

THE POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION REFORM PROCESS IN UGANDA:

EXPERIENCES OF THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES

By

Patience Bibohere Rwamigisa

MSc. Zoology (MUK); PGD Comp. Sci. (MUK); BSc. Zoology (MUK)

*A Thesis Submitted to the Directorate of Research and Graduate
Training in fulfilment of the requirements for the Award of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Makerere University*

August, 2014

Abstract

Agricultural extension reforms initiated in the 1990s were an offshoot of a global movement for reforming the national extension systems in developing countries, which started late in the twentieth century, an era characterized by globalization, democratization, privatization and decentralization. These reforms were aimed at creating efficiency and effectiveness in delivery of agricultural extension services, particularly to smallholder farmers. Uganda provides a good case study of these globally driven reforms. What institutional and political conditions existed in Uganda at the time? How did these conditions affect the extension reform? Although these questions are key in explaining the outcome of the agricultural extension reform, they have not been adequately examined.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate how the agricultural extension reform process was undertaken in Uganda, and how it was influenced by the political and institutional processes and values. The study analyzed the case of Uganda's National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), which constitutes one of the most far-reaching extension reforms in Africa. Specifically, the study sought to (i) determine how the political environment influenced the agricultural extension reform process (ii) identify the actors that were involved, and how they influenced the agricultural extension reform process (iii) examine the strategies and resources employed by the different actors and their relative impact on the reform process. The Advocacy Coalition Framework in combination with discourse analysis and Max Weber's theory of Bureaucracy guided the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Empirical research methods included key informant and stakeholder interviews, participant observation and a review of policy and other documents.

The study revealed that the agricultural extension reform was designed and implemented in a changing political and institutional environment dictated by the 1995 Constitution. Politically, the country transited from a less competitive monolithic movement system to a more competitive multiparty political system. This increased competitiveness exposed the reform program to undue political interferences and elite capture. The reform process was surrounded by several unanswered questions concerning political interests and institutional values. Furthermore, the new political dispensation led to development of several policies that affected the design and implementation of the reform. The political transition was also paralleled by moving away from a centralized to a decentralized system of administration.

The need to conform to decentralization policy triggered restructuring of the ministry of agriculture. However, in the process, this restructuring weakened the ministry's capacity to provide leadership to the agricultural extension reform. Furthermore, the study revealed that the agricultural extension reform process was shaped by the interaction of two advocacy coalitions with conflicting belief systems, a donor-dominated radical reform coalition led by the World Bank and the Ministry of Finance, planning and Economic Development; and a technically-oriented gradual reform coalition led by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries. The findings showed that a clash in core beliefs between the two coalitions constituted an unresolved problem that affected NAADS throughout its implementation. The gradual reform coalition was excluded from the design and early implementation of NAADS and this increased the vulnerability of the program to political capture and governance problems.

The radical reform coalition's core beliefs dominated the design of the NAADS program. To achieve this goal, the radical reform coalition effectively employed various strategies and resources that included use of extensive social networks, financial and human resources, accumulation of scientific evidence and promotion of institutional changes that favored the reform. These resources and strategies tilted the power relations in favor of the radical reform coalition. The gradual reform coalition responded to this tilt in power relations by adopting the strategy of "silent boycott" or "passive resistance". The findings further show that the proponents of the reform relied more on the resources to get things done than on the processes and values. This denied the NAADS program the necessary ownership and commitment by key institutional actors across the coalitions.

In conclusion, the findings of this study illustrates that ultimately, the outcome of a reform in any political system is determined by long term political and social process, conditioned by political and economic interests, and driven by belief systems of institutional actors.

The findings of this study suggest that for an agricultural reform to succeed there is a need to have strong institutions in place, consensus building among the policy actors and local ownership of the reform program. This lesson may be of relevance to other countries in sub Saharan Africa and elsewhere in the developing world. The study recommends that efforts to foster policy learning across implementing institutions will be a promising approach to resolve the long-standing problems of agricultural extension reforms in Uganda and elsewhere.