Strengthening Information and Communication Linkages between Agricultural Research and Extension

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Project No: TCP/UGA/3002 (A)

Duration: Nov. 2004 – Feb. 2006

Implementing Agency:	**NARO**
Collaborating Institution:	**NAADS**
Financial and Technical:	**FAO**

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Background

Background into the initiation of the ARENET project.

Consultations were held in 8/ 2003 between senior managers of NAADS/NARO for long term linkages and partnership.

It was recognized that:

- **In order for PMA to become effective it is important for its various components to converge and complement each other in specific programs and activities.**
- **research and extension linkages are critical for agriculture change to occur.**

Background
cont…

It became of immediate concern to senior managers in NAADS and NARO:

- **how to best realize linkages in the multi-institutional context of PMA.**
- **in which manner NAADS and NARO can relate and link with each other in order to fully realize their complementary benefits to the farmers.**
- **the need to consider carefully how they can converge and collaborate better and improve the chances of a powerful extension-research interface.**

Background
cont…

It was agreed that a shared NARO/NAADS vision and purpose should inform emerging partnership between NAADS and NARO at all levels

- **Shared vision - To contribute to the improvement of agricultural productivity and incomes (livelihood) of subsistence farmers**
- **The purpose - To increase farmers' capacity to demand and access relevant and effective technology and knowledge for profitable agriculture.**

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Background

Key Potential areas of NAADS – NARO Collaboration

Among 6 major areas, 2 of them are concerned with information and communication.

- Resource and information sharing - set up systems and processes for regular sharing of information
- Strengthening information, education and communication at all levels - lack of information at farmers level, CBOs and service providers is a major constraint to improvements in productivity and technological change.

Background
Mechanisms for actualizing NAADS/NARO Collaboration

A number of questions arose as to:

- What are the levels at which these themes can be operationalised?
- What kind of structures and processes are required for the collaboration to be effective?
- Who will take the lead in what area?

These are some of the questions this workshop will deliberate on.

1.2 Problem/Justification

- **Information is a strategic and important input in strengthening livelihoods of farmers to take informed decisions – access?**
- **Lack of information contributing to poverty and powerlessness in rural areas**
- **Low productivity due to lack of relevant technologies, lack of adequate interface between research, extension and farmers.**

Poor linkages between research and extension is a key bottleneck in agricultural development.

1.3 Government response

- **Establishment of NAADS and NARO.**
- **NAADS is a new public-private institutional framework to ensure that support services are responsive to farmers needs.**
- **Agricultural research is undergoing review and reorganization in order to make it relevant to the needs of rural poor farmers.**

This process started internally in NARO with:

- **Decentralization of research services to the major agro-ecological zones –ARDCs**
- **Acquisition of the basic elements of ICT infrastructure at ARDCs**
- **Putting an internal information management system**

Government response cont..

However, this does not address the process and mechanisms of information sharing and communication between NARS institutions, farmers, private sector and the extension system represented by NAADS.

Therefore an information/communication system fulfilling this role is urgently needed to strengthen R-E-PS-F linkages in the country.

1.4 Govt response.... Conditions for strengthening R-E-F linkages

Govt response set the necessary conditions i.e.

- Favourable policy environment
- Increasing role for the private sector (service providers), NGOs, CBOs in agricultural technology adaptation and advisory services provision.
- Private service providers are providing advisory services to farmers.
- The new NARS structures are expected to work closely with the established NAADS farmer institutions in addressing farmer technology needs.

Both R&E systems aim at increasing farmers capacity to demand and access relevant and effective technologies and knowledge for profitable agriculture.

2.0 What has been proposed?

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Strengthen the links between the NARS and NAADS and its related extension service providers by developing an appropriate information and communication network (ARENET).

ARENET will comprise a strong coordinating system between NARO and NAADS, NGOs, private sector service providers and local government representatives at apex and at district level.

Direct linkages will be established between the NARO and NAADS affiliates at district and community level, and key intermediary organizations that work directly with Farmers.

3.0 Objectives

Development objective - To improve, through strengthened research-extension linkages, the agricultural advisory services provided to poor farmers in support of food security, rural development within the framework of PMA to eradicate poverty.

Immediate objective - To develop the necessary institutional structures and processes, and build capacities, to improve communication and exchange of information between agricultural research and extension service providers in Uganda.

2.2 The basis UG/FAO/TCP

- Tested models or systems for fast and easy exchange of information not yet availed.
- Lack experience in the field
- Urgency to meet the information needs of farmers
- Experience of FAO in developing VERCON

2.2 cont..

- **In view of the above: Govt requested the support from FAO to develop the necessary initial institutional structures and processes, and to pilot the ARENET six locations**

4.0 Outputs

The project aims to achieve the following specific outputs:

- **An operational framework for information sharing among ARENET stakeholders established**
- **Research institutions, NAADS, NGOs and private /extension services providers in pilot districts connected to the pilot ARENET (minimum six partners)**
- **Staff from participating partners trained in the application of Internet technologies for exchanging information between research and extension institutions (minimum 60 persons)**

4.0 Outputs

- Private services providers in selected districts trained in participatory communication and media skills, including specific approaches focusing on gender and the requirements of HIV/AIDS-affected households (minimum 30 persons)
- Relevant content developed and adapted, based on user requirements with specific reference to HIV/AIDS-affected households and gender-related issues
- Information sharing formats developed, as appropriate (CD-ROMs, print, linkages to other media)

4.0 Outputs

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- Lessons learnt documented and agreements about the functions of a research-private service provider network formulated.
- Processes for institutionalization of the ARENET defined.
- A follow-up programme of work under the PMA framework to expand the ARENET information-sharing framework to national level prepared for possible submission to external donors.

2.1 What are the expected contributions of ARENET?

- Successful implementation of the NAADS
- Sets the required platforms for future interactions between NARS scientists and service providers.
- Farmers influencing the research goals
- Access to agric. information and knowledge in Uganda
- Help NARO to respond to the new changes brought by the NARS Reform in terms of new institutional linkages and working with other research bodies and advisory services/technology transfer organizations such as NAADS and NGOs.

2.1 What happens after piloting of ARENET?

Based on lessons learnt, NAADS, NARO, partners, intend to take forward the ARENET framework, based on the VERCON model, as a key information, communication and knowledge management network for Uganda.