When the Solution Became a Problem: Strategies in the Reform of Agricultural Extension in Uganda

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What is this presentation about?

• **Agricultural extension**
  – Key role for the adoption of agronomic practices
  – “Good intentions and hard realities” (Anderson & Feder, 2004)

• **Reform of agricultural extension services in Uganda**
  – **National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS)**
  – Extension reform program promoted in Uganda starting in 2001, funded by multiple donors, led by World Bank
  – Internationally – the most widely celebrated agricultural extension reform model in Africa
    • portrayed as a solution to the typical challenges of public sector agricultural extension
  – Ultimately unsuccessful – and completely disbanded
Key questions for this presentation?

• What was contested about NAADS?
  – By whom?
• How did the controversy about NAADS change over time?
• Was the contested nature of the program the main reason of its failure?
• What can we learn from this case?
What was NAADS about?
Main elements of the reform program

• Outsourcing of extension services from public sector staff to private service providers
  – Contracting private or NGO service providers on an annual basis

• Farmer empowerment and demand-driven approach
  – Farmers’ organizations decide on the agenda of the extension service – and on the hiring / firing of service providers

• Gender-sensitivity
  – Rules about participation of females

• Decentralization
  – NAADS was managed at the sub-county level

• Semi-autonomous agency
  – NAADS Secretariat – outside the agricultural ministry
How did NAADS come about?

• **International context**
  – Since the 1990s, rising criticism of the Training and Visit (T&V) system of agricultural extension as “top-down”
    • Reform-minded group within the World Bank (Thematic Group on “Sustainable Agriculture Systems, Knowledge and Institutions” - SASKI)

• **National context in Uganda**
  – World Bank-funded extension project – following the T&V model came to an end – negative evaluation
  – Decentralization policy
    • Downsizing of staff in the agricultural ministry
    • Closing of the Directorate of Agricultural Extension
How did NAADS proceed?
A Chronology of events

- 2001: National elections – agriculture high on the agenda
  NAADS World Bank Project approved
  NAADS Act passed in Parliament
  Implementation starts in “trailblazing” districts
- 2004: Positive mid-term evaluation
  Accelerated expansion of the program
- 2005: Input subsidy program is linked to NAADS
- 2006: National elections
  Government launches “Prosperity for All” Program
- 2007: President suspends NAADS
  “Model farmer” approach adopted; donors stop funding
- 2008: NAADS implemented in all districts
  Increasing criticism about misuse of funds
  World Bank NAADS Project came to an end
How did NAADS proceed?
A Chronology of events (continued)

- 2008: Preparations for new World Bank Project (ATAAS: “Agricultural Technology and Agribusiness Advisory Services”)
  - Had the provision to lay off all public sector extension staff
  - Successfully opposed by agricultural ministry
- 2010: President stops NAADS again
- 2011: ATAAS starts
- 2012: NAADS leadership exchanged

Present situation
- NAADS model completely disbanded
- Switch back from contracted service providers to public sector staff
- Directorate of Extension re-established in the Ministry
- Limited funding for extension – major funding goes to input subsidies
- Controversy with donors continues
Evaluations and research on NAADS

• Early evaluations positive
• Increasingly critical research studies
  – e.g., Parkinson (2009)
• Major impact evaluation by IFPRI
  – Methodologically rigorous (panel data, matching)
  – Preliminary findings positive (Benin et al., 2007, 2011)
  – Final results could not proof benefits (Benin et al., 2012)
• Review by the World Bank’s Independent Evaluation Group (IEG)
  – Rated as “moderately unsuccessful” (World Bank, 2011)
  – Problems: increased elite capture, misuse of resources, misdirected inputs, depressed farmer morale, weakening of farmers’ groups
Research Approach

- **Conceptual basis**
  - Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993)
  - Discourse analysis (Hajer, 1995, 2006)
  - Gradual versus radical policy reform (Murrell, 1992)

- **Data collection**
  - Use of qualitative methods – starting in 2007
    - Review of documents
    - 56 qualitative interviews with a wide range of stakeholders
    - Participant observation by first author

- **Quality control**
  - Triangulation, member checks, peer debriefing
Conceptual framework for analyzing agricultural policy processes

- Economic capital
- Human capital
- Social capital
- Electoral leverage
- Lobbying
- Public protest
- Influencing the rules of the process
- Use of ideological arguments
- Use of empirical evidence

Radical reform coalition:
- Interests
- Beliefs
- Resources

Public sector coalition:
- Interests
- Beliefs
- Resources

Political capital

Political process

Political decisions

Implementation process

Policy impact

Politics of implementation

Source: Birner and Resnick (2010, p. 1448), adapted from Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) and Birner and Wittmer (2003).
The radical reform coalition

- **Members**
  - Development partners, Ministry of Finance, National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO); initially: Minister of Agriculture

- **Core belief**
  - Internal reforms of public sector extension services will not be successful – alternative models are needed

- **Strategies to build political capital**
  - Use of financial resources to fund extension and to lobby (especially Ministry of Finance; Minister of Agriculture)
  - Use of media (frequent reports)
  - Creating a semi-autonomous agency outside the Ministry (NAADS Secretariat) run by strategically recruited pro-reform personnel
  - Use of international expertise to support the reform
The public sector coalition

• Members
  – Technical staff in the agricultural ministry; academics

• Core belief
  – Public sector institutions need to continue to play a key role in extension; reforms need to be gradual

• Strategies to build political capital
  – Passive resistance to reform through non-participation
    • E.g., planning meetings for NAADS, mid-term evaluation
  – Lobbying among technical staff, using social networks
  – Exploiting the weaknesses of the NAADS program as implementation unfolded (“We could have told you so.”)
  – Lobbying new decision makers that were appointed after national elections
Was the contested nature of NAADS the main reason for its failure?

- **View of the radical reform coalition**
  - Controversy could not have been avoided
    - Radical reform approach was the only option to overcome bureaucratic resistance
  - Political capture to blame for the failure

- **View of the public sector coalition**
  - Imposition of a reform model by donors and outside experts
  - Lack of inclusion of local experts led to major design flaws that ultimately undermined the program
  - Examples:
    - Decision to limit entire extension activities in each sub-county to only three topics only
    - Failure to address challenges of contracting/procurement at sub-county level
    - Creation of a semi-autonomous agency – making NAADS vulnerable to direct intervention by the President
What can be learnt from the case?

- Radical reform approaches (suppressing the opponents by using power)
  - may be successful for reforms that can be implemented “by the stroke of a pen”
  - not promising for institutional reforms that require buy-in from a large number of staff members placed throughout the country

- Need to build consensus
  - Methods of “deliberative democracy” involving farmers
  - Insights from the Advocacy Coalition Framework on the role of science useful
    - Need to enable analytical debates
Thank you!
Sources


Sources


