

Budgetary support improves agriculture extension services



Research shows at least 60% of agro inputs given out to farmers are wasted due to lack of extension workers to guide them

By Joshua Kato

"My cow has been in labour for the last few hours, but I do not see any progress in the delivery of the calf, so how can I help it deliver?" Justus Nuwamanya, a cattle keeper, posted a question on a cattle keepers' forum.

"Why don't you call the nearest veterinary extension worker to assist you?" one of the forum members asked.

"We do not have any here at the moment. In fact, I have never seen a government extension worker visit me," Nuwamanya answered.

This is the dilemma that farmers across the country face in the course of their farming activities. Many of them are either paying for private extension services or farming by trial and error. This is largely due to the limited number of extension workers in the communities.

According to a research carried out by International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in 2015, at least 60% of agro inputs given out to farmers are wasted due to lack of extension workers to guide them. These losses have not gone unnoticed to the Government. It is not surprising that in 2016, the Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries proposed that in addition to giving out inputs, farmers must also be helped to 'dig' standard holes for the inputs. To put these losses into perspective, between 2014 and 2015, National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS)/Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) gave out 5.4 million kilograms of maize seeds to farmers across the country.

With losses of around 50-60%, this means that at least 1.7 million kilograms were wasted. During the same period, 58.3 million coffee seedlings were given out. However, because farmers did not know the basics of planting coffee, at least 29 million seedlings were wasted. Other



NAADS/OWC gives farming inputs such as goats with the goal of improving family livelihoods



Agriculture minister Ssempiija

inputs given out by NAADS/OWC include beans, tea seedlings, citrus and dairy cows.

"Agriculture extension is the 'heart and soul' of the knowledge base of the agriculture ministry and is one of the most important elements for agricultural sector transformation," agriculture minister Vincent Ssempiija says. As the reading of the 2018/19 National Budget draws closer, agriculture extension is one of the key sub-sectors that have been allocated funds for the last four years.

"The reformed agricultural extension system is expected to significantly improve production efficiency, competitiveness and foster commercialisation of smallholder farmers still engulfed in a cycle of vicious poverty," Ssempiija says.

Examining the numbers

According to the strategy, the extension services run from the national extensions directorate, through the districts up to the sub-county levels. The national level

In figures

Sh 294.5 billion

The cost of recruiting and paying wages of the current 3,032 extension workers

Sh 593.4 billion

The amount of money needed to cater for operational costs of the extension workers

should have 47 staff, who include a director, commissioners, assistant commissioners and support staff.

As of end of 2017, 26% of the national directorate was fully staffed, with another round of recruitment in the coming Financial Year 2018/19 to bring the total percentage to 60%.

Each district should have a total of 13 staff. There are 116 districts in the country which brings the total number of staff to 1,508. These include production and marketing officers, extension co-ordinators, principal veterinary, crop and fisheries officers. Others are senior veterinary, crops and fisheries, animal production and vermin control officers as well as entomologists. Thirty percent of the positions at the districts were filled in 2016/17, with another 30% in 2017/18, bringing staffing to a total of 60% in 2018. The plan is to have 100% by 2020.

At the sub-county level, a total of 9,548 staff are targeted. These include veterinary and agriculture officers plus their assistants and an entomologist. Of these, at least 36% were recruited, with more recruitments coming in the next three years, to make 100% by 2020.

Ssempiija says the 2018/19 budget has provided more funds for recruitment of more extension workers. Overall, around sh82b was allocated to extension services at both the directorate and district level. This includes salaries for staff and funds for recruitment of more extension workers.

With around 3,032 extension workers already recruited, out of a targeted 11,111 (according to figures in the Extension Policy by 2020), the ratio of extension workers to farming households is 1:1,800. According to recommendations of Members of Parliament while preparing the 2018/19 budget, at least sh16b is required to recruit another 1,900 extension workers to make 5,000.

According to Beatrice Byarugaba, the ministry's director of agriculture extension, this is still far below the internationally recommended 1:500. However, if all the 11,111 workers are recruited in two years' time, the ratio will drop to 1:800. "We are sure these will be able effectively carry on the task," Byarugaba says. To bring the figure to the 1:500, around 17,000 workers should be recruited.

"The fact is that recruitment of all extension workers must have been

Abuse of office

Ideally, each district must have a vehicle for the extension staff and motorcycles at every sub-county to ease their transport.

Under the old NAADS system, there was supposed to be a vehicle for the district NAADS co-ordinator and a motorcycle for the sub-county NAADS co-ordinator. The vehicles were mainly double cabin pick-up trucks worth about sh150m or Honda off road motorbikes worth sh15m each. This means that if the Government is to buy a vehicle for each of the 116 districts, approximately sh17.4b is required.

Then, with around 1,364 sub-counties, the Government will need sh20.4b for the motorbikes. On top of the vehicles and motorbikes, the workers need offices and office equipment. This can only be implemented gradually, since the funds are not provided for in the 2018/19 budget.

And then after buying these vehicles, the Government must make sure that they are not abused. "But you realised that the vehicle was used by other top officers at the district including the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and the LC5 chairperson," lamented a former district coordinator.

Sometimes, the vehicle was taken by either the district chairman or the CAO on trips for many weeks. In fact, when he refused to hand over the vehicle to the chairperson and CAO, his job was threatened. "It is one of the reasons I was forced to leave," he says.

done yesterday," said Jacqueline Aol, Nebbi MP. She, like most of the other MPs explained that if there were enough people to guide farmers, even the current effects of drought and diseases would be low. Her colleague, Sandra Santa, MP Oyam agreed, "It is improper for the Government to continue distributing farm inputs without giving the right guidance," she said.

Call to recruit, equip extension workers

The cost of recruiting and paying wages for all extension workers is sh294.5b. According to Beatrice Byarugaba, the ministry's director of agriculture extension, the government has budgeted for this through the next three years.

"The money has been allocated, but for now, it only caters for the wages of the workers," she says. This means that the

recruited workers will be paid for doing no work, or work using their own means of transport.

Indeed, some of them, in districts such as Nakaseke, are already doing so. "I was recruited to work, so I cannot say I have no transport. Farmers call me and I visit them using my own means," one of the new workers says. He, however, explains that it is a big challenge.

"Fortunately, most of the farmers are willing to contribute something for transport," he adds.

Paul Kitooke, a farmer in Kikuyu, says most farmers have no problem giving 'something' to the *abalimisa* (extension workers). "As long as they do proper work, we have no problem facilitating them," he says. But then, this is not how it should be, at least, under the

policy.

"It is good the extension services have improved in terms of recruited staff, however, the Government should equip them with transport to operate effectively," says Geoffrey Okello, an agriculture consultant. This is the view of most extension workers and farmers.

According to the Extension Policy, sh593.4b is needed to cater

for operational costs. Byarugaba says this money has not yet been availed. And now this causes a dilemma. During the budget debate for the 2018/19 financial year, Parliament proposed that rather than continue with recruitment of extension staff who are not working, more money allocated for recruitment should be used for equipping

extension staff. The proposal looked at sh10b to cater for this non-wage support, including setting up offices and facilitating their transport.

"If the Government has only got money for recruitment, but no money for helping the recruited staff operate effectively, then this recruitment is a waste of time and taxpayers' money."