays and fertilizers that many farmers cannot afford. Third, participatory market surveys could have expanded farmers’ knowledge of options, if this had been funded by NAADS following requests made by several NGOs operating in the district. Capacity-building is required to be able to analyze trade-offs related to enterprise choice and to understand and predict the market. This needs to be integral and was a missing dimension.

In the course of working and training farmer groups, it was apparent that they needed further competence development in various notable areas: crop husbandry, fruit tree management, pesticide applications, new farming methods for Irish potato farming, aquaculture, zero-grazing and pig husbandry. The training needs suggested by farmers were forwarded to the NAADS coordination office so that private service providers would be contracted to work with the respective farmer groups to meet the farmers training expectations; however, many of these were not fulfilled not were service providers themselves having the necessary skills.

Table 3. Summary of enterprises with the respective number of farmer groups and overall rank, Rubaya Sub-County

Type of Enterprise	Number of Groups	Rank
Irish Potato Growing	83	1
Beans growing	10	2
Aquaculture	7	3
Pig Keeping	6	4
Sheep Rearing	5	5
Poultry Keeping	3	6
Goat Rearing	3	6
Zero Grazing	1	7
Tree Planting	1	7
Pyrethrum growing	1	7
Mushroom growing	1	7
Wheat Farming	1	7

CASE NO. 2: FARMERS’ FORA AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER ACTORS

Ideally, the Farmers Forum in each sub-county is comprised of farmer group representatives that reside in the sub-county parishes.³ The farmers’ forum is the main institutional structure for increasing the participation of individuals and households in the NAADS process enabling farmers access to the advisory services. Advisory services (such as information, knowledge and skills, research, training) are provided by service providers (e.g. consultancy firms, professionals, academic institutions and parastatal agencies) who are contracted by the farmer forum to engage with farmer groups on specific issues.

The functions of the farmers’ forum are:

- To plan, cost and contract advisory services;
- To monitor and evaluate the services provided and the performance of the service providers;
- To determine priorities and allocate resources;

³ Original plan is that Farmer Forum is constituted by two representatives from the farmer groups that are NAADS compliant. The reality on ground is that the farmers groups are very many. On average there are more than three hundred groups in the pilot sub-counties of Kabale District. Hence, raising the issues of how the farmers forum can be organized and sustained.

- To consider and approve NAADS work plans for final inclusion in the sub-county development plans;
- To provide feedback and feed-forward between farmers and farmer fora at different levels; and
- To influence policy direction in the agricultural sector.

The interaction between farmer groups and the farmer fora was weak and still needed strengthening so that priority enterprises are addressed, and so there is groups receive timely feedback from the forum members. The weak linkages were manifested by the absence of systematic feedback meetings where farmer opinions could be solicited. The farmer forum members mainly concentrated on having meetings with the NAADS sub-county coordinator with little communication of the outcomes from their meetings shared with the communities.

At the end of the interim period, it was evident that the weak links between: the farmer fora and contracted service providers; the farmer fora and the farmers (as stated above). This needed action from the NAADS coordinators at sub-county and district levels and by the local government. The forum members needed capacity building which did not occur in the time allowed for start up. It was obvious that members of the farmer forum members were getting “new” responsibilities for which they did not have adequate capacity to manage and the “voice “ to negotiate for the changes they needed. Although AHI involved the farmer fora in its activities, the farmer fora seldom invited AHI in their meetings creating a weak link and a unidirectional relationship because only AHI took the invite to invite them. The roles and responsibilities of the forum were challenging and initiation of NGO and development agencies in NAADS meeting was viewed with suspicion. The farmer forum member had the view that once they contract ed service provides, them forum members would monitor and evaluate performance and decide whether to continue working with the service provider or not. The perception of monitoring as a policing function was dominant among the forum members as compared to monitoring for learning and improving delivery of services.

CASE NO. 3: COALITION FOR EFFECTIVE EXTENSION DELIVERY (CEED)

A coalition for effective research and extension delivery (CEED) for the civil society, farmer groups and the farmer fora was conceived by the AHI and CARE, who had been jointly pursuing capacity building and saw the weaknesses in the NAADS start-up processes and wanted to assist. CEED’s immediate aim were to build a pro-poor model for community action and farmer empowerment to demand agricultural advisory services. To achieve this, CEED focuses on empowering poor farmers to be active participants in the demand –to-delivery processes improving their capacity contract agriculture services and to influence policy under NAADS where needed. Thus contributing to the NAADS vision of economically and politically empowered farming communities who understand and are able to exercise their rights under the NAADS framework.

CEED’s major hypothesis under its work with NAADS is that through facilitation and capacity building, farmer groups and the farmer fora will be able to: develop their own performance criteria, develop monitoring schemes and feedback mechanisms, deal with adverse power relations, and respond to advocacy needs so as to improve problems areas (current and future). Seven months of participatory action research with farmer groups and farmer fora by the coalition work have identified five major ‘hotspots’ areas in the NAADS implementation process that seem to be contentious, misunderstood or subject to abuse or misinterpretation. These key areas are include:

- Agro-enterprise selection and development
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Funding and Financial Accountability
- Inclusiveness and Empowerment
- Service Provision
- Technical Service Delivery

Agroenterprise selection and development was raised as a concern for several reasons. First, the limited time allocated to identifying and developing viable enterprises that included attention to natural resource management within the interim period. As such their was limited time to test selected enterprises for their effectiveness, and less still for the effectiveness of the process used to facilitate the farmers in enterprise selection. Secondly, insufficient market intelligence and skills in market research led to perhaps an over-reliance on traditional crops whose demand in the market is already known to be limited. Finally, the emphasis

on market oriented production a limited number of enterprises and group organization as the basis for service access led to the exclusion of certain social groups due to their limited ability to work on selected enterprises or influence enterprise selection processes. Action learning and research process is currently being used to address these constraints.

Insufficient clarity on the roles and responsibilities of farmers and farmer fora members is a concern because guidelines from the NAADS secretariat are undergoing continuous revision so their clarity is not communicated. Current communication mechanisms limit timely flow of information to the local level, and from the local level upward. Thus limited internalization of roles and responsibilities has resulted in few viable feedback mechanisms on service delivery from farmers to farmer fora and opened the door to unhealthy power dynamics as certain empowered actors co-opt decision making process or contract provision.

The main players in the NAADS implementation processes at the sub-county level are: farmers, represented by farmer groups (FGs); farmer fora (FF); the sub-county NAADS coordinator (S/C-NC); and service providers (SPs). In order for NAADS to function all relationships as illustrated in the figure below should be operational. For example, there should be 2-way information flows between the various actors; decision making and monitoring by the farmers should be able to influence the process; service providers should be providing good quality services; sub-county coordinators should be overseeing the process and not taking it over; farmer fora should be overseeing and monitoring service providers and collecting feedback from farmers.

The relative capacities of the various players and how they relate to each other have a bearing on the NAADS implementation process – significantly affecting the quality of and access to services. For example a dominating Sub-County NAADS co-ordinator an ex-agricultural extension worker could over-dominate and take control of the NAADS implementation process and yet it is the farmers who are supposed to lead implementation. Since the NAADS extension approach is based on the understanding that the old extension system was not working there is need to unlearn old methods, attitudes and behaviour and learn new ones. This takes time as it is the same extension workers from the old to the new system without adequate orientation. There is a need to distinguish between roles of NAADS coordinators versus the old extension coordinator – coordinators so far do not think of their role as facilitatory but just as implementing government policy.

Funding and financial accountability was a third area of concern due to the bureaucratic that limited effective disbursement and management of funds for service provision. Some of the bottlenecks include the timing and flexibility of fund disbursement vis-à-vis the agricultural cycle, the administrative levels at which funds are allocated to parish rather than sub-county; and insufficient clarity on roles and responsibilities so as to ensure farmer ownership of contracting arrangements including the decision making and tendering processes and quality controls.

More specifically, as time passed it was evident that there was insufficient financial accountability and the necessary guidelines from the NAADS secretariat leading to ineffective use of allotted funds. The contracting processes lacked transparency thereby obscuring possible standards against which to measure progress. For example, it was the farmer forum members and the sub-county NAADS coordinator that selected the service providers to work with farmer groups and the criteria used for selection was made transparent and neither was the public opinion sought.

Technical Service delivery was also identified as a concern due to the quality and distribution of agriculture services. Although criteria that warrant contracting service providers had been identified, limited funding levels from NAADS affect the quality and coverage of technical service especially for innovative enterprises such as fish farming. The issue of qualifications of service providers was misunderstood and/or abused and so it hindered the use local expertise coupled with lack of an adequate service provider monitoring system affects quality of services and reactions to poor quality. There was limited funding levels from NAADS and this affected quality and coverage of technical services for innovative enterprises such as fish farming. The farmer forum members and the farmer groups did not have agreed upon standards that could be used to monitor the quality of service that was being provided.

Inclusiveness and empowerment concerns are rooted in the discussion on selection of beneficiaries of the NAADS program. While a new tendency has emerged to hold leaders accountable, farmer capacity to effect

change and their awareness of their legal basis for empowerment is still lacking. For example, farmer fora are still not seen as representative and equity issues have yet to be operationalised within agro-enterprise selection. Lastly, accountability within the system is still weak, leading to regular abuses of power and usurpation of decision-making authority from farmers to other actors.

Discussion

LESSONS LEARNT

The participatory action research enabled us to learn the following lessons on decentralized extension:

- It is important to build upon existing groups that already have a history of activity and social capital. Sustainability of groups is questionable if group formation and organization is based on handouts from donors or development actors. Uphoff (1992) adds that most rural organizations have and use local knowledge to respond to change and handle conflicts on their own there by maintaining group stability.
- Local ownership of the process is important.
- Ways to enhance and facilitate farmer group dynamics and positive ways in which local knowledge and resources could be harnessed for development.
- That iterative review of progress and bottlenecks in program development is important and helps to direct the program implementation and policy formulation.
- That involvement of multiple actors and local resource persons with target groups at the community level improves capacity to engage, relate to one another and promotes local ownership.
- That time is required to build the capacity of the demand side and service delivery side, particularly on the side of roles, responsibilities and power relationships. Additionally skills in enterprise selection, work plan development and group management are new and important to rural communities where formal literacy level are low.
- Guidelines for implementing development projects need to be based on realities and local context within which rural communities live.
- An active forum or platform for government ministries and NGOs to share lessons and deliberate on strategies for improving the way development projects are being implemented critical if farmers have to take lead in setting the agenda for development.
- Providing money to participants in meetings organized by development programs sets standards that affect the mutual trust and creates a dependency syndrome killing the local initiative.
- Team and partnership skill are key to sustainability of partnerships because different actors have different values and principles in the way they interface with local communities. This helps in creating a common vision and development strategy.

ROLE OF PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH DURING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION⁴

Participatory action learning was instrumental in gathering some key insights both on the problem and the possible solutions to implementation of NAADS policy at local and Sub-County levels. By engaging with farmers in a joint learning process over time, key issues requiring attention automatically emerged. Engaging in this learning with outside development actors also gave farmers' concerns some legitimacy, empowering them to present their concerns to local government officials and to seek reforms locally. The PAR process contribute to the following:

- Improved learning across levels. The levels include village, parish, sub-county and district levels where different set of actors are involved in the NAADS activities. For example the local administrators and elected leaders at the above levels would learn what makes cohesive and solid groups and opportunities they provide for development work.

⁴ These areas are related to the identified "hot spots" where better practice is required. They can be revised as needed according to the interest of stakeholders.

- Increased capacity of local groups to influence and engage in NAADs and other processes. When groups are well trained they are able to articulate their priority needs and have the confidence to engage in dialogue with development actors.
- Increased capacity of local NGOs and KADFA. By virtue of local NOGS and a farmers association involvement in the CEED coalition activities, there is potential for empowerment and streamlining of guidelines that are not suitable to the local context. This contributes to generation of guidelines that context specific and are realistic.
- Improved inputs of research to inform development processes. It was apparent that the enterprises farmers selected needed input from research organization. Therefore the opportunity to strengthen the line between farmer group and research service provides so that relevant and affordable technologies are developed jointly with farmers.
- Advocacy for better guidelines and policies. The PAR process created more awareness about what farmers would lobby for. For example representation and formation of a farmer's forum whose members are accountable to the community. The CEED coalition has been working with farmers fora and farmer groups as civil society organizations on lobbying skill and how they can influence the NAADS policies (normally generated at the headquarters) to be responsive and cognizant of the needs and aspirations of the rural communities.
- Better power relationships. The leaders or coordinators of development programs have immense power and areas in which they influence decision making process. For example the NAADS coordinators were instrumental in the selection process of service providers to be contracted. In quest of strengthening the community voice in priority setting the dominant positions of those who bring projects to rural communities need to change. Although rural communities have power to decide on what they want or otherwise, the communities are passive and feel they do not have the legitimate power to influence the projects are being run. It is against this scenario that CEED coalition of creating awareness on the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders at different levels.

Conclusion

The participatory action research process and the iterative steps, stakeholder consultations and dialogue enabled learning and timely implementation of the tasks AHI was to accomplish. However, time was short and more effort is needed to address the 'hot spot' areas uncovered by stakeholders, particularly to better harmonize roles and responsibilities and to continue to build capacity in the demand and service provider dimensions. Combined efforts from research (represented by AHI partners in this case), NGOs and farmer networks are required to support this and other development efforts in future. The formation of CEED is opportune and it will further facilitate farmer groups involved in the NAADS process to deal with the power relations, its effects on access to services by poor farmers, and to change these relationships in order to enhance benefits to poor farmers. CEED will continue to use a participatory action research (PAR) process to inform on methods useful to empower farmers to address "hot spots" and newly emerging implementation constraints that might arise from time to time.

Enhancing the capacity of farmer groups and farmer fora at sub-county level to provide a link with the community is critical and the success of the NAADS program. Farmers are demanding effective accountability and transparency mechanisms with regards to the selection and delivery of NAADS advisory services. Secondly, the farmer fora capacity for managing NAADS processes – like conflict identification and resolution, representation of interest groups and constituencies, collecting and using feedback from farmer users, monitoring and performance assessment schemes, and a clear definition of roles and responsibilities is needed. On the other hand, capacity of farmers to formulate criteria and standards for the types of services in the selected enterprises and for improving NRM, to provide feedback to farmer fora regarding the performance of service providers, and to identify and resolve conflicts within their groups is desirable.

Improved Links between Sub-county, District and National Levels

The links between the stakeholders at the various level need strengthening. PAR calls for the involvement and continuous consultation and interactions between various actors. The CEED coalition using the PAR strategies will build on the existing partnerships. It is envisioned by the CEED coalition members that the CEED

activities will generate information for reformulating clear roles and responsibilities. The members of the CEED coalition intend to have dialogue with the NAADS secretariat and the NAADS operatives at the district, sub-county, parish and community levels. Morse frequent consultation and capacity building for the farmers so that they are able to articulate their demands and contract service providers.

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The AHI Working Papers Series

The AHI Working Papers Series was developed as a medium for AHI staff and partners to synthesize key research findings and lessons from innovations conducted in its benchmark site locations and institutional change work in the region. Contributions to the series include survey reports; case studies from sites; synthetic reviews of key topics and experiences; and drafts of academic papers written for international conferences and/or eventual publication in peer reviewed journals. In some cases, Working Papers have been re-produced from already published material in an effort to consolidate the work done by AHI and its partners over the years. The targets of these papers include research organizations at national and international level; development and extension organizations and practitioners with an interest in conceptual synthesis of “good practice”; and policy-makers interested in more widespread application of lessons and successes.

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