



Tropentag, October 5-7, 2011, Bonn

“Development on the margin”

## Is the Provision of Agricultural Extension Services Better under Decentralised Than under Centralised Government Systems? the Case of Uganda

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### Abstract

Efforts to improve the delivery of rural services in developing countries have revolved around decentralisation policies, which have been seen as a promising approach to increase responsiveness of governments to people's needs by making rural services demand-driven and empowering communities to determine their development. This paper examines the performance of Uganda's agricultural extension under a decentralised system. We analyse the performance of decentralised service provision in Uganda using data collected from 208 agricultural extension agents (AEAs), which were affiliated with (1) the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) and (2) non-governmental organisations (NGOs), both of which provide demand-driven services, and with (3) the government, which provides traditional agricultural extension services comparable to services under a centralised system. The paper combines qualitative approaches to analyse the perceptions of AEAs and other key informants with econometric approaches to determine the factors associated with the performance of service provision.

AEAs and local government leaders observed that decentralisation brought services closer to the people, empowered farmers to demand better services, and allowed them to monitor providers of advisory services more closely. The major weaknesses of decentralisation were seen in limited staff promotion, increased political interference, and poor vetting of candidates applying for positions to serve as private advisory service providers. There was also the perception of corruption and weak regulation and monitoring of private providers. The econometric results showed that AEAs affiliated with NAADS and NGOs provided services to a significantly larger share of farmers under their jurisdiction than government-affiliated AEAs — reflecting the better incentives provided to non-governmental AEAs. Moreover, AEAs affiliated with NGOs were more likely to provide advisory services to women than government-affiliated AEAs. This is consistent with Swanson (2008), who found that NGOs are better able to serve women and other vulnerable groups. Government-affiliated AEAs were more likely to offer advisory services on traditional technologies such as improved seeds than AEAs affiliated with NAADS or NGOs. The results highlight the complementarity of different types of advisory service providers to provide a variety of management practices.

**Keywords:** Agricultural extension, decentralisation, outsourcing, Uganda