

DFID/FAO/ODI Strategic Programme for Information on Sustainable Livelihoods - Uganda Country Component

Background

Economic and Agricultural Development Policies

Uganda is amongst the 20 poorest countries in the world but has achieved successful macro-economic reforms contributing to an economic growth of 6% per annum over the last ten years. Agriculture, forestry and fisheries, account for approximately 43% of GDP. The government of Uganda has prepared and is implementing a Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) aiming to reduce the number of people living in absolute poverty to less than 10% by 2017 through maintaining the economic reform process, broadening economic growth and economic opportunities (particularly in agriculture), improving the provision of basic social services, and improving the country's capacity to respond quickly to economic problems. The World Bank, IMF and other donors recognise the PEAP as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Uganda.

The Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA), an important component of the PEAP, aims to increase rural incomes through increased farm productivity, increased marketing of agricultural products and increased on-farm and off-farm employment in agriculture-related activities. The PMA has seven components: improved agricultural research and technology; the establishment of a national agricultural advisory service (NAADS); improved rural finance; improved agro-processing and marketing; agricultural education; sustainable natural resource management; and improvements in physical infrastructure. The plan also seeks to integrate programmes to improve health, general education and general rural services throughout government and local government programmes, and explicitly recognises the importance of improved information services and knowledge.

The PEAP has a well-developed communication strategy, and the PMA and many of its subsidiary components are developing communication strategies to help coordination and integration, to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the programme activities and are able to participate in planning and local budgeting, and to deliver the information needed by stakeholders at all levels.

DFID and FAO in Uganda

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) is one of the largest bilateral donors to Uganda and contributes approximately £55 million annually. The DFID have a growing programme of activities, mainly in collaboration with other donors, NGOs and the private sector, with an increasing emphasis on sectoral support rather than individual bilateral projects. The FAO has a long history of support to agriculture in Uganda including programmes at field-level (e.g. Farmer Field Schools in Soroti and Busia), at intermediary level (e.g. a current proposal to develop a FarmNet with the Uganda National Farmers Union), and at policy-level (e.g. some support to the Department of Statistics to establish a dissemination programme).

Information Systems and ICT

The Government of Uganda has prioritised the development of information and communications infrastructure through privatisation over the last few years. The establishment of the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) to oversee the privatisation of Uganda Telecom, and the introduction of private sector competitors to provide fixed and mobile telecommunications infrastructure has resulted in dramatic improvements, especially in urban areas. The current teledensity of 1 telephone per 100 people on average however disguises wide regional disparities, although all Districts should be connected by 2004, and a Rural Communications Development Fund, financed through

levy on private sector communications companies, is intended to ensure adequate telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas, and internet points of presence throughout the country. Multi-purpose telecentres have been introduced by donor programmes and are being piloted in a range of sectors such as health, education and agriculture, and private sector cyber-cafes and internet services are emerging in most major towns.

The Country Visit

A team from DFID, FAO and ODI visited Uganda in October 2001 to start a process to identify opportunities for practical field activities in Uganda for the Strategic Programme for Information on Sustainable Livelihoods (SPISSL). The team met with representatives from a wide range of government, parastatal, and private sector organisations, bilateral, multilateral and non-government donors and development agencies, farmers, farmers groups and their supporting organisations, and collected background documentation. More details are provided in the Field Report and list of Documents.

Key Themes

The SPISSL Desk Study identified a number of themes for improving information for sustainable livelihoods based on a review of the literature of worldwide experience. Discussions with stakeholders in Uganda confirmed their relevance, and helped to priorities the key themes in Uganda:

1. The need for coherent, coordinated policies

The need for improved information highlighted in the PEAP, and addressed through its communication strategy, has spawned a rash of communication strategies in sectoral programmes (e.g. the PMA), and their component parts (e.g. the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) and National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAADS) communication strategies). Most stakeholders stressed the need for greater coherence and coordination within and between these strategies, for agreed procedures and standards, and for effective monitoring and evaluation of communication activities.

2. Strengthening partnerships.

The parallel processes of privatisation of communication infrastructure (coordinated by the UCC), commercialisation of public sector broadcasting (through the establishment of Uganda Broadcasting Agency), rapid growth of private FM radio stations, reorganisation of agricultural research, and promotion of multiple agricultural service providers, while potentially increasing the flow of information to farmers, has also complicated the process. Appropriate partnerships will need to evolve between all stakeholders to ensure the development and delivery of appropriate messages.

3. Linkage between national and local-level institutions

Decentralisation should strengthen links between communities and government, allowing local government to develop, or encourage the private sector to develop more appropriate services, but has removed many of the structural links between national-level organisations (e.g. NARO, or the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)) and district institutions. New, informal mechanisms will be needed to ensure that local-level institutions can benefit from national-level capacity and that national-level planning is based on accurate local-level information.

4. Building capacity

Stakeholders at all levels stressed the need for greater capacity in assessing information needs, developing information strategies, transforming and delivering information.

5. Access and Empowerment

While a number of agencies are involved in providing information directly to farmers, many informants stressed the problems of media and scale. Farmers prefer face-to-face communication, and few receive much information through other routes. Even the relatively large-scale Farmer Field School programmes in Soroti and Busia Districts reach fewer than 5% of farms, and there is some evidence that programmes providing market information benefit traders more than farmers. There is an urgent need to find new ways of ensuring that useful information reaches poorer farmers.

6. Content and context

Many government and non-government agencies in Uganda are generating potentially useful information on agricultural production and livelihoods (e.g. NARO, Makerere University, MAIFF and others), but much is too academic, too specific, or just in the wrong language for farmers. Incentive systems for staff involved in producing this information encourage them to produce academic information for scientific journals rather than practical materials for farmers, and few have farmer-oriented communication skills.

7. Building on existing systems

Uganda has much useful experience of providing information in support of sustainable livelihoods, including practical extension, farmer field schools, rural radio, telecentres, and the internet, and interesting experiments in the pipeline for mobile-phone based text messaging. The challenge over the next few years is to build these up into a sustainable informal network of partnerships delivering multi-media information to the whole spectrum of stakeholders involved in sustainable livelihoods.

Opportunities for FAO Interventions

FAO's mandate is to provide information and support to information systems in its member states to improve food security and help alleviate poverty. The purpose of work at country-level within SPISSL is to learn how FAO can better provide information to support sustainable livelihoods, and to develop and test approaches, which can subsequently be applied throughout its work. All of the individuals and organisations the team met in Uganda were keen to collaborate with the SPISSL to improve the information aspects of their programmes – the demand for practical support is far greater than the programme will be able to deliver.

The situation in Uganda however provides a unique opportunity for the programme to work strategically with a wide range of partners at all levels to explore how new policies, strengthened institutions, and improved processes for generating and delivering information can improve livelihoods. Some opportunities are described below, although the actual activities will need to be developed by the programme team in collaboration with potential partners during the first few months of the programme.

Improving policies for information

Many information policies exist or are being developed (eg PEAP, PMA, NAADS, NARO, UCC, UBoS, NGOs etc), with little overall coordination. Most are driven by the organisation rather than information users, some are weak or fail to focus on disadvantaged groups. There are opportunities for SPISSL to help develop and coordinate communication policies and strategies, e.g.:

- Work with UCC, UNCST & others to help ensure that appropriate strategies for rural information technologies are incorporated into national policies.
- Help the PMA Secretariat, partners at all levels and donors to develop coordinated strategies and capacity for communication.

- Help specific agencies e.g. Agricultural Statistics; NAADS, NARO and NGOs to develop their own communication strategies.

Strengthening institutions

Many institutions in Uganda produce, use, and deliver information. Different institutions need to provide specific information content to their clients. Many institutions lack resources, or the capacity to identify, obtain, generate and deliver appropriate content, and there is a gap between national and local institutions. There are many opportunities for SPISSL to strengthen the capacity of public and private institutions to develop, deliver and assess the impact of relevant information, e.g.:

- Strengthen the capacity of the FAO office in Kampala to provide FAO information to partners in Uganda, to evaluate the impact of FAO information, and to communicate how FAO information systems could be improved back to Rome.
- Strengthen MAIF and UBoS to collect and disseminate agricultural statistics (building on existing FAO systems – eg FIVIMS), for monitoring the PMA process.
- Strengthen the capacity of NAADS and its partners (e.g. NARO Outreach, Local Councils and NGOs etc) to develop and deliver appropriate and cost-effective information to advisors and farmer groups.
- Strengthen the capacity of the media in Uganda (e.g. Radio Uganda nad/or private FM stations etc) to develop and deliver appropriate information.

Improving information processes

Organisations in Uganda are producing a wide range of media in different formats, and use a range of mechanisms to manage and distribute it. But Uganda's 10 million (?) farmers live in diverse, often remote areas, speak 22 (?) different languages and have poor access to information services. There are many opportunities for SPISSL to explore new ways of producing, managing and distributing information more effectively, e.g.:

- Building a coalition of individuals who have practical experience of innovative approaches to communication (e.g. CBS Radio, MTN Mobile Data Services, FFS, COARD project etc), to raise the profile of communication activities, publicise successful approaches and address specific issues.
- Help PMA and NAADS to develop appropriate internal information systems to help them manage their diverse, multi-parnter information activities more coherently (using e.g. intranet / www – based systems) and understand audience needs better (eg by using Steadmans to conduct audience surveys etc).
- Work with UCC to help develop appropriate content to promote the roll-out of internet points of presence at District level and/or MTN to develop and test mobile-phone text message systems for farmers.
- Work with NAADS, DAO, SAARI, Voice of Teso and the Farmer Field Schools in Soroti District to capture, scale up and share farmer-level information (see Soroti example below).
- Work with NARO and NAADS to explore new methods to transform research results to extension and farmer messages (e.g. by scaling up the CABI project).
- Work with farmer organisations and/or research institutes to develop and test electronic mechanisms for information sharing (e.g. FarmNets or VERCONs).

Soroti Example

A field trip to Soroti District, provided an opportunity for the team to develop a more detailed example of how the SPISSL programme might work at field level¹ to implement one of these opportunities.

Background

The FAO/IFAD-funded Farmer Field Schools programme, being implemented by the Department of Agriculture, has effectively introduced new approaches to integrated production and pest management, but the process is very labour-intensive and has only so far covered c.5% of farmers in the District. The key to the programmes success is a process of facilitated ‘farmer learning’ that both provides new information and skills, and motivates farmers to apply the new approach on their own farms. If it were possible to capture and communicate the results of this ‘farmer-learning’ directly to other farmers the new approaches could benefit more farmers more quickly.

Purpose

The purpose of the activity would be to “develop cost-effective approaches to capture, share, scale up and disseminate farmer-level information”, which could then be replicated more widely throughout Uganda, and would strengthen FAO’s ability to advise other member states.

Partners

SPISSL’s role would be to facilitate collaboration with other programmes and organisations that are already working in Soroti District to address this issue. Potential partners could include:

- The District Agricultural Office – which is responsible for coordinating agricultural development efforts in Soroti.,
- The Local Councils, especially at District (LC5) and Sub-County (LC/3) levels – which are responsible for implementing government policy and programmes.
- Serere Agriculture and Animal Research Institute – which is involved in research and information provision on dry-land crops, including integrated production and pest management.
- The Soroti Agriculture and Rural Development Centre – which will (when it becomes operational) provide demand-driven agricultural research and extension in the dry-land areas of Uganda.
- The DFID-funded Client-Oriented Agriculture Research and Dissemination project (at Serere) – which is exploring mechanisms to increase client-orientation and dissemination of the results of agricultural research.
- NAADS – which will be piloting new approaches to agricultural service provision in Soroti districts.
- IITA/FoodNet – a regional agricultural research and development network which is developing a decentralised market information service for policy agents, producers, processors and traders.
- Uganda National Farmers Association – a national farmer’s organisation which undertakes advocacy on behalf of farmers, and provides a range of practical services to members including training, information and marketing.

¹ NB This example was developed simply to illustrate how the programme might work in collaboration with a range of partners at field level, not as a definite activity. The final activities will be developed by the programme team in collaboration with potential partners during the first few months of the programme.

- Local NGOs.
- Voice of Teso – a private FM radio station with a mission “development through radio” which has already been involved in some interesting development-related broadcasting for small-scale enterprises funded by private sponsors.

The process

The process could include:

- An initial workshop for all stakeholders to generate enthusiasm, develop clear objectives, identify tasks and linkages with other related processes (e.g. Credit, inputs etc).
- Capacity-building materials and events for partners.
- Development of an information strategy including an assessment of information needs, messages and media, and responsibilities.
- Collaborative and independent work to develop appropriate information materials and mechanisms.
- Implementation of the information strategy in Soroti, including feedback and evaluation.
- A workshop to review lesson-learning, and develop plans for institutionalisation and wider dissemination in Uganda and elsewhere.
- Work by FAO to make the lessons available to other member states through technical departments, the FAO web site and information materials.

Implementation

For the SPISSL to be successful in Uganda it must be located clearly within PMA framework, and use PMA mechanisms to develop relationships with a wide range of partner organisations. The programme will require a full-time in-country team of two professionals, with appropriate administrative support, based in the FAO office.