

Privatization of Agricultural Extension Services: Implications for Gender Relations and Farmer Socio-economic Wellbeing. The Cases of Mpigi and Wakiso Districts

By

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Abstract

The 2001 introduction of the National agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) was aimed at developing a demand driven, client oriented and farmer led agricultural extension service programme assumed to be provided by an efficient private sector that is also expected to be flexible and responsive to the needs of both male and female farmers. This study was designed to assess the effects of the liberalized agricultural extension services under NAADS framework, on gender relations, and farmer agency, as well as the resultant implications for livelihoods sustainability and socio-economic wellbeing of farm households in Central Uganda. The study was designed to be analytical and comparative and covered the period 2001-2009.

Anchored upon four main theoretical standpoints – the neoliberal theory, feminist standpoint theory, the sustainable livelihoods framework and the actor theory, the study contends that the design and implementation of government policies (such as those influenced by neoliberal ideologies – NAADS in this case) as well as the structures and processes through which these programmes and policies function can either provide opportunities or create significant constraints to households' efforts to craft sustainable livelihoods. Further, the capacity of individual farmers/farm households to enhance sustainability of their livelihoods and have better quality of life is in turn dependant on their level of agency, wellbeing and choices available to them as actors. These opportunities are however, circumscribed by factors like existing gender ideologies, norms, values, practices, social relations, and institutional norms at all levels.

The study concludes that the structures and processes under the NAADS framework are skewed against the interests and needs of the less educated and poorer farmers. It is also evident the NAADS systems provide insufficient room for agency expansion given existing socio-cultural norms among farmers. As such, the farmers that need these services most, are unable to tap into availed opportunities and enhance their socio-economic wellbeing through livelihoods diversification and sustainability. The findings indicate that gender relations though changing, and although the NAADS has significantly enhanced numerical participation of women in agricultural extension programmes, there is still significant gaps between men and women farmers in terms of the five key assets bases essential for sustainable livelihoods as well as capacity to effectively tap into existing opportunities for crafting sustainable livelihoods. Indeed, those women who are able to favourably compete with their male counterparts appear to be the elite, wealthier and educated women rather than the average female farmer.