

A STATEMENT OF FARMERS ON AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES IN UGANDA

DEVELOPED DURING

THE FARMERS' FORUM HELD ON 18TH/08/2016

This statement represents views and opinions of farmer representatives generated during the Regional Farmers' forum 2016 organized by the Central Archdiocesan Province Caritas Association (CAPCA) under the theme; "*Agriculture Extension service delivery" looking at its present state and Future*". They statement was submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, Directorate of Agriculture Extension Services.

Preamble

We the undersigned farmer representatives of 24 farmers' organisations, comprising of 14 cooperative societies and 10 farmer associations with over 6,500 farmers based in Mpigi, Butambala, Bukomansibi, Mubende, Luweero, Nakaseke, Mukono and Wakiso districts convening at Pope John Paul II Memorial Building - Lubaga on Thursday 18th August 2016 to deliberate on the state of agricultural extension service delivery.

We commend the efforts by government of Uganda through the Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) for having established the Directorate of Agricultural Extension Services, developed the National Agricultural Extension Policy & strategy, as well as the on-going efforts to recruit agricultural extensionists per Sub County in Uganda.

We also recognize efforts by the government through Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) for the continuous provisions of agricultural inputs to farmers. Indeed agricultural inputs are important in any transformation of a country to an agri-business economy.

We commend and appreciate the recognition of farmers' voice by government that even led to structural changes in NAADS programme to a single spine approach in providing agricultural extension. The consequent efforts to transform 68% of small holder farmers from peasant producers to middle income agri-business citizens.

We are however concerned that;

Operation Wealth Creation (OWC)

- Planting materials are distributed late, at times when rains are over. For instance in 2015, in Nagojje sub county we (farmers) received coffee seedlings and banana suckers in May on the onset of drought season. Hence many farmers lost out as they committed a lot of labour and time to plant, but most of what was planted dried out. The handling of seedlings is at times poor. Planting materials are heaped onto trucks and off-loaded anyhow. This retards their capacity to germinate.
- In addition, farmers rarely prepare adequately to receive inputs. Communications just come a day before, at times on the day inputs

are delivered. This retards farm planning, worse of all the choice and quantities of planting materials is determined by OWC not farmers. This has created an inputs' receiving group, giving way for some people to disguise themselves as farmers, receive inputs especially coffee, maize, beans, etc. and later sell them off.

- Although planting materials are distributed, they are not accompanied by the required agronomic knowledge (Extension services). The absence of extension services to accompany inputs delivered retards farm production and productivity.
- There is inadequate follow up by OWC, Production and Extension officers to ascertain progress of received planting materials. Hence some planting materials are not planted especially those given out in dry seasons, others are sold off by receivers who disguise themselves as farmers, crops that get planted dry out due to quality issues, poor handling, among challenges.
- Much as OWC has supplied a lot of planting materials, it has not gone ahead to supply the required necessities for all round cultivation. For instance simple irrigation equipment to counter drought seasons, fertilizers to enhance soil fertility among other inputs. In some cases inputs are distributed unevenly, for instance, a farmer of 1 acre is given 50 coffee seedlings rather than 420 seedlings recommended per acre. Yet that of less than an acre is given over 400 coffee seedlings.

Extension Service Delivery:

- Extension officers are few, for instance 1 officer per Sub County. They have no field offices where farmers can reach them in time. They are based at sub county headquarters, very far from farmers. Moreover with no transport means in form of motorcycles for their mobility. In cases where sub counties have a motorcycle, it is one, used in turns by a number of government officers, including Veterinary Doctors, Animal Husbandry Officers, Agricultural Extension Officers, Health inspectors etc.
- Extension officers have no clear schedules to effectively reach farmers even where there is high demand exhibited. This leaves farmers with no choice but rather seek fellow farmer advice even in extra-ordinary cases.

- There is still no close working relations between government and Non-State Actors (NSAs) that provide extension services to farmers. A number NSAs are doing well in providing extension services and promoting farmer to farmer extension, but government has failed to recognize their efforts.
- Weather forecast information is at times not reliable. This affects farm planning, planting in wrong seasons and retards productivity. Besides, some politicians are increasingly causing challenges to extension service delivery. Their focus is on voters' support and not service delivery.

We therefore recommend that:

- OWC management should take stock of field learnings in particular distribute agricultural inputs at onset of rainy seasons or during rainy seasons, allow farmers to suggest the inputs/materials required, adopt a rational distribution criterion in terms of acceptable quantity per acreage, good animal breeds and communicate time to all stakeholders. This will also enable effective follow up and monitoring until harvesting time.
- Communicate in advance preferably in 2-4 weeks' time when inputs will be availed to farmers, distribution venues, etc. We request OWC to de-centralize distribution centers of inputs.
- Government should enforce all regulations on counterfeit agricultural inputs. Suppliers of OWC should also be scrutinized to ensure that quality seeds, livestock, mature seedlings are distributed to farmers.
- OWC management should diversify the agricultural inputs procured. Besides planting materials, irrigation equipment among other non-planting materials should also be included on the list of procured items to improve farm production and productivity due to effects of drought.
- Government should strengthen follow up of inputs provided by OWC. Preferably this should be at all levels; village, Sub County and district level involving farmers and local councils.
- Let farmer organizations; farmers' associations and cooperatives, in particular multi-purpose and produce cooperatives, be involved in distribution of inputs to communities where their members stay. Refrain from prioritizing farmer lists presented by political leaders

including Local Council. They are at times partisan and discriminatory

We further recommend that:

- Government Extension officers be facilitated with motorcycles and necessary tools to effectively reach out to farmers. Increase the number of extension officers to a ratio of at least 1:500 farmers rather than 1:1500 farmers.
- Government should recognize the important role Non-State Actors (NSAs) play in extension service delivery. Government through MAAIF should map out NSAs providing extension services to farmers and work with them to fill gaps in extension services delivery across Uganda. Government also needs to devise strategies to strengthen and promote farmer to farmer extension services delivery.
- Enact bi-laws to regulate distribution, handling and planting of seeds/seedlings/suckers.

We reaffirm our commitment and support towards all government programmes for improving the agricultural sector. However, it is our plea that the above issues and the consequent recommendations are considered to enable transformation of the country's agricultural sector from a subsistence to a prosperous agri-business sector come 2021.