



## What are the key constraints affecting access to agricultural extension services?

### Overview

Agricultural Extension Services include interventions/activities by government and non-state actors (NSAs) that facilitate access of farmers, their organizations, and other value chain actors to knowledge, information, and technologies. The services enable farmers' interaction with other relevant organizations, and assist them to develop their technical and management capacity in agriculture and family life (MAAIF, 2022).

The Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) is mandated to promote and support sustainable and market oriented agricultural production, food security and household incomes. In exercise of this mandate, MAAIF has developed the National Agricultural Extension Strategy 2021/22–2025/26 as a successor to the National Agricultural Extension Strategy 2015/16 – 2020/21.

This strategy is aligned to the third National Development Plan (NDPIII), Vision 2040, the National Agricultural Policy, National Agricultural Extension Policy, National Organic Agriculture Policy, Parish Development Model and the Agro-Industrialisation Programme. It is designed to build on the successes and address challenges that were identified during implementation. It aims at transforming extension from a system of parallel institutionally fragmented public and non-state actors to a well-coordinated, harmonized, regulated pluralistic service with multiple providers addressing diverse needs.

This policy brief discusses the key constraints to accessing agricultural extension services and opportunities during the FY2019/20 to FY2021/22.

### Key Issues

- Inadequate budgetary allocation and scheduling.
- Reducing numbers of extension staff at District Local Government (DLG) level, due in part to retirement, death, and labour mobility without a matching replacement.
- Weak institutional linkages among actors within the agricultural innovation system.
- Ineffective extension approaches.

### Introduction

In 2013, the Government of Uganda developed the National Agricultural Policy (NAP). This was followed in June 2014, by the adoption of an agricultural extension reform dubbed 'Single Spine Agricultural Extension System' and the restructuring of the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) that had hitherto been implementing a demand-driven agricultural extension and advisory services delivery model for more than a decade.

Following the end of the implementation of the National Agricultural Extension Strategy (NAES) 2016/17-2020/21, a new strategy drawing lessons from its implementation and in line with the new strategic direction as articulated under NDPIII, the Agro-Industrialisation Programme and the Parish Development Model has been developed. The overarching objective of the NDPIII is to fast-track the transformation of subsistence farming into commercial agriculture and the provisions of the

NDPIII necessitate that the new strategy embraces a value chain approach.

The National Agricultural Extension Strategy (NAES) 2021/22-2025/26 is anchored on national and sector policy frameworks as well as the continental Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. At the national level, the Uganda Vision 2040 envisages a transformed Ugandan society from a peasant to a modern and prosperous country within 30 years. This transformation will be achieved, among others, through a modern and indigenous



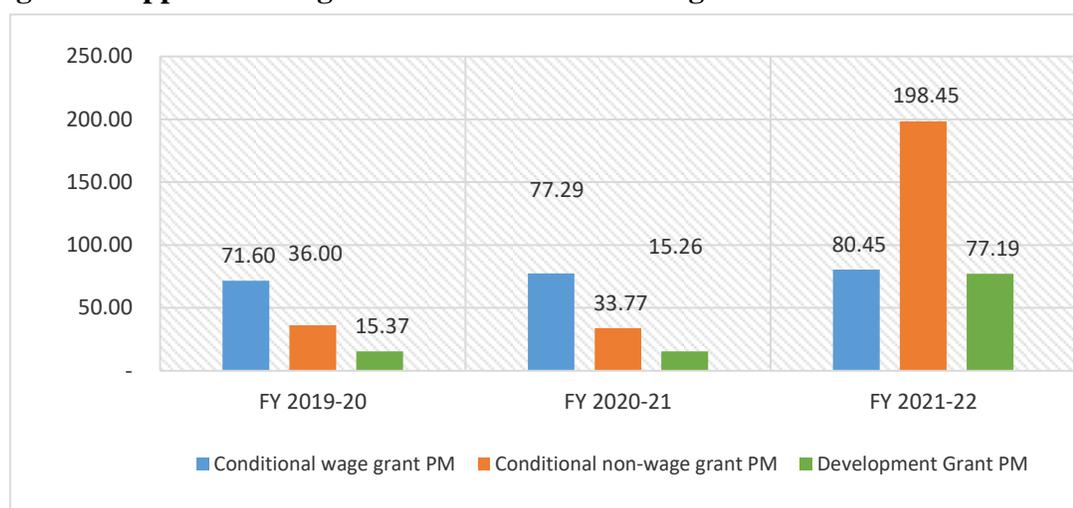
knowledge-based agriculture as reflected in the NAP whose vision is, “*A competitive, profitable and sustainable agricultural sector*” that will be realized by “*transforming the sector from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture.*”

The NAES will be implemented in line with the MAAIF proposed policy focus areas, which include; Production, multiplication, certification and distribution of seed and stocking material, disease control, mechanization and irrigation, farmer education and mobilization.

### Financing of the extension grant

Over the last three FYs, there has been inconsistency in financing extension services. According to the approved Indicative Planning Figure (IPF), FY2019/20 to FY2021/22, the actual budget for the Production and Marketing (PM) conditional wage grant has remained almost unchanged (Figure 1). However, budget allocation for the conditional non-wage grant in FY 2019/20-FY2020/21 consistently stagnated, although augmented in FY2021/22. Furthermore, the budgets under the development grant have been fluctuating for two FYs but later improved to Ug shs 61.93bn.

**Figure 1: Approved budget allocations to extension grant FY 2019/20 – FY 2021/22**



*Source: Background to the Budget FY2019-2022-Online Transfer Information Management System*

### Key Constraints

- Inadequate budgetary allocation and scheduling:** The challenges of inadequate budgetary allocation and untimely release of funds combine to weaken the agricultural extension system basically by underutilizing the knowledge base. This has constrained the ability of the Department of Agricultural Extension and Skills Management (DAESM) to supervise, coordinate and regulate extension services at all

levels of the value chain across stakeholders. In addition, it has limited the ability of field extension staff to visit targeted communities regularly. The frequency of visits to farmers to demonstrate technologies and best practices requires at least three times: pre-season, within the season, and post-season to provide comprehensive extension services. Hence the low budget performance translated into poor logistical support that remained an outstanding hindrance to



a thriving agricultural extension service up to today.

- 2. Reducing numbers of extension staff** at the DLG level due, in part, to retirement, death, and labour mobility without a matching replacement because of the delays by the district service commissions to advertise for the vacant position. For instance, in FY 2021/22, the extension workers/staff filled at the national level was at 4,031 (43.7%) compared to the approved staffing number of 9,275 leaving a gap of 5,220 (56.3%). This was lower than the recommended ratio.

For example, Ntungamo District had 47 extension workers to serve 35 Lower Local Governments (LLGs). The farmer-to-extension staff ratio was overwhelming, which limited access to advisory services by most farming households. Relatedly, there was a high coffee farmer-to-extension staff ratio in the Eastern region leading to limited contact and dissemination of coffee-specific knowledge and information. Similarly, there were only seven Regional Coffee Extension Officers (RCEOs) to coordinate the 22 districts in the Eastern region, and only four RCEOs in the Elgon region to coordinate 10 districts which was overwhelming in terms of service delivery to coffee farmers (*BMAU Annual Report FY2020/21*).

- 3. Weak institutional linkages among actors within the agricultural innovation system:**

Although a lot of effort was made to strengthen institutional coordination and eliminate parallel service delivery systems that had emerged during the NAADS reform, the linkages among the different actors both public and private have remained patently weak. The players include the Directorate of Agricultural Extension Services, Technical Directorates, Agencies (such as

Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA) and Cotton Development Organization), DLGs, Private Sector Organizations and entities, among others. This has created gaps in service delivery, duplication of efforts and conflicting messages. This implies that the flow of knowledge, information, skills and technologies among players within the innovation system is still inefficient and inconsistent.

- 4. Ineffective extension approaches:** Current extension delivery systems are majorly based on the face-to-face approach which is unsustainable in light of the inadequate human and financial resources. This is compounded by the existence of numerous extension workers that require orientation and skilling. However, MAAIF remains constrained by inadequate funding to support capacity building.

Despite the many constraints hampering agricultural extension in Uganda, several opportunities exist that can be exploited to build an effective and efficient agricultural extension service. These opportunities among others include:

- a) Existence of ZARDIs and PARIs:** The Zonal Agricultural Research and Development Institutes (ZARDIs) and Public Agricultural Research Institutes (PARIs) present huge opportunities for knowledge transfer and capacity-building of actors along commodity value chains. Considering the importance of establishing strong research–extension–farmer linkages, the staff and facilities available at ZARDIs and PARIs are opportunities to strengthen research linkages with agricultural extension and facilitate mass training of farmers and other value chain actors to adopt and apply new knowledge, technologies and innovations.



## b) Availability of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs):

Advancement in technology, especially ICTs has created a huge opportunity in extension service delivery. Over the years, several digital agricultural solutions have been developed that can be up-scaled to improve efficiency in the delivery of agricultural extension services. To strengthen the extension system, MAAIF is in the process of developing an e-extension system, which if implemented shall complement the existing extension approaches. This is an opportunity that can be exploited to a great extent during the implementation of this strategy.

## c) Existence of the nucleus/large farms that offer extension services:

Under the nucleus model, the nucleus farmer is a large farmer, well-resourced and may be supported by government and development partners such as non-governmental organisations to take charge of smaller farmers. These may provide small-scale farmers with the necessary training on agronomic practices and some inputs such as seed, fertilizer, agrochemicals and mechanized services for production either on payment or credit. The nucleus farmer purchases the crop from many farmers, processes or packages and markets the product. This model has registered great success with the oil palm project in Kalangala as well as with the sugar and tea estates. The adoption of this model by the government is an opportunity that brings synergy between the public and private sectors.

## Conclusion

Agricultural extension services through the MAAIF will continue to be provided through the single-spine pluralistic, equitable, decentralized, integrated and harmonized system. This links all

categories of extension users along the agricultural value chains with appropriate services, innovative technologies and the market. However, several hindrances to agriculture extension services should be addressed to cater for all farmer categories and allied businesses.

## Recommendations

1. The MFPED and MAAIF should increase funding and timeliness of the release of funds to the agricultural calendar in each district. Additionally, non-wage resources should be allocated and distributed according to a well-informed agricultural schedule.
2. The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Public Service, MAAIF, and the LGs should prioritize the recruitment of more extension workers and ensure that the staff are adequately skilled to safeguard the quality of services provided to farmers.

## References

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