

# Stakeholders' Participation in Agricultural Farmers' Extension Services Programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Case of the Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) Programme in Uganda

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The paper presents findings from a study carried out to assess the contribution of stakeholders' participation on the performance of the national agricultural farmers' extension services programme in Uganda known as *Operation Wealth Creation (OWEC)*. Specifically, the study sought to establish how participatory planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation (M & E) respectively contributed to the performance of OWC in selected district in central Uganda. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design using both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques and employed both questionnaires and interview guides on key participants in the programme. Findings of the study indicated positive relationships between stakeholders' participation and programme performance with participatory planning, budgeting and M & E all having positive significant effects on the performance of OWC programme. The study concluded that indeed stakeholders' participation contributed to improved performance of the OWC programme. The study recommends increased funding and M & E of the agricultural extension programmes for improved performance.

*Keywords:* stakeholders participation, agricultural farmers' extension services, Operation Wealth Creation Programme

## Introduction and Background

Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) has been a key government programme intervention to foster Local Economic Development (LED) in Uganda. The programme, that was launched in June 2014 has been poised as an intermediation to expedite national socio-economic transformation, emphasizing the boosting of household incomes and creating local economies by targeting the transformation of subsistence farmers into commercial farmers (President's Office, 2018). The OWC programme, that was first piloted by former army veterans, was eventually evolved to specifically target rural agricultural transformation as an engine for LED.

Since acquiring political independence, government of Uganda steered programmes and strategic policy interventions in the agricultural sector principally designed towards transforming the sector from subsistence to

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commercial farming (Annet et al., 2014). According to the World Bank economic update on Uganda (World Bank Group, 2019), agriculture is still the largest economic sector in terms of national production and employment and its economic contribution extends beyond the production sector into the wider food system, including agro processing, manufacturing, and other services. Unfortunately, the employment potential of agriculture and agro-food system is largely untapped, although it still provides 70% of the country's employment opportunities and contributes more than half of all exports, and about one-quarter of gross domestic product (NAADS Secretariat, 2017).

OWC as major national agricultural transformation program functions by involving military operatives of the Uganda Peoples Defense Force (UPDF) in improving household income support and community-level coordination of the hitherto National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) programme activities. The NAADS programme, with similar objectives of transforming the agricultural sector by providing agricultural inputs, agribusiness support and value chain development to improve household food security and incomes had been suspended by government on basis of in effectiveness (Masaba & Semakula, 2013). Consequently, OWC was created as a single-spine agricultural extension method directly under the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) with military operatives as focal implementers of its activities (MAAIF, 2017). Being a new approach to agricultural extension services, several stakeholders including civil servants, political, religious and cultural leaders as well as farmers and their associations were involved.

Stakeholders' participation was the overriding principle for the performance of OWC activities. Commercialization of agriculture and increased household incomes were assumed to be dependent on the proper involvement of stakeholders.

Regionally, almost all countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have in the last two decades embarked on LED policy interventions targeting the agricultural sector (Hall et al., 2017). Indeed, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), reconsidered the changeover from subsistence to commercial agriculture a key component for local economic development of less developed countries with concerns associated particularly to their food security and nutritional outcomes (Carletto et al., 2017). In Tanzania, for example, the *Kilimo Kwanza Initiative*, a similar initiative had already started by 2009 whose objective was to forefront the growth of agricultural sector and transforming it from subsistence to commercial industry. Mohamad Naim et al. (2016) contended that this programme also aimed to increase crop yields, curb food insecurity and poverty rural Tanzania. This programme has had critiques like from, among others, Mkonda and He (2016) who asserted that despite anticipating to solve problems as underlined in its pillars, *Kilimo Kwanza* had not addressed the problems facing the sector as portrayed in the 10 pillars that were supposed to be addressed by the initiative. They further asserted that, all the problems envisioned to be resolved still exist like shortage of capital which is still a pronounced problem despite of the establishment of Tanzania Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) to give credits to farmers, poor infrastructure, poor technology, and lack of incentives are still the barriers to undertake agriculture.

Similarly, the National Smallholder Farmer Association of Malawi (NASFAM) another agricultural based LED programme, encouraged commercialization of agriculture by presenting the attitude of farming as a business between its members who were principally smallholder subsistence farmers and the Government of Malawi. NASFAM operated on the ideology that intensification and commercialization of smallholder agriculture were crucial to achieving increased productivity and profitability of smallholder agriculture (Chirwa & Matita, 2012). However, CFS (2015) highlighted that the intricate interconnections amongst the numerous

causes of poverty and food insecurity necessitate integrated resolutions. Further, agricultural performances found difficulty in changing and shifting in cooperation with traditional leaders. This seemed the main challenge faced by NASFAM, together with high rates of illiteracy that also obstructed knowledge transfer.

However, none of the agricultural based LED programmes in the region has target the military as implementers of the LED strategies as has the case has been with OWC. Besides, there was inadequate knowledge, data, and information on how the various stakeholders would come up in partnership with the military in implementing the *OWC* based LED (Riwthong et al., 2017). The paper presents findings from a study that was undertaken to evaluate such stakeholder performance in the implementation of this programme in Sembabule district, central Uganda.

### **Conceptualization**

Government of Uganda has since political independence undertaken several policy interventions to support agricultural sector as an engine of local and national development. There have been series of policy and regulatory measures, ranging from new policies on research and facilitation of irrigation, distribution of seeds to farmers, setting-up of agricultural finance platforms, and even creating structures and institutions to support agricultural extension services in rural areas (Hall et al., 2017). These measures have, however, been insufficient according to the report by the World Bank Group (2019), and sometimes even counterproductive such as was with the NAADS programme. Yet agriculture continues to be a major and important sector in Uganda that is targeted by the *OWC* programme for LED. The study hypothesized and was in agreement with Hassan and Van (2011), Fontaine et al., 2006, and Freeman, 2019 that effective stakeholders engagement was necessary for effective *OWC* programme performance. Indeed, stakeholders' participation and performance of LED initiatives are always at the center stage for development planners and decision-makers. Stakeholders' participation in this study was conceptualized as participatory planning, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation. At the same time, LED was conceptualized by identifying indicators of agricultural commercialization, and improvement in households' incomes.

### **Methodology**

The study embraced a cross-sectional research design as justified by (Hollweck, 2016; Yin, 2014). This design enabled a quick glimpse at the programme performance through interviews and group discussions. Key programme stakeholders were interviewed as well as military operatives involved in coordinating the programme, local civil servants, and political leaders, and in all, one hundred and thirty (130) respondents were targeted and interrogated.

### **Key Findings**

The first objective aimed at assessing the contribution participatory planning on performance of *the OWC* programme. Findings were consistent with the previous studies of Rae and Gomes (2010) that revealed that participatory planning practices are critical in ensuring that stakeholders involvement in form of community fellows and joint plan designing improved grassroots production. In this particular study, findings revealed that 67% of the respondents did participate in needs identification of the agricultural inputs they received while 33% of the respondents disagreed that they do not participate in planning for agricultural inputs they receive.

Relatedly, Blanca (2015) emphasized (through a quantitative analysis), that participatory planning improved transit-oriented development through various planning styles, (technical, bureaucratic and neutrality). Further, the style of political impact promotes a specific political and popular agenda while social movement that represents community engagement and participation in strategic planning choices, encourages the cooperative style of varied stakeholders coming together to achieve compromise. It was therefore proved that collaborative (participatory) designed programmes showed higher government satisfaction and cost efficiency in programme design relative to other methods, which assertion is in agreement with findings from this study. Indeed Grove and Pugh (2015) further observed that involvement of liberates and would be sidelined individuals encourages new forms of policy. Further arguments raised are that, per formative participation identifies participatory activities that are usually influenced by political intervention, which may result in to challenges that affect the designs of programme management.

This description helped in positive evaluation of the OWC programme that was passed through participatory activities although there were identified challenges that affect constitutive powers associated with army veterans managing the programme. In this particular study, findings indicated that 78.6% of the farmers had the knowledge of processes in farming like when to plough, sow, weed their farms, and harvest. While 83.5% of respondents agreed that food production had increased as a result of OWC intervention with 71.8% of farmers had the market for their outputs like milk, grains, food, and poultry products sold onto the market.

The second objective of the study sought to assess whether participatory budgeting contributed to performance of the OWC program. Results were again in agreement with the previous scholars such as Kasozi-Mulindwa (2013) who also argued that theoretically a budget is the primary mechanism by which any organization's policy plans are translated into real on-the-ground operations and outcomes, which is in agreement with the study.

Williams et al. (2017) also argued that participatory budgeting was key in facilitating local population in decision making by allocating public funds, change the rapport between citizen and state, improve the operation of government and leads to improved public services and infrastructure. Cabannes (2015) also opined similar views of regular advantages for people, taking into account how the participatory budgeting process, allows people to rank fundamental facilities. During studies discussions about participatory budgeting enabling additional funds for execution and maintenance of local people and groups; the study was in agreement with previous scholars who that also supported the findings.

The third objective sought to find out how participatory monitoring and evaluation (M & E) contributed to the functionality of the OWC program. The findings agreed with the findings of the previous scholars such as Wao et al. (2017) who highlighted that weak M & E systems and limited supply of M & E human resources in Africa signal the need to strengthen M & E capacity which is in agreement with findings of this study.

Kananura et al. (2017) further observed that the application of participatory M & E methods was substantial for directing local decision-making, upholding the implementation of actual involvements and attending to developing issues in the course of execution which is in agreement with findings from this study. Apparently, the primary issue from the M & E point of view is that data management and policymaking was focused on the administrative methods of expenditure and operations rather than on the results, effects and objectives of poverty being pursued. Expenditures on recurrence and growth were evaluated individually rather than for their combined effect in attaining general objectives.

Findings further established that in order to be successful in agricultural extension services, a robust framework with two elements is required, firstly, to identify key stakeholders in relation to the programme and secondly, an adequate means of integrating their perception holistically into the programme development process.

### Conclusion

The conclusion from this study is that indeed stakeholders' participation is a vital approach to managing agricultural farmer extension services such as the case was with the *OWC* programme. Particular participation in planning, budgeting and M & E in the *OWC* greatly contributed to the success of the programme in Uganda.

### Policy Recommendation

Basing on the findings, participatory planning was proved to be insignificant on the operations of the *OWC* programme. The study therefore recommends that both the NAADS Secretariat and Ministry responsible for Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries should embrace participatory planning in their programmes implementation by promoting increased stakeholder involvement and participatory needs identification. In this particular study programme, stakeholder involvement is projected to further promote the increased relationship between *OWC*, other government institutions, district technical staff, and the farmers to achieve the original aims of the program and its sustainability.

The second recommendation arises out of the finding that the study areas were not involved in *OWC* programme budgeting which resulted in poor priorities identification. Accordingly, this study recommends that governments should involve sub national administrations in budgeting for agricultural extension services particularly in their localities taking into account of the uniqueness of their areas and population sizes.

The study also recommends that central governments should intensify allocation of funds for monitoring and evaluation of agricultural extension services to rural areas in order to establish the actual achievements, assessment of the activities priorities, outputs and outcomes. For the *OWC* programme, this should be in fulfillment of the programme objectives of promoting commercial farming, increased household incomes and wealth created.

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