



Managing Africa's Soils No. 16

Policy processes in Uganda and their impact on soil fertility

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This discussion paper series has been launched as part of the NUTNET project. NUTNET stands for *Networking on soil fertility management: improving soil fertility in Africa-Nutrient networks & stakeholder perceptions*. It brings together several research programmes working on soil fertility management in sub-Saharan Africa. Activities include research on farmer management of soil fertility and understanding of the perceptions of different stakeholders towards how best to improve soils management. This series will be continued under the INCO-concerted action programme *Enhancing soil fertility in Africa: from field to policy-maker* which builds on the work done by NUTNET and receives funding from the European Union.

This discussion paper series offers an opportunity to publish findings from research on soil fertility management in Sub Saharan Africa. Themes include:

- Farmers' knowledge of soils and soil fertility management
- Socio-economic context of environmental change, including histories of soil management
- Nutrient budget analysis at farm and field level
- Examination of the policy context within which soil fertility is managed
- Discussion of methodological aspects and dilemmas when analysing soil fertility management at farm level
- Approaches towards on-farm trials and technology development with farmers.

The series encourages publication of recent research results in a discussion paper form. Emphasis will be on interdisciplinary research results which highlight a particular theme of wider relevance to development policy and practice.

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1 Introduction

This study analyses the way in which stakeholders perceive constraints to agriculture and soil fertility management, and considers the potential role of key policies on improving agricultural productivity.

Agriculture is of paramount strategic importance to the Ugandan economy, contributing 60% of GDP and providing employment for 90% of the population (MAAIF/MFED, 1998). During the 1990s, the agricultural sector grew at an annual rate of 7% in real terms (MAAIF/MFED, 2000), mainly through the expansion of cultivable acreage rather than the intensification of agriculture. However, crop yields are falling or at best stagnating, partly due to declining soil fertility, and levels of poverty in the countryside are high (FAO/World Bank, 1999; Zake, 1992, 1993; UNDP, 1998).

While agricultural growth is regarded as the engine needed for the elimination of poverty (Republic of Uganda, 1999), clear and well-integrated national policies are required to increase productivity, improve rural livelihoods and facilitate the sustainable use of natural resources. A framework for such policies is enshrined in Uganda Vision 2025, which demonstrates the political will and commitment of the government to eradicating poverty and conserving the environment (Republic of Uganda, 1993 and 1999; MENR, 1996). Improving soil fertility management (SFM) has been given little consideration in agricultural policies and planning, largely because it is commonly believed that Ugandan soils are very fertile (Mugyereza, 1999; Zake, 1999). This view is changing, however, and a national policy on soils is being formulated from 1993 onwards.

Focusing on the policy processes that affect agriculture and soil fertility management in Uganda, this paper considers stakeholders' perceptions of soil fertility and assesses policies on decentralisation, the Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA) and reviving by-laws relating to soil and water conservation. It analyses the processes by which these three policies are formulated and implemented, discussing factors with a direct bearing on them. The final section draws a number of conclusions as to how researchers and stakeholders can develop strategies to influence the policy process.

Methodology

This study was part of the Nutrient Networks and Stakeholder Perceptions project (NUTNET), which aims to facilitate agricultural development by contributing to the formulation of more realistic soil fertility management policies. NUTNET works on the premise that the policy making process cannot be improved unless those involved have a thorough understanding of the diverse soil fertility management strategies used by farmers, and insight into the perceptions of all stakeholders involved in the agricultural sector. In line with these objectives, this study examines the way in which various individuals and organisations perceive the processes used to formulate and implement policies in Uganda.

This study aims to answer the following questions: How did the selected policies emerge? To what extent have they been formulated and implemented in a participatory manner? Are local councils adequately empowered to implement policies? How does decentralisation affect agriculture, and specifically SFM? What is the way forward?

The research followed a participatory and interactive approach, involving farmers, extension workers, researchers, planners, policy makers and opinion leaders. At the beginning of the study, participants from each district met at a local workshop, where they identified the key policies influencing agriculture and soil fertility management in their area, and assessed the involvement of different stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of these policies.

The criteria for selecting policies for the study were: how often they were mentioned by stakeholders, how important researchers considered them to be for soil fertility management, the availability of related published material, and whether stakeholders had been involved in the process of formulating or implementing them.

After the workshops, researchers carried out semi-structured interviews with key informants, using a checklist to obtain in-depth information about the formulation and implementation of the selected policies. They also reviewed the available material published on related issues.

A national workshop entitled “*Towards building a participatory soil fertility management initiative in Uganda*” was organised by the Soil and Water Conservation Society of Uganda (SWCSU) in collaboration with Environmental Alert and the Regional Land Management Agency (RELMA). Scientists, technicians and policymakers from across the country discussed the possibilities for improving soil fertility, and the role that policies could play in such a process. This meeting was particularly useful for our research, as it confirmed some of the perceptions and constraints raised during the earlier district workshops.

2 Perceptions of the constraints to agriculture

Study areas

The study was conducted in the districts of Pallisa and Kabarole, in eastern and western Uganda respectively. Kabarole is a mountainous area with relatively fertile andosols and favourable weather, where the montane farming system supports a fairly high population. In Pallisa, which is comparatively flat, with infertile ferralsols and a tendency to droughts, the farming system is based on cotton and millet production (Table 1). Livestock are an integral part of the farming system in both areas.

Farmers in both districts sell about 30% of their agricultural produce, but often get poor returns on it because of the high cost of inputs and transport, lack of marketing infrastructure and low farm gate prices. Those in Kabarole benefit from the extra income generated by cash crops such as coffee, and earn more from agriculture than their counterparts in Pallisa, where households are more dependent on off-farm income.

Table 1. Characteristics of study sites

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Pallisa</i>	<i>Kabarole</i>
Altitude (masl)	1,070–1,160	1,500–1,800
Rainfall (mm/y)	800–1,200	1,300–1,500
Average slope (%)	3	20
Population density (people/ km ²)	225	400
Average family earnings (Ug. Sh.)	460,000	952,000
Contribution of off-farm income (%)	22	7.5
Market share agricultural produce (%)	30	29

Source: LEINUTS data; 1US\$ = 1570 Ugandan Shillings

Perceptions of key constraints to agriculture

Farmers, administrators, councillors, NGOs and extension workers in both study sites were asked to identify the key constraints affecting agriculture and soil fertility management. Each area produced quite distinct lists, reflecting very different local conditions, although participants in both districts generally agreed on the nature of the most serious problems affecting them. Farmers in Pallisa not only have to cope with inherently poor soils and unreliable rainfall, but also with cattle rustlers, whose activities

deprive households of their 'working capital', draught power and manure. Fertility is not a particular problem in Kabarole, where soils are good, but land is fragmented because of the high population density in the area. Table 2 below outlines the major constraints identified by each group.

Table 2. Constraints identified at local level in order of priority

	<i>Farmers</i>	<i>Government administrators</i>	<i>Local councillors</i>	<i>Extension workers</i>	<i>NGO staff</i>
1	Land fragmentation	Poor agricultural practices	Lack of effective extension services	Land tenure	Poor facilitation of extension workers
2	Exhausted soils (P)	Low uptake of improved technologies	Land degradation due to poor farming methods	Land fragmentation (K)	Lack of improved seeds
3	Lack of inputs	Poorly enforced by-laws (K)	Prolonged drought and erratic rainfall	Unreliable rainfall (P)	Army worms and other pests
4	Unreliable rainfall (P)	High cost of inputs	Lack of improved seeds and pesticides	Farmers' belief in old practices (P)	Low income from agriculture
5	Earthquakes (K)	Poor facilitation of extension workers		Farmers lack confidence in young extension workers (K)	Land fragmentation
6	Poor farming methods provoke erosion	Poor marketing arrangements		Lack of markets	Lack of data at village level
7	Poor facilitation of extension workers	Livestock rustling (P)		Weak infrastructure	Poor farming methods
8	Deforestation			Lack of capital (P)	Land is owned by a few people
9				Poor facilitation of extension workers	Lack of research with farmers on new technologies

K = Kabarole, P=Pallisa;

Land tenure and land fragmentation, lack of access to inputs, markets and credit and poor infrastructure featured prominently on all lists. Farmers were particularly concerned about land fragmentation caused by the growing population, exhausted soils and problems with rainfall and earthquakes. They did mention poor farming methods and ineffective extension services, but put less emphasis on these issues than the administrators, councillors and extension workers, who also mentioned low uptake of improved technologies.

Poorly facilitated extension services refers to a lack of transport and field allowances. Agents also reported that farmers are often unwilling to take their advice on new technologies, particularly when it is offered by younger workers, and one of them observed "*farmers, especially the old ones, always want to cling to older farming systems, which is a setback to agricultural productivity and a challenge to PMA*". The very weaknesses of extension hampers development in the agricultural sector and also impede analysis of its problems. Some of the extension staff responsible for collecting data for planning and prioritising policies are so unmotivated that they have been known to produce data at their desks, without doing any field research.

Several problems with extension and input supply are related to decentralisation. District councils are now responsible for these services, but they are handicapped by the limited fiscal powers granted them by central government, and cannot always rely on district administrators efficiently to supervise agricultural extension agents. For the PMA and SWC programmes to succeed, the institutions responsible for implementing agricultural policies need to be strengthened. The private sector, which currently handles the input supply, is also weak. Farmers have very little purchasing power because the returns on agriculture are so low, and no businessman is willing to invest in marketing of inputs where there are no good returns to be expected.

Stakeholder perceptions at national level

At national level, stakeholder perceptions of the constraints to agricultural production and soil fertility management focussed on the problems affecting the adoption of new technologies, and the use of credit. The main obstacles identified by the agricultural policy secretariat were the lack of high-yielding and disease-free varieties, use of rudimentary tools, poor marketing infrastructure, the high cost of inputs and credit, and inadequate extension. The NGOs we spoke to broadly agreed with this, but also criticised the tendency of farmers to give greatest priority to subsistence farming.

3 Policy actors and process

What is policy?

During the course of the workshops, stakeholders came up with several suggestions as to what constitutes a policy, finally agreeing that it is the '*means or guidelines set by a group of people/institutions to achieve a goal or solve a problem through a defined set of activities and involving consensus*'. It became clear that Uganda has no specific policy on soil fertility management, although various agricultural and environmental policies do deal with issues related to soils. In terms of their importance for the management of soil fertility, participants identified the PMA, the soil and water conservation policy and decentralisation as key policies.

Policy making institutions in Uganda

A number of institutions are involved in developing policies that directly or indirectly influence the performance of the agricultural sector. They can be grouped into five categories:

Government ministries whose policies have a direct impact on the sector

- Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF)
- Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED)
- Agricultural Policy Secretariat

Government ministries that develop policies which indirectly influence the sector

- Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Industry
- Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment
- Ministry of Works, Housing and Communications
- Uganda Coffee Development Authority
- Cotton Development Organisation
- National Environment Management Organisation
- Uganda Tea Authority
- Parliament of the Republic of Uganda

Civil society

- Uganda National Farmers Association
- Community Based Organisations
- Non-Governmental Organisations

International organisations/donors

- International Monetary Fund, World Bank and donors

Research institutions

- Economic Policy Research Centre
- National Agricultural Research Organisation
- Makerere Institute of Social Research
- Centre for Basic Research

While the first two categories actually develop policies, the last three groups mainly contribute to policy initiatives taken by others.

An historical perspective of policy processes

From 1900 onwards, when Uganda became a protectorate, the British colonial administration implemented a number of policies to develop the agricultural sector. Development was based on the division of the country into various agro-ecological zones, with each area specialising in the cultivation of a particular crop, notably the cash crops promoted by the colonial government. As concern increased about the levels of erosion and land degradation caused by agriculture and livestock, the authorities addressed the problem by issuing district level by-laws specific to 'African-held land'. These were implemented by local chiefs and government officials, who imposed stiff penalties on farmers that failed to comply with them. The colonial period also witnessed the development of research stations, agricultural colleges, an extension system, an input supply system, and processing and marketing infrastructures (Walaga et al., 2000).

After Independence in 1962, most of the basic aspects of colonial policies and laws relating to natural resources and agriculture remained in force until 1966, when the constitution was abrogated and the country became politically unstable. The numerous colonial laws and regulations that had formerly governed soil management were abandoned, and farmers started cultivating previously prohibited areas, such as steep slopes and the banks of streams.

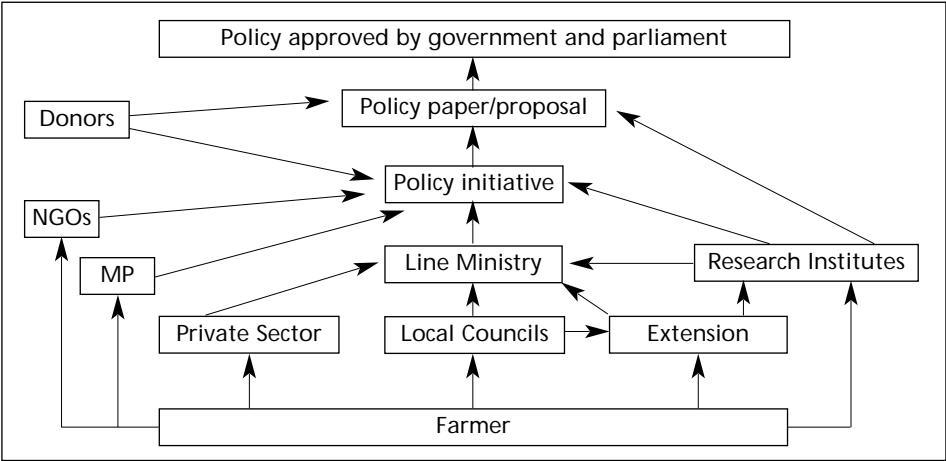
In spite of these developments, agricultural output continued to grow until the early 1970s. This was mainly due to the introduction of new technologies, such as mineral fertilisers and improved varieties, and to new initiatives in agricultural extension. However, all this came to an abrupt halt in 1971, when the military government of Idi Amin declared 'economic war' on Ugandans of Asian origin. As their properties and

businesses were expropriated and reallocated to Ugandans of African origin, the distribution system for agricultural inputs broke down, the infrastructure for marketing and processing produce collapsed, prices dropped and the whole economy went spiralling downwards. Farmers were no longer paid for produce as the marketing boards for cotton and coffee collapsed after the government borrowed money from these institutes. The state extension system declined rapidly as the economic situation deteriorated. Law and order broke down across the nation as all sectors of the economy and administration declined.

Idi Amin's reign ended in 1986, when the National Resistance Movement came to power, sparking civil war in parts of the country. In its first few years of power, the NRM introduced a policy of economic liberalisation, which meant that the State withdrew from the provision of some services and market forces played a larger part in the economy.

Although agriculture is the most important sector of the national economy, research and extension activities are still allocated a small proportion of the government budget, receiving no more than 1.5% of the total budget in the 1998/1999 fiscal year (MFED, 1998). Chronic under-funding continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s which meant that the extension service was unable to train staff, who were left inadequately informed about the range of available new technologies and unable to disseminate them effectively.

Figure 1. Policy formulation process in Uganda



Policy formulation process

The process of policy formulation in Uganda has historically been dominated by central government, while the beneficiaries were only involved during implementation. When the National Resistance Movement came to power, they jettisoned the previous top-down approach, introducing a structure that enabled all relevant stakeholders to contribute to the process. Policies can now be initiated at local level within the decentralisation framework (Bahiigwa, 1997). Figure 1 outlines the current process for formulating policies. However, most of the stakeholders we interviewed were of the opinion that this was not yet reality and one of them observed: *“it is a good idea in principle, but it has yet to be put into practice.”*

Decentralisation policy

Decentralisation has given local actors the opportunity to shape and formulate policies, which can then be implemented with a certain amount of flexibility. The aim is to transfer political, administrative, financial and planning authority from central government to local councils, promoting popular participation, enabling communities to make their own decisions, and increasing their responsibility and accountability. It also aims to introduce efficiency and effectiveness into the generation and management of resources and the delivery of services.

Some have argued that Ugandan policy on decentralisation was conceived by the National Resistance Movement during the protracted ‘peoples’ war’, but others contend that it is the result of World Bank policies and a number of consultations initiated by the International Monetary Fund. Whatever the exact source, it was recognised that decentralisation was a necessary condition for strengthening democratisation, with its three main objectives of parliamentary democracy, local democracy and a decent standard of living for every Ugandan.

The process of decentralisation started officially in 1986, with a commission of inquiry into local government, and was finalised in 1997 with the passing of the local government Act. Its evolution is summarised in Box 1 below. From the very beginning, the NRM regarded decentralisation as fundamental to improving local democracy, equity and the sustainable, countrywide provision of social services, and they were determined to proceed cautiously but resolutely. They have tried to develop this policy in a way that ensured grassroots involvement at every stage of the transfer of power and accompanying resources to local governments. The focus is currently on strengthening management and technical capacity within local government.

Now that planning power has been devolved from central government, policies can be initiated at district level by planning and policymaking units mandated to develop policies specific to their district, but which follow the line set at national level. The

central actors in this process are the district councils, while the role of technical staff from the respective line departments is limited to providing information and responding to requests for assistance with implementation.

Box 1. Development of the decentralisation policy in Uganda

1986	Commission of inquiry into local government set up.
1987	Capacity building workshop for local government officials. Creation of local resource committees.
1988	White paper on local government inquiry considered and supported by permanent secretaries. Meeting between Prime Minister and local government officials.
1990	Recommendations made to strengthen local governments at all levels. Presentation of report by experts on democratic decentralisation. Inauguration of committee of experts on democratic decentralisation.
1991	Ministry of Justice asked to consolidate laws governing local authorities, and to provide for decentralisation. Recommendations on decentralisation debated in the interim parliament of the National Resistance Council (NRC), (this was the interim legislature in Uganda until in 1995 the constitution was put in place). Minister of local government briefs the NRC.
1992	Inauguration of Decentralisation Secretariat.
1993	Decentralisation Act passed.
1995	Ugandan constitution amended to provide for decentralisation.
1997	Local government Act passed.

Setting priorities at district level

The perceptions, interests and concerns of local and national stakeholders have been considered throughout the formulation of the policy on decentralisation, and its implementation has been greatly facilitated by the participatory way in which it was developed. Local people feel that they have a stake in it, and are clear about the benefits they expect to enjoy from it. One of the more promising developments since the process of decentralisation began has been this growing influence of district councils over setting the agenda for policy priorities, which now differ between districts. The objective of the agricultural policy in Kabarole, for example, is to conserve soil and water through the following measures:

- Training farmers and staff in soil and water conservation techniques;
- Employing a specialist on soil and water conservation;
- Training farmers in bio-diversity and the judicious use of organic and mineral fertilisers in order to protect the environment;
- Revival and enforcement of by-laws related to soil and water conservation policies;
- Stepping up of agro-forestry practices;
- Collaboration with NGOs involved in soil and water conservation practices.

Policy priorities for the agricultural sector in Pallisa include:

- Adopting policies issued by the national Ministry of Agriculture, such as agricultural modernisation;
- Promoting the production of yams and upland rice for food security;
- Tree planting along boundaries;
- Developing a farmer training-centre.

However, district priorities for implementing agricultural policies may well differ from those set at national level. Moreover, it is one thing formally to earmark agriculture as a priority area, and quite another to commit resources to it. Although council officials in both Kabarole and Pallisa cited agriculture as the priority sector, this was not reflected in their budgets. Only 3.5% of total resources were directly allocated to agriculture in the 1998/1999 budget for Pallisa District (Table 4), apparently indicating that the constraints on agriculture were not seen as serious enough to warrant channelling more resources into this sector.

Table 4. District priorities for Pallisa in 1998/1999

<i>Priority programme areas</i>	<i>Allocation (%)</i>
Education and sports	51.9
Technical services and works	15.0
Health and environment	13.4
Management and support services	10.6
Finance and planning	3.6
Agricultural production and marketing	3.5
Council	1.1
Gender and community	0.9

Source: Pallisa district local government (1998)

In order to ensure that certain sectors receive sufficient attention at district level, it may be necessary for central government to earmark some areas as vital for the development of the country, although this is likely to be perceived as going against the spirit of decentralisation. It would be better to involve the district councils in discussions about new policies, raise awareness of their importance, acknowledge the need for location-specific implementation, and help districts to reconcile national and local priorities.

Allocation of financial and human resources to district councils

Even where there is a political will to modernise agriculture, the process is still vulnerable to budgetary constraints. Although decentralisation appears to favour the implementation of locally approved policies, it has not increased the financial resources required to implement them. Regional development initiatives will only be sustainable if communities have the capacity and local resources necessary to plan and implement programmes.

However, the most lucrative taxes are currently monopolised by central government, while district councils are left to make do with the smaller contributions, which are expensive to collect and often go unpaid because people are too poor to settle them. Since decentralisation, villages have been allowed to retain 25% of all revenue collected at local level, while 50% goes to the sub-county council. This could be used for development activities, but because so little income is generated by taxes raised at this level, what is retained is insufficient to cover local needs.

To be effective, district councils not only need skills in management and mobilising resources, but also require a larger share of the national budget. The following weaknesses in the overall decentralisation policy have been pointed out (Kiwanuka Musisi, 1999; Nsibambi, 1997; Kiyaga-Nsubuga, 1999):

- Failure of the central government to involve local governments in formulating the budget;
- Insufficient financial resources assigned to local authorities, which bear most responsibility for service delivery. For example, during the 1996/1997 financial year, central government allocated 70% of the recurrent budget to itself;
- The negative impact caused by the unilateral decision of the central government to step up conditional grants, which are earmarked, at the expense of unconditional ones;
- Unwillingness of central government to expedite the provision of equalisation grants, intended to provide extra resources for disadvantaged districts;
- Failure of the central government to consult local governments when it plans to take over local institutions, such as local administration, police and prisons;
- General reluctance in some line institutions to relinquish their hold on functions that have now been decentralised;
- The lack of technical capacity at sub-county level, particularly among accounting officers and sub-county chiefs.

It is becoming clear that the lack of funding at district level is so chronic that it might not be possible to implement some of the policies now initiated by central government. For example, how can district councils release money for agricultural extension workers to implement the PMA and SWC programmes when they cannot even afford to pay their own allowances? Improving participation and the feeling of ownership at local level does not in itself create sufficient conditions for the implementation of a particular policy: actors must also be empowered with sufficient human and financial resources to carry out their mandate.

Plan for the modernisation of agriculture (PMA)

The purpose of PMA is to create a strategic and operational framework for the eradication of poverty, through increased agricultural production and productivity, and

by protecting the environment (MAAIF/MFPED, 2000; Ngategize, 2000). The specific objectives of the PMA are outlined below:

- Prioritising agriculture as the engine of economic growth and the eradication of poverty;
- Transforming smallholder farming from subsistence-oriented to market-oriented production;
- Addressing food security issues through trade, rather than producing for self-sufficiency;
- Ensuring that agricultural production does not damage the environment;
- Minimizing the direct, operational role of the public sector, while vigorously supporting the involvement of the private sector in commercial activities;
- Increasing decentralisation of public service provision through appropriate institutional reforms, while emphasising inter-institutional links between central government, district councils, and sub-county councils;
- Supporting the generation and dissemination of technologies that improve productivity;
- Improving the access of women and young people to productive assets;
- Improving Uganda's agricultural competitiveness on export markets.

The government has also redefined its role in the schedule of modernisation of agriculture. For the medium-term, the main thrust of public action will emphasise:

- Policy formulation and strategic planning;
- Reforming and strengthening institutions;
- Provision of research and advisory services to subsistence farmers;
- Agricultural statistical and data collection services;
- Provision of regulatory services;
- Epidemic disease and pest control;
- Formulation of land policy and implementation of land reform;
- Regulations for water conservation and environmental management;
- Capacity building for irrigation and water harvesting technologies; production of seeds; micro-financial services; marketing and agro-processing infrastructure;
- Capacity building for agricultural education.

Formulating the PMA

The seeds of the PMA were sown in the presidential manifesto of 1996, in which President Museveni pledged that his campaign to modernise Uganda would involve "sensitising the people so that they are able to use their assets optimally" (Museveni, 1997; Ngatagize, 2000). According to MAAIF/MFPED (2000), the process actually began in August 1996, with a series of wide-ranging consultations with key stakeholders. The resulting findings were submitted to the consultative group meeting in December 1998, and a final report on the consultations was presented to the donor community in March 2000. Box 2 below outlines the stages in the PMA policy formulating process.

Box 2. The development of the PMA

- | | |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1996 | Agricultural modernisation highlighted in presidential manifesto. Vice president of the Ministry of Agriculture organised an agricultural sector participatory planning retreat in Tororo to identify priority areas for modernisation (MAAIF, 1996).
Workshop held in Kampala to consider the Tororo recommendations.
Consultations with districts to solicit their views on the Tororo and Kampala workshops. |
| 1998 | Appointment of eleven task groups to focus on specific priority areas.
In-depth consultations initiated to develop a more credible framework.
Publication of report by national task force.
PMA document presented to consultative group. |
| 1999 | Continued consultations and consolidation of work done by 11 task groups. |
| 2000 | PMA presented to donors in Kampala. |

The government believes that the process used to formulate the PMA is unique, and that it was formulated on the basis of extensive consultations with key stakeholders in an innovative and gender-focused manner. PMA is seen as a collaborative initiative to reduce poverty and transform the livelihoods of subsistence farmers that is in line with the Uganda Vision 2025 (Republic of Uganda, 1998). However, the participation of relevant stakeholders in the formulation of the PMA does not guarantee its smooth implementation. Ngategize (2000), has already highlighted the following challenges:

- Need for a cross-sectoral policy and budgeting forum;
- Need to strengthen regulatory policy and improve the monitoring capacity of ministries;
- More support for bottom-up planning and budgeting at district level;
- Need for financial support from donors;
- Ensuring that the focus on eradicating poverty is maintained.

The stakeholders we spoke to during the course of this research also expressed concern over these issues (Box 3). The general consensus seemed to be that the policy can provide a useful framework, as it is cross-sectoral, forward-looking and specific, but that it is likely to be hampered by insufficient funding and the pressing need to raise awareness at ground level. One informant from Kabarole commented: *“PMA is a good policy because it will rejuvenate agriculture when it is implemented. But in its present form, it is not clear at all. It is still abstract”*. And another stakeholder said *“the plan is too good to be true, because it has too many areas that need to be concurrently addressed under different line ministries. Harmonisation of priorities among line ministries will be very difficult, let alone the colossal monies required.”*

Box 3. Stakeholder opinions of the PMA

Agricultural Policy Secretariat:

- The policy is comprehensive and focused, and should contribute to rural development, as it targets constraints to marketing;
- Has a multiple actor perspective and seeks to delegate implementation of activities to those having comparative advantage;
- Acknowledges that the government has failed in critical areas such as extension and credit services, and would like to involve the private sector and NGOs;
- Should improve the regulatory and monitoring capacity of ministries;
- Concerned about insufficient funding for the programmes.

Researchers:

- The policy is comprehensive, liberal and focuses on commercialising agriculture. If marketing problems are solved, farmers will certainly invest more in soils and use better technologies;
- Protects the environment, which should ensure support from environmentalists;
- Implementation will only be successful when the PMA is taken seriously by the stakeholders concerned;
- Necessary requirements for implementation are not yet in place.

NGOs:

- The policy is forward looking;
- Has not been implemented yet, and is not fully understood by many of those that it will affect;
- Many challenges of which the greatest will be funding for the activities.

Although most activities are supposed to be implemented by local governments, the fact that many of them lack the financial resources to do so is likely to result in an uneven programme of implementation. District governments with available funds will be able to start work, while those depending on government grants will have to wait. To help ease the problem, donors have been approached for financial support, which should be forthcoming since they regarded the PMA as a good framework for local and national subsection policies and investment plans.

In 1998 a new Land Act was approved, decentralising the administration of land and offering better protection for tenants (Republic of Uganda, 1997). However, despite active lobbying, it did not accord women co-ownership with their husbands, and may therefore negate much of what the PMA is trying to do. Women manage the land on many farms, and denying them co-ownership could deter them from investing in long-term improvements to land that they may no longer be able to farm after their husband dies.

The PMA also promotes large-scale, mechanised agriculture as a means of improving agricultural productivity, but the new measures to protect occupants of *mailo*² and leasehold land will make it virtually impossible for landowners to take their land back and farm it as one large plot. Some observers believe that this will contribute to the continuation of subsistence agriculture, which the PMA seeks to discourage, as tenants are likely to be reluctant to give up their leases so that owners can develop the land. The extent to which tenants will invest in improving soil fertility on their leasehold will depend on the profitability of farming, and how secure they perceive their new position to be.

Soil and water conservation policy

The colonial authorities considered erosion a serious problem with the potential to provoke a rapid and dramatic reduction in agricultural productivity (Stockdale, 1937; Wayland and Brasnet, 1938; Tukahiirwa, 1994). They implemented a rigorous SWC policy which included measures such as:

- Incorporation of appropriate conservation practices into the farming systems;
- SWC awareness campaigns;
- Gazetting fragile and environmentally important areas, such as national parks;
- Conservation of vegetative cover, and controlling erosion by regulating bush burning, overgrazing and quarrying.

The SWC policy was formulated and implemented gradually. Providing for the different constraints in each region, it contained a number of measures specific to particular areas, such as the Eastern Region SWC policy (1941) and the Buganda Government Conservation Rules (1947). Indigenous local leaders had been instructed to pass by-laws to supplement national legislation and in the 1950s many by-laws were developed and enacted.

The vigilant supervision of the British authorities ensured the widespread implementation of the SWC policy during the colonial period, as it was considered important to sustain food production and generate raw materials for British industries during the Second World War. The success was also attributed to the mobilisation of communities by ex-World War II servicemen such as in West Nile in the late 1940s ('Communal gangs'), and 'Bulungi Bwansi' communal activists in Buganda (1949). However, the policy provoked much resentment at local level because it was imposed by the 'colonial masters', and consequently was largely abandoned by the mid-1960s, when the political turmoil after Independence meant that farmers were no longer forced to implement it. Despite its general unpopularity, the benefits of certain techniques were recognised in some areas, such as bench terracing which is still used in the Kigezi highlands.

Among the stakeholders we interviewed, opinions differed about the colonial soil and water conservation policies (see Box 4). NGO workers and researchers seemed in favour

² In 1900, the British colonial administration issued land titles to chiefs, clan leaders and religious institutions. This privatised land, known as '*Mailo* Land', may be inherited or sold.

of reinstating them, saying that they were basically sound, but had failed because farmers were not involved in their formulation. However, farmers maintained that they had abandoned the measures as soon as they could because they were not effective.

The NRM government has allowed NGOs to become more involved in agricultural programmes, and has encouraged popular participation in most activities. In Kabarole, a local NGO organised field demonstrations of measures to control erosion, which have been very effective in raising awareness about soil degradation. People are beginning to realise why the colonial SWC policies were necessary, and that local councils need to promote their widespread adoption. This has prompted discussions about the possibility of reviving the colonial SWC policy by enacting by-laws, although one NGO official advised that "*efforts should be made by the government to define the problem with the farmers in order for the policy to succeed*".

At national level, work is also under way on creating an institutional and policy framework for environmental conservation. Initiatives in this area include the creation of a Soil Conservation Unit, and the drafting of a National Soils Policy and National Soils Standards for Uganda by the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA).

The history of SWC policies highlights several issues relating to policy process. In the first place, no regulatory policy can succeed unless stakeholders are involved in developing it, acknowledge its legitimacy and support its enforcement. Having identified soil erosion as a problem, British colonial officers then proceeded to formulate a policy to combat it, without consulting farmers or telling them why it was important to adopt the measures. This high-handed approach led to the policy being jettisoned after independence, as the coercive manner with which it had been implemented made the farmers resent what were basically sound measures. If a policy is inappropriate or unpopular, it is unlikely to survive, no matter how good its intentions may be.

Box 4. Stakeholder perceptions of the SWC policy

Researchers:

A good policy because it was specific. The problem was that they enforced compliance, and there was no deliberate attempt to explain to people the importance of the policy.

NGOs:

A good policy, but post-independence euphoria spoilt it, as its implementation slackened. When it was still enforced, soil degradation was minimised.

Farmers:

The policy was enforced without its importance being explained. A farmer observed that "*the SWC policy, like other colonial policies, came from nowhere, and the peasants saw it as beneficial to the colonialists only. The short-term benefits of the SWC policy were not clear to us although the colonialists knew why they wanted it. We abandoned it as soon as chiefs stopped enforcing it*".

4 Conclusions

Participation in policy formulation

Traditionally, policies in Uganda were made by a few government officials, with little or no input from other stakeholders (Bahigwa, 1997). From colonial times until the second half of the 1980s, the government set the agenda and dominated policy formulation in the agricultural sector, while forcibly implemented the resulting procedures without explaining why they were necessary or desirable. Acknowledging that the policy had failed principally because it was imposed in a top-down manner by the colonial powers, the present government has made a point of involving all stakeholders in policy formulation from the mid-1980s onwards (Bahigwa, 1997; Mugyereza, 1998). The policy making process has become more consultative in recent years, as the NRM government has opened up the policy debate since it came to power in 1986. It is increasingly soliciting the views of stakeholders, particularly in the context of decentralisation, while interest groups such as NGOs and private sector associations are also exerting a growing influence on the policy process (EPRC, 1998).

However, we need to clarify what is meant by ‘consultation’ and ‘participation’. Some officials seem to believe that because rural people have been involved in data collection, they can be said to have participated in the process of formulating policies. The people themselves think that they have not been consulted or involved in policies, nor do they have a clear idea of the opportunities that these policies present. Talking about the PMA, one district official observed *“we have always provided the MAAIF with information regarding agriculture in our district. But we do not know whether it is the basis of the PMA”*.

Participation during implementation

Our findings also show that the participation of major players in policy formulation is no guarantee for successful implementation. Even though some stakeholders believe that they have been involved in formulating the policy on decentralisation, and support the outcome, its success will largely depend on whether or not the institutions and individuals involved have adequate financial and technical support to carry out their mandate.

The current decentralisation policy has resulted in the transfer of political, financial and planning responsibilities from central to local governments. District councils are now

charged with delivering services and encouraging participation and empowerment of local people in decision-making processes. However, certain skills and insights into the processes at work are required for effective participation in local councils, and it is important to acknowledge that, having lived under top-down mechanisms and certain forms of oppression, ordinary people will be cautious. Having always been told what to do, most people are not used to publicly question authority or exercising power as illustrated by the following remark: *“We have been waiting for the people at the district to come and tell us what we are supposed to do, but to no avail. Many years ago, chiefs gave directives on, for example, the growing of cassava, and they made sure to enforce these. Now, however, they are simply folding their arms”*. One councillor from Kabarole said: *“Policies should be made at the top, because they know very well what is good for us. We will implement them”*.

Their participation in the policy process may also be hampered by a lack of information, either because it is not available, or because it is not always presented in a form that is understandable to lay people. Development agencies should help to disseminate clear and usable information to ensure that local communities can participate fully in the decision-making process.

One of the key questions raised by our research is whether local people are fully aware of their roles in the new system, or of the opportunities now open to them. There is clearly a need for other organisations to work with rural communities, enabling them to explore the new prospects and responsibilities entrusted to them within the framework of decentralisation.

Challenges in the decentralisation policy

The successful implementation of various policies will hinge on the decentralisation process, which is itself seriously constrained by a number of institutional, managerial and environmental challenges. The Ugandan programme of decentralisation will only be able to accommodate the new agricultural policies intended to further rural development if decentralised institutions have the capacity to carry out the following tasks:

- Mobilise sufficient revenue to effectively execute the responsibilities that have been devolved to them;
- Co-ordinate the activities of local governments and other actors, such as NGOs, community organisations, farmers’ associations and the private sector, to ensure an efficient and effective attack on poverty through proper SFM and improved agricultural productivity;
- Raise the awareness of farmers and other actors, encouraging them to change their attitudes and support new agricultural policies such as PMA and SWC;
- Transform farmer training and extension from supply-driven to demand-led, based on accurate needs assessment by local governments;
- Eliminate corruption, wastage and misallocation of public resources at all levels.

Regional development initiatives will only be sustainable if communities have the capacity and local resources necessary to plan and implement programmes. To be effective, district councils not only need skills in management and mobilising resources, but also require a larger share of the national budget. Weaknesses in the decentralisation policy indirectly affect the PMA and SWC policies that are supposed to be implemented within its framework. Although district councils have been granted legislative powers, and are supposed to pass by-laws to resolve local issues affecting the economy, they are often handicapped by logistical and financial limitations. This restricted ability to make by-laws has a direct impact on the agricultural sector, which is the backbone of the local and national economy.

Under decentralisation, districts are free to choose their own priorities, albeit in line with national objectives. The implementation of the PMA and the revival of soil and water conservation policies will therefore depend on local councils: firstly, on whether they see soil degradation as a policy priority, and secondly, on their having the capacity to implement appropriate programmes.

Districts now compete with each other on development initiatives, and with policy makers and planners desperate to implement programmes that make their district 'shine', there are considerable opportunities for organisations to influence local policy choices. The chairman of one district council was heard to say: *" We are ready to make Pallisa a model district but we will require technical support. Tell us what policy you want and we will have it in place. Tell us how you want it implemented and we will give you all the necessary support"*.

Strategies for improving policy processes

The role of research

Policy makers can only make well-informed decisions if they can rely on appropriate research and efficient information systems. Although there is no obligation for governments to seek their advice, research institutes can play a valuable role in policy formulation. At the moment, research findings are mostly disseminated through publications, seminars and workshops, but they are hardly used by policymakers because most documents are too technical, and are only accessible to experts in the subject.

Some researchers recognise this problem, and realise that their findings are not taken into account when policies are developed. One professor in the Soil Science Department observed: *" there should be a policy demanding that the University concentrates on farmer driven research to ensure better adoption of new technologies developed with them. The University should also report findings in simple language for ease of understanding by non-scientists. This could be an important way to inform farmers and raise awareness on certain constraints in the policy environment, which could result in change, given that in the current political environment they can influence their local*

council or MP, who in turn could introduce the issue into the policy debate". Aware of the need to encourage the adoption of new technologies, this professor decided to apply his findings to his own farm, where he demonstrates the potential of soil management practices with a combination of mineral fertilisers and locally available resources. He also chairs a farmers' association, which he has put in contact with the University and Kawanda Agricultural Research Institute, and is encouraging members of the association to market their produce on a collective basis.

Collaboration and networking

Cross-sectoral policies are essential for improving agricultural productivity. The current situation cannot improve while various line ministries continue to pursue their own priorities, with little thought for harmonising policies and activities. Change is needed at all levels, to build capacity to develop and implement cross-sectoral policies, enhance the technical and financial capacity of decentralised institutions, carry out institutional reforms and improve networking. Networks can also play an important part in shaping the policy process, by building a wider constituency and promoting the sharing of information and experience. In fact, they already exert some influence, as a body of civil society organisations called the Land Alliance has actively contributed to the formulation of the Land Act. Researchers and extension workers should explore the possibilities for creating such alliances around the issue of soil fertility management.

The way forward

This study has demonstrated that although stakeholders in the agricultural sector in Uganda traditionally were not consulted on policies, the situation has improved considerably since the mid-1980s. The government has become increasingly aware of the importance of participation by major stakeholders in policy formulation and implementation, realising that the rehabilitation begun in 1986 can only evolve into a successful programme of development and growth if it is backed by popular support. Believing that effective participation by stakeholders will foster rapid and sustainable growth, the government is aiming for a more consultative form of policy formulation and implementation. However, the government still has much to do to convince those at grassroots level that it is prepared to put its rhetoric into practice. Enlisting the help of NGOs, donors and private sector, commissioning research and acting upon its results would certainly contribute to the elaboration of appropriate, popular and sustainable policies.

Given that agriculture plays a central role in the rural economy, development policies should explicitly recognise that it holds the key to reducing levels of poverty across the country. It is imperative that national development policies and programmes take their lead from the real needs of rural communities, which must be given the opportunity to provide their input into policy design. The success of any policy depends on its perceived importance and legitimacy. Involving stakeholders in a given sector in policy formulation would contribute significantly to creating support for the programmes they generate.

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