



Uganda

UNFFE-Uganda: grassroots consultations to refine the national agricultural advisory services

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The core business of the Uganda National Farmers Federation (UNFFE) is to lobby and promote the farmer-enabling environment. The Federation stemmed from agricultural competitions organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government between 1988 and 1993. The competitions, were meant to reward best performing farmers in livestock and agricultural production. In order to institutionalise these competitions, the Ministry

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facilitated the formation of the Uganda National Farmers’ Association (UNFA) on 22 January 1992. The Association developed into the Uganda National Farmers Federation (UNFFE) in 2002.

The Federation has 78 member farmer organisations, consisting of District Farmer Associations (DFAs), Commodity-Specific Associations and agri-business related farmer-service oriented companies that operate at national and district levels. The total individual membership is over 1,000,000 farmers, of whom 45 per cent are women. UNFFE leaders are elected at parish, sub-county, district and national level. Elected officials serve voluntarily, based on their interest in improving the incomes and welfare of fellow farmers.

UNFFE organisational structure consists of: (i) The National Farmers Council, (ii) The National Executive Committee, and (iii) The Secretariat. The National Executive Committee, currently presided by Mr Charles Ogang, has ten members and is supported by a management staff of eleven.

Development challenge

Uganda has a population of over 35 million people with ten main ethnic groups. Some 15 per cent of the population lives in urban areas. Literacy rates are almost 77 per cent for men and 58 per cent for women. Uganda has generally fertile soils and regular rainfall. Agriculture is the most important economic sector, employing some 80 per cent of the work force and representing some 24 per cent of the GDP.

Coffee is one of Uganda’s main crops, accounting for the main portion of its export revenues. In addition to coffee, Uganda also exports fish and fish products, tea, cotton, flowers and horticultural products.

Since 1986, the government of Yoweri Museveni has brought relative stability and economic growth to Uganda. Museveni was re-elected for another 5 years in 2011. From the start of his rule, the Ugandan government has focused on rehabilitating and stabilising the economy by undertaking currency reforms, raising producer prices on export crops, increasing prices of petroleum products, and improving civil service wages. The policy changes are especially aimed at dampening inflation and boosting production and export earnings. The GDP for 2011 was estimated to be USD47.78 billion, with a growth rate of 5.1 per cent (down from 6 per cent in 2010 and 7 per cent in 2009). The global economic downturn has hurt Uganda’s exports. Oil revenues and taxes will become a larger source of government funding as oil comes into production in the next few years. Per capita income is currently USD1,400, up from USD1,300 in 2009. However, it was estimated that 24.5 per cent of Ugandans still lived below the poverty line in 2009.

Uganda has six million farmers. Smallholder farmers form the majority (over 90 per cent) of the farming community in the country. They are characterised by a low resource base in terms of land (less than 3 ha per household), capital, labour (they mainly depend on family labour), and limited farm management skills. Their farming operations are low input/low output and they generally lack necessary information for improving their situation. The majority of farmers are individual producers operating at subsistence level having limited surpluses to sell, which they also sell as individuals. The quality of their produce is generally low, a factor which hinders access to markets and reduces their bargaining power. Thus farmers do not benefit fully from farming, which is their major economic activity. The need to improve their access to markets is therefore apparent.

UNFFE strives to help farmers in four major areas: building institutions, technical assistance, general support services, and lobbying and advocacy.

Building Farmer Institutions: Starting at the grassroots level, UNFFE's members help to organise farmers into groups commonly known as Special Interest Groups (SIGs). These SIGs receive services such as agricultural extension, training in post-harvest handling and quality management. They are also encouraged to pool their produce and sell as a group in order to increase their bargaining power. These services are all aimed at helping farmers to access the market.

Technical Assistance: UNFFE provides technical assistance to farmers, through the DFAs, in the following areas: Accessing high-quality inputs (e.g. improved seeds, fertilisers), training in proper use and handling of agricultural chemicals, provision of input/output market information as well as development and training in improving product quality.

General support services: These include promoting produce bulking, linking smallholder farmers to traders and institutions, and sensitising smallholder farmers on the GlobalGAP.

Lobbying and advocacy: These are activities that help smallholder farmers to increase production to meet demand and that promote market access within multilateral trading systems.

Collaborative research process

Many development challenges were identified in the first workshop held by AGRINATURA, IFAP and UNFFE in 2008:

1. Provide accessible and affordable finance for farmers to invest in value addition of farm production.
2. Provide accessible and affordable finance for storage and bulking.
3. Provide access to market information (including radio stations, internet, etc.).
4. Strengthen extension services through existing and new farmer groups.
5. Establish incentives for strengthening and self-sustenance of farmer groups.
6. Establish regulations for quality standards.
7. Support district commercial officers in collecting market information.
8. Put zoning policies (geographical specialisation/commodity-based regional differentiation) into operation.
9. Provide national policies on bulking.

There was much criticism of the existing National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) policy, mainly because the government has established new structures instead of involving existing farmer organisations and frameworks. Therefore, UNFFE decided to undertake a survey to audit the effectiveness of

legislation and policies that affect farmers, with specific reference to NAADS. UNFFE's other partners (Uganda Cooperative Alliance (UCA), the Agri-Profocus-Uganda network, the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), and Pelum Uganda), joined in to further formulate this research agenda. In July 2010 a project consultant Morrisson Rwakakamba, a former UNFFE advocacy officer, was hired to facilitate the process and coordinate research with UNFFE's partners. A detailed proposal was developed entitled: *"Action Research to Audit the Effectiveness of NAADS and proposals for Reform: NAADS that farmers want"*. The objectives of this research were to:

- Facilitate a data-driven consensus on the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of NAADS from the farmers' point of view
- Benchmark and analyse various extension models, with a view to recommending progressive models that deliver solutions to farmers' concerns
- Deliver a farmers' "Green Print" proposal detailing a road map for the reform of NAADS
- Provide evidence of the impact of NAADS on farmers and enable UNFFE to conduct effective advocacy
- Map the power/influence matrix to underpin reforms in NAADS

To begin with, a preliminary survey with farmers was conducted in order to get their opinion on NAADS, resulting in "NAADS that farmers want – dialogue report". This served as an input into the first focus-group dialogue, held on February 3, 2011. This dialogue brought together key stakeholders, from the private sector, (inter)national NGOs, government including representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and NAADS secretariat, farmers and researchers. UNFFE also engaged the Ministry of Finance, for whom improving NAADS was a key issue. Both the research theme and dialogue initiative were welcomed by the government and NAADS. During the dialogue, the results of the preliminary dialogue report were discussed as well as the implementation of NAADS. The main results of the consultations on key issues and constraints of NAADS have so far been:

- Overpricing of inputs / poor quality technologies to farmers
- Poor public relations at local government level
- A flawed selection process for the six model farmers per parish: only rich farmers or those having political influence benefited from NAADS
- Annual growth in the Ugandan agriculture sector continues to fall, despite the investments made by NAADS

After the dialogue, a fact-finding survey was done to analyse the effectiveness of NAADS Programme. This included developing the questionnaire, and selecting regions and respondents. Farmer groups that participated in NAADS as well as some that did not were interviewed about their experiences with NAADS during so-called 'fire-place meetings' (meetings taking place in villages with a group of farmers). The information was combined in progress reports, which served as a basis for developing a strategy to improve NAADS. The fact-finding survey was performed by a consultant, who collaborated with two members of UNFFE in performing the 'fire-place' conversations and interviews. AGRINATURA researchers helped with the methodological set-up and documentation of the results of the survey.

On the basis of the survey results, the consultant and two UNFFE members drafted a proposal "A Green Print for NAADS reform". On March 21, 2012, the findings of the survey were presented to a wide platform of stakeholders, during a workshop convened to discuss the advocacy points with UNFFE Board members and stakeholders. Representatives of NAADS secretariat, Oxfam, Pelum, SNV, Trias, Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA), Scientific Foundation for Development, VECO, Makerere University and AGRINATURA attended this workshop. These parties were also involved in the setup of the study.

“The problem with NAADS is not money, but rather lack of proper partnerships and everybody in the agriculture sector engaging in scattered activities on their own.”

The advocacy points included:

1. Farmers want NAADS to carry out widespread awareness on the new NAADS, especially on the differences between the old and new NAADS
2. NAADS should urgently tap into the pool of Extension Link farmers that were trained by UNFFE members throughout Uganda in Animal Husbandry and Agronomic practices.
3. Local governments at district and sub-county level should be involved in identifying and moderating Private-Public Partnerships frameworks across the country.
4. NAADS should promote labour-saving initiatives and other technologies that would reduce labour costs.
5. NAADS should promote particular enterprises, backed by enterprise-specific extension.
6. Farmers expect NAADS to provide market information and forecasting for enterprises that they promote.
7. Farmers engaged in animal husbandry need more livestock extension services as well as access to inputs such as improved seeds, fertilisers, pesticides.
8. Crop and livestock diseases should be urgently contained and curtailed. For instance, the 31 per cent decline in coffee exports in 2010 was mainly attributed to coffee wilt. Other crop and animal diseases like banana wilt, cassava streak virus disease, Newcastle disease in poultry, pneumonia in cattle and African swine fever all affect agricultural performance in Uganda.
9. NAADS should work more closely with National Agricultural Research Organisations (NAROs) and other research organisations to provide producers with resilient seed as well as appropriate varieties and other plant materials. At the moment, NAADS does not collaborate closely with research organisations.
10. NAADS should promote the efficient use of both inorganic and organic soil fertility measures in various crop systems throughout the farming community in Uganda.

In the discussion on the Green Print proposal, UNFFE expressed its gratitude for the study and the importance of the proposal for creating an evidence-based and legitimate advocacy strategy for UNFFE. An action plan was formulated (see Box 9).

BOX 9 Action points for UNFFE advocacy on NAADS'

1. Fine tune the Green Print and identify the core messages presented by the research team and UNFFE advocacy officer.
2. Publish the Green Print and study report so that UNFFE advocacy can be based on this research. The intention was to take the report back to farmers for validation and also to engage them in advocacy activities at the local government level.
3. The Jinja Source of the Nile Annual Agricultural Trade show provides a platform for UNFFE advocacy. The Green Print should be worked into the speech of UNFFE president at the show and used to petition the President of the Republic of Uganda. During the trade show, UNFFE should have an information/documentation room where advocacy issues can be relayed to members and to the multitudes of show-goers.
4. UNFFE will seek an appointment with the President of Uganda, the Minister of Agriculture and the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture to discuss the contents of the Green Print, with a view to securing practical and concrete commitments.
5. UNFFE should enter into dialogue with journalists involved in agriculture reporting across the wider media in Uganda. The Green Print could then be published and circulated via newspapers.
6. The Green Print can be posted on online media, blogs and websites. The Agri-Profocus website is an example of one of the many avenues to disseminate information that can generate discussions of issues raised in the Green Print.

Grassroots organisations have not been directly involved in the presentation of the findings and the Green Print, although some of the Board members of UNFFE represent district farmer organisations in the country. However, the research itself has been a way to reach out to the grassroots organisations. Or, as a UNFFE member included in the study stated: *“wherever we had discussions in the villages, UNFFE members in district branches were actively involved”*.

Advocacy outcomes

During the workshop, it also became clear that the purpose of the Green Print proposal serves not only as an advocacy recommendation to the government, but the president of UNFFE also stressed that disseminating the proposals to their members gives them proof that their views are incorporated into the national UNFFE advocacy strategy. The effect of this is a strengthening of UNFFE's relationship with member Farmer Organisations. One of UNFFE Board members expressed this as follows:

“Such studies give us a chance to keep in touch with our members and provide a picture of the real beneficiaries of NAADS.” Another stated *“We have tickled these farmers and they are waiting for responses and findings from the report.”*

After the discussion about the Green Print during the workshop on March 21, 2012, UNFFE presented the final document to the Ministry of Agriculture and discussed the Green Print with the Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Tress Bucyanayandi, who acknowledged the conclusions. He assured UNFFE that the NAADS

programme would revert to a focus on the provision of extension and advisory services. In addition, the Minister also appointed UNFFE to the committee which is planning a new project under NAADS called Agriculture Technology and Agri-business Advisory Services, whose main objective is improving advisory service systems in Uganda.

UNFFE's relationship with NAADS secretariat has also improved, which has led to a closer cooperation between UNFFE and NAADS. This is illustrated by the fact that NAADS has recently funded UNFFE's farmer members to attend the International Agricultural show in Nairobi, to learn new technologies. UNFFE and NAADS also will sign an MoU, which will facilitate cooperation in the future. Finally, at the end of 2012, UNFFE plans to share the Green Print with the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture.

The AGRINATURA research team and UNFFE identified several factors that influenced the uptake of the study's findings (i.e., the Green Print) into a successful advocacy strategy:

1. The consultant provided continuity throughout the project's lifespan, which was characterised by occasional lapses of time during which few activities were developed.
2. The connection with UNFFE was helped by the fact that the consultant had been employed as an UNFFE advocacy officer in the past and had a good working relationship with UNFFE staff.
3. The research team included two UNFFE officers, of which one also a UNFFE Board member. As UNFFE Board member stated, *"I think involving UNFFE staff in the exercise was a good thing. It was also an awesome thing that the funding came in very fast on request"*
4. The topic, reforming NAADS, was selected by the organisation itself and is still high on both the social and political agenda. Again, quoting UNFFE Board member: *"it all started with careful selection of the topic NAADS, which touches the hearts of many farmers. Thus they were all motivated to loudly speak out on the issue and share experiences"*.
5. UNFFE has strong relationships with the President's office and the Ministry of Agriculture. The strength of advocacy and links to the government were highly valued by the Board members.
6. The study strengthens UNFFE's legitimacy and therefore its position in matters of advocacy. UNFFE Board member summed up with: *"UNFFE can now be put at a higher level of research and fact-based advocacy. It will even leverage our partnerships and lobbying."*

Constraining factors for the uptake of the findings into a successful advocacy strategy:

1. There was a long delay after the initial workshop in the start-up of UNFFE and ESFIM activities in 2010. The momentum had been lost, and some UNFFE staff had been replaced. The "institutional memory" of the project had been somewhat lost as a result.
2. There was no involvement of senior UNFFE staff in drafting of reports and the Green Print proposal prior to the presentation on 21 March 2012.
3. The timing of the final report and the Green Print did not match the timing of the final workshop.
4. The cost of printing and disseminating the Green Print and final report are to be borne by UNFFE, but UNFFE may not have budgeted for this.
5. The sample size of the survey was small. As an UNFFE Board member remarked during the final workshop: *"I think the study was good so that UNFFE was able to get the real feeling of the farmer. However I think the issue of coverage/sample size didn't go well and we didn't reach many people."*



In the self-assessment performed by UNFFE Board members and employees, UNFFE has acknowledged the limitation in consultation of their district members and travel to these regions for the creation of evidence-based advocacy. Costs associated with these activities limit the field work carried out by UNFFE employees. To quote an UNFFE Board member remarked during the final workshop

“There are logistical constraints that limit our coherence, especially between the secretariat and district branches. In the previous three years our donor support had gone very low and this trickled down to our existence and support to our local stakeholders.”

The study is, however, highly valued by UNFFE president and Board members and they see the importance of such surveys for strengthening their advocacy strategy. An UNFFE Board member said: *“The research will greatly improve UNFFE’s advocacy work. The presentation of the findings today has really opened our eyes on NAADS.*

In its 2008-2012 Advocacy Strategy, UNFFE observed the following obstacles to its advocacy and lobbying strategy:

“There is very limited funding for lobby and advocacy efforts. This is due to lack of knowledge on the benefits of the activity and a tendency among most donors to think that advocacy is a one-day or one week activity. Yet research shows that in order to achieve advocacy objectives, there is need for a long-term, sustainable and protracted approach that initiates contact with advocacy targets and sustains it for longer periods. (...)

Limited coordination between research and advocacy. If advocacy were a factory, research would be its raw material. Good lobby and advocacy results from well researched and factual lobby and advocacy positions that are compelling enough to move policy makers, donors and development partners. Research therefore needs to be properly harmonised with lobby and advocacy for maximum results.”

Partnership

The ESFIM project therefore was rather timely. The AGRINATURA team (LEI), UNFFE and IFAP met for the first time during an agenda-setting workshop in Kampala, in December 2008. This relationship was characterised as equal, in the sense that UNFFE was in the driver's seat to determine the research agenda, with LEI providing the methodology. UNFFE hired an external consultant, who had previously been employed by UNFFE, Morrisson Rwakakamba. There was considerable trust between UNFFE and the consultant, who worked independently, but had regular consultations with UNFFE and LEI. Mr Rwakakamba visited many farmers in different regions of Uganda. This resulted in an improved link of UNFFE to its constituency, which was much in need of improvement, as UNFFE admitted.

Some scepticism has been expressed during the process in Uganda about the pivotal role that the consultant has played in collecting data, writing reports and self-assessment. It is a fact that the AGRINATURA team would have preferred more involvement on the part of UNFFE staff, other stakeholders (such as NGOs working in the same area), or university researchers. However, whenever this topic was discussed with UNFFE partners, they indicated that they preferred to continue working with the consultant only. UNFFE itself appeared not interested in being more actively involved in the drafting of the reports. This may partly reflect the fact that being a farmer organisation mainly involved in advocacy and lobbying meant that UNFFE members are not accustomed to or interested in writing reports. National research partners (such as universities) were not involved. Although including them was considered, it would have meant increased fragmentation of the budget, which was thought to be undesirable.

The advantage of rehiring the same consultant several times was that this provided a stable factor in the project. Changes in personnel at UNFFE and LEI thus had less impact on the "institutional memory" of the project. It has also contributed to the relatively smooth continuation of activities. While communication between the AGRINATURA team and UNFFE was sometimes difficult, with long lapses of silence, communication between the AGRINATURA team and the consultant was much better. The risk was, however, that UNFFE could feel that they had lost ownership of the project. However, because the consultant knew UNFFE staff well, he could easily link up with them. In addition, the topic chosen for the research (evaluation of NAADS) was of importance to UNFFE, and UNFFE remained involved throughout.

Lessons learnt

- The goal of ESFIM was to improve UNFFE's lobbying strategy through local research, supported by the AGRINATURA team. At first, it was not clear whether this concept would work in practice. We feel that it has been partly successful in Uganda. Gathering evidence-based information from farmers gave UNFFE sufficient material upon which to base an advocacy strategy. It had the beneficial side-effect of linking UNFFE up with various farmers throughout Uganda. However, because most activities were carried out by a consultant, ESFIM probably contributed little to institutional learning and to forging partnerships with research institutes such as universities. However, the project did provide UNFFE with the positive experience of using research, as was illustrated by a statement made by the President of UNFFE during the final workshop: *"I would like that UNFFE staff get more involved in research programmes. We need a more participatory programme both at the apex and down to the beneficiaries"*.

- The study has given UNFFE a strong evidence-based advocacy message that was enriched by discussions with its members and partners. UNFFE has expressed advocacy and lobby as one of their strong points, in contrast to a poor capacity in reaching out to member organisations, therefore EFSIM has provided crucial support.
- UNFFE's challenge for the future is to create strong coherence with its members in order to send a stronger advocacy message to the outside world.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to all members of the Uganda National Farmers Federation (UNFFE) for their support and advice during the ESFIM programme, as well as helpful suggestions and inputs for this chapter. Special acknowledgements go to Morrison Rwakakamba, Kenneth Katungisa, Acio Dora, Charles Ogang, Capt. (Rtd) Esau Tisasira, Harriet Ssali and Emmanuel Sunday.