

How to Promote Institutional Reforms in the Agricultural Sector? A case study of Uganda's National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explain the limited success of the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) program in Uganda, a reform that was initially considered as a role model for a demand-driven, decentralised and market-oriented agricultural extension reform in Africa. The study is based on the Advocacy Coalition Framework and used key informant and stakeholder interviews, participant observation and a review of policy and other documents as empirical research methods. Concepts of discourse analysis were applied to analyze the results. The study shows that the extension reform process was mainly shaped by the interaction of two discourse coalitions: a donor-dominated coalition which believed that only a radical reform was possible, and a technically oriented coalition of actors led by the Ministry of agriculture that believed in the need for a gradual reform. The study further shows that the exclusion of the gradual reform coalition in the design and early implementation phase of NAADS increased the vulnerability of the program to political capture by a political coalition that emerged during implementation and governance problems later on, hence contributing to the performance problems of the program. The study concludes that for complex institutional reform programs that require large-scale implementation efforts, consensus-building and using a gradual approach deserves attention as a promising alternative to a radical reform, which may ignore local expertise and invite passive resistance.

Key words: Demand-driven extension, Uganda, NAADS, policy reform, agricultural institutions

1 Introduction

In 2001, Uganda adopted one of the most-far reaching reforms of an agricultural extension system in Africa. By creating the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), Uganda departed from the model of a publicly financed and publicly provided extension service, which had its origin in colonial times and dominated everywhere on the African continent. The guiding principles of NAADS were based on the "Common Framework for Agricultural Extension" developed by the Neuchâtel Group (1999, 2002), a donor coordination group that had originally been formed with a view to developing an alternative to the Training and Visit (T&V) system. T&V had been promoted by the World Bank in more than fifty countries, including in Africa (Anderson et al., 2006). The principles of the Neuchâtel framework emphasized empowerment of producers as clients, sponsors and stakeholders; market orientation; pluralism and

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decentralization of activities coupled with coordination of actors and innovative mechanisms for funding and delivery of services through public private sector partnerships

NAADS was the first extension model in Africa that followed those criteria. In its early years, it was widely publicized and frequently discussed in international fora organized by the Neuchâtel group. Many practitioners and scholars, who had tried to establish an alternative to T&V, which was seen as top-down, disempowering the farmer, and ultimately unsuccessful, placed their hopes in NAADS. The World Bank provided major funding to NAADS, and other donors such as European Union and Danish International Development Agency among others supported it, too. Early reports, including the preliminary results of a major quantitative impact evaluation by the renowned International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), showed positive results (Benin et al., 2007). However, as the program matured, the enthusiasm faltered. The program became increasingly controversial in Uganda. Anecdotal evidence, newspaper reports and research evidence indicated major problems, such as farmers' ambivalence towards the program (Parkinson 2009), mismanagement of the program (MAAIF 2009a), limited understanding of the program by farmers (Musemakweri 2007), questionable capacity of private service providers (Mangheniet. al. 2003, Obaaet.al. 2004), low technology uptake by farmers (Buaet.al 2004) and a far too rapid roll out of the program (DCI, 2003).

In 2007, the President of Uganda suspended the NAADS—a novelty, given that no other major donor-funded agricultural development program in Uganda had ever been suspended by the President. The government and the donors went into a major controversy over NAADS (Kjaer and Joughin, 2012). Major reform elements of NAADS were reversed, causing a departure from the original principles. Ultimately, the World Bank's own Implementation Completion Report rated the outcome of NAADS Program as only “moderately successful” (World Bank, 2010, p.14). The review of the ICR for the NAADS project by the Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank rated the performance of the program as “moderately unsuccessful”. The report was critical of the World Bank's own performance and rated it as “moderately unsatisfactory” (World Bank 2011).⁵

The initially positive results of the impact evaluation research conducted by IFPRI (2004, 2007) could not be maintained either. After IFPRI's researchers used more advanced analytical techniques than they had done in their preliminary analysis, they found that the evidence on the impact of NAADS on farm household income was inconclusive (Benin et al., 2011, Benin et al., 2012).

In view of these facts, the question arises: Why was NAADS, the most celebrated extension reform model in Africa, ultimately unsuccessful? Answering this question will provide insights into agricultural extension reform, not only for Uganda, but also for other countries. It can also provide more general insights on institutional reforms in the agricultural sector, which has remained a major challenge (World Bank, 2007, Chapter 11). Different explanations have been put forward to explain the failure of NAADS as a reform model: Donors tend to blame the government. The Implementation Completion Report rated “Government Performance” as “Unsatisfactory” (World Bank, 2010, p. i), quoting problems with the timely release of funds as

⁵In the World Bank's evaluation system, the Implementation Completion Report (ICR) is prepared by the management of the project. Hence, it is a self-evaluation. The ICR is then made subject to a review by the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) of the World Bank Group, which often takes a more critical view than project management.

well as “changes in design without prior consultations with financing partners”(World Bank, 2010, p.18).In the research-based literature, similar explanations can be found. For example, Joughin and Kjaer (2010) argued that the government “captured” the program and changed its original design for political benefit, especially by introducing an input subsidy into the program prior to the 2006 national elections. A more recent paper by Kjaer and Joughin (2012) provides a more nuanced picture: It identifies lack of ownership by key actors, especially Uganda’s Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries (MAAIF), and differences in values, as additional reasons.

This paper aims to contribute to the emerging literature that attempts to explain the failure of NAADS as a reform model. The paper is based on extensive research that started in 2007 and involved interviews with 56 key stakeholders. Discourse analysis was used as a main approach to analyze the interview information. The first author was also able to use participant observation of the reform process since it started, for example, by participating in numerous meetings held related to NAADS. The findings from this study confirm the earlier findings in the literature on ownership and capture quoted above. However, the paper goes beyond the existing literature by identifying the following problems: First, the exclusion of the agricultural ministry MAAIF in the reform process was not an oversight, as Kjaer and Joughin, (2012) suggested, but a deliberate choice of a donor-dominated coalition of actors who came to believe that such a reform could only be achieved outside this ministry. They chose to push for a radical reform without the participation of who they perceived to be opponents, rather than seeking a consensus, and adopting a more gradual approach to reform. This paper finds that such a radical reform approach is not suitable for institutional reforms that require a large-scale implementation effort, involving thousands of people placed all over the country. A radical reform may be suited for reforms that can be achieved “by the stroke of a pen”, such as changing exchange rates or tariffs, but not for *institutional* reforms in a large sector such as agriculture.

The paper also finds that not enough attention was paid in the design of NAADS to the governance challenges that would arise in implementing the envisaged reform. Such governance problems include political interference from the top, and contracting and procurement problems at the bottom. The lack of attention to such governance problems may have been partly due to the novelty of the reform, but, as the research presented here indicates, it was also due to the exclusion of those actors from the design process who would have had a better understanding of how such problems could best be tackled within Uganda’s political and administrative environment. Even though NAADS was set-up with the best intentions to protect it from potential interference and make it a well-managed agency—run outside of what the donors perceived to be an ineffective and corrupt bureaucracy—it turned out that the design of NAADS as a semi-autonomous agency made it particularly vulnerable to governance challenges.

The paper proceeds as follows: The next section describes the conceptual framework and the research methods used for this study. Section 3 presents the results of the study. Section 4 discusses the results, and Section 5 draws conclusions for the reform of extension services, and for institutional reforms in the agricultural sector, more generally.

2 Conceptual framework and research methods

2.1 Conceptual framework

This research applies the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) as a major basis. The adapted version of the ACF used for this study is shown in Figure 1. The ACF recognizes that for policy issues that are contested, individuals and

groups often form “advocacy coalitions” that “substantively engage in a nontrivial degree of coordinated activities over time” to pursue specific policy options (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, p.18). They are referred to as “Discourse Coalitions” in the diagram. In this study, the term “discourse coalitions” was applied instead of advocacy coalitions, because the research showed that there were groups of actors that did not necessarily engage together in political action, but that shared a common discourse on the topic, which enabled them to shape the political debate and people’s opinions. The concepts of discourse analysis developed by Hajer (1995, 2006) and van Dijk (1998) were used to identify these discourse coalitions.⁶The study follows the ACF in assuming that the coalitions share a common belief and value system, which is expressed in their discourse. In line with van Dijk’s theory about ideology and discourse (1998), the framework also assumes that discourse coalitions typically have a positive self-representation, and a negative other-representation, that is a positive view about goals and values of their own coalition, and a negative view about those of coalitions with different value- and belief systems.

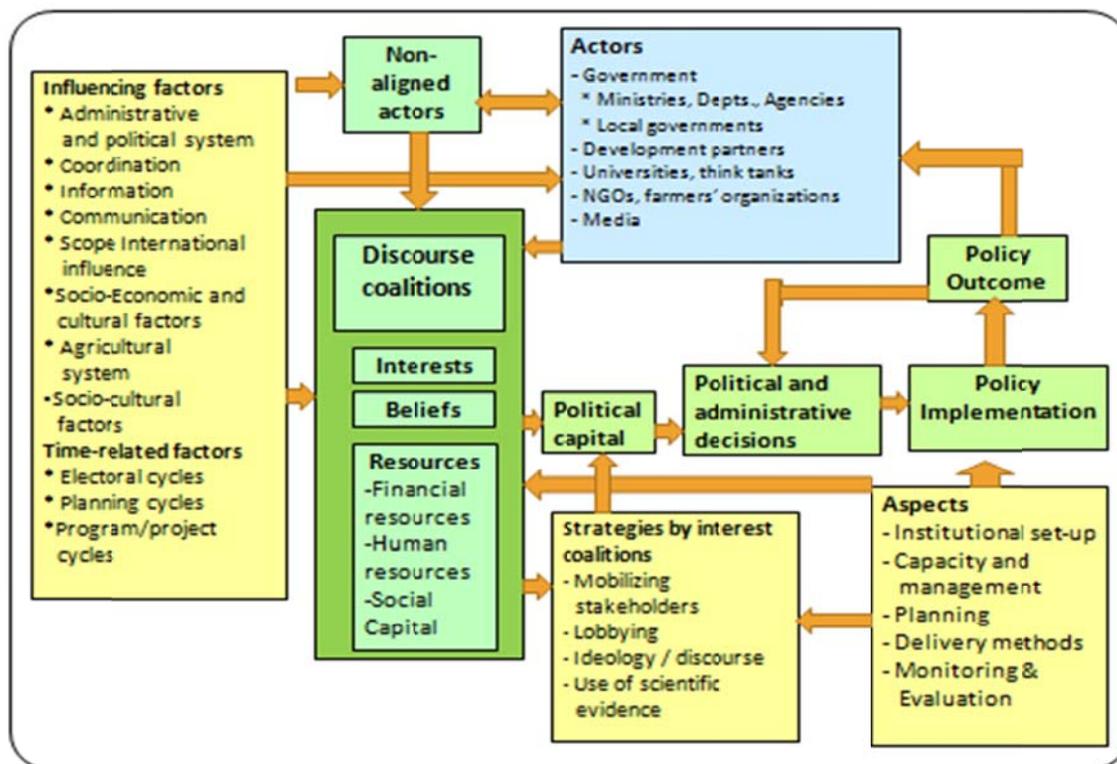


Figure 1: The Advocacy Coalition Framework as adapted for the study

Source: Adapted from Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993, p.18) and Birner and Resnick(2010, p. 1448)

⁶The authors acknowledge that there are major epistemological differences between Sabatier’s Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) and Hajer’s discourse analysis. While the ACF applies a positivist interpretation of reality, which is compatible with economic models of the policy-making, Hajer applies a post-modern social constructivist perspective. This paper is based on a positivist perspective in the sense that, for example, the problems that smallholder farmers are confronted with are seen as problems that exist in the real world and not as social constructions. However, the paper still integrates important insights that have been gained in the literature that used a social constructivist approach to discourse analysis, in particular by acknowledging the role that language use plays in shaping political processes.

According to the framework, policy decisions and policy implementation are the outcome of a competition between the different discourse coalitions. The members of the different coalitions, which are referred to in this paper as actors, used different resources, such as financial and human resources as well as social networks to create “political capital.” The latter can be defined as “the resources that enable an actor or coalition to influence policy formation processes and realize outcomes that serve the actor’s perceived interests” (Birner and Wittmer, 2003, p. 298). Strategies to create political capital include lobbying, using scientific evidence and influencing the public discourse. The ability of different coalitions to influence the outcome of policy decisions and their implementation is dependent on political culture, scope for international influence, the nature of the administrative system, electoral cycles, planning cycles, and program/project cycles as shown in Figure 1. This framework was used to analyse how effective the different coalitions were in pursuing their objectives.

Table 1: Key institutional actors* in the agricultural extension reform process and the number of interviews conducted

Institution/ Actor	Number of Interviews	Remarks
Cabinet	2	Interviews done with former Ministers of MAAIF who were in charge at beginning of reforms.
Parliament	4	Agricultural Session Committee members and former MAAIF officials who became legislators
MAAIF	14	Heads of Technical Departments of MAAIF and other officials with insights in the process
MFPEP	2	Senior MFPEP officials participating in the reform process
NAADS	4	Senior NAADS officials in charge of implementing extension reforms
PMA	1	Senior Official from PMA Secretariat
MPS	1	Ministry of Public Service Officials involved in conversion of staff to NAADS
NARO	2	Senior NARO officials involved in the reform process
Academia	3	Makerere University Faculties of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine.
Farmers Org.	2	National level
NGOs/Professional organizations	3	National NGO Forum and Uganda Veterinary Association Officials
Development partners	6	Interviews with World Bank Country office and Washington DC, including retired officials
Local Government	10	Kabarole District represented views of local governments where policy implementation takes place
Retired MAAIF Extension Staff	2	Retired senior MAAIF officials who were part of the extension reforms
Total	56	

* The abbreviations stand for the following institutions: MAAIF: Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, MFPEP: Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development, MPS: Ministry of Public Service, NAADS: National Agricultural Advisory Services, NARO: National Agricultural Research Organization, NGO: Non-Governmental Organizations, PMA: plan for Modernization of Agriculture.

2.2 Research methods

A combination of methods was used for this research: As mentioned earlier, the first author had the opportunity to directly observe the NAADS reforms since its beginnings due to his role as a staff member of MAAIF. Specific research on the policy process involved in NAADS started in 2007. A review of documents and initial interviews with officials in MAAIF served to map the policy landscape and get an overview of the process that led to the creation of NAADS.

Based on this initial mapping, the respondents for in-depth interviews were selected. Using a snow-ball approach, additional interviewees were added during the process. A research stay of the first author at IFPRI in Washington DC, in 2010, made it possible to conduct interviews with staff from World Bank headquarters involved in the design of NAADS. Overall, 56 semi-structured interviews were conducted (see Table 1 for details).

In line with principles of qualitative research, the interviewees were selected according to the criteria of “completeness,” covering the entire spectrum of actors identified, and “dissimilarity”, that is, selecting interviewees with diverse perspectives (Blee and Taylor, 2002). Participant observations, ongoing informal interactions with identified key policy actors and reviews of internal and published documentation related to NAADS provided additional sources of data. Most of the participant observation activities and informal interactions occurred in naturalistic settings. In line with ethical standards, no classified information was used for the research. For each interview, detailed notes were made, including verbatim quotes on key issues. In analyzing the interview notes, methods of discourse analysis as developed by Hajer (1995, 2006) were used. The main approach was to identify recurring patterns of speech that can be characterized as “story-lines” (Hajer, 2006: 69), that is narratives which reflect the ways in which actors perceive and explain the phenomena of interest for this study. Combining this approach with the Advocacy Coalition Approach described above, the interviews were also analyzed with a view to identifying the policy beliefs that the interviewees hold on key issues, such as the role of the public and private sector in agricultural extension. Based on the identification of common policy beliefs and story-lines, the actors could be grouped into two major discourse coalitions, as further described below.

Initial findings and data analysis were periodically shared with policy actors. Their feedback helped to validate and refine the analysis. The findings were also validated through sharing preliminary research findings in meetings and workshops and by discussing them with peers. Some of the respondents were also revisited for purposes of cross-checking the findings. As the first author was involved in the policy process himself, as a staff member of MAAIF, special emphasis was placed in the validation of the results on identifying and addressing potential problems of bias that might have emerged due to his position. To uphold confidentiality as promised during data collection, the findings from both participant observations and interviews are presented here anonymously: The respondents were randomly assigned numbers, and they are quoted with this number as R1, R2, R3 etc. in the following presentation of results.

3 Results

3.1 Overview of the process of designing and implementing NAADS

Figures 2 and 3 below provide an overview of the NAADS reform process, which can be divided into two phases: The first phase (Figure 2) starts with the elections in 1996, in which the Transformation of Agriculture was a major element of the platform of the ruling party, the

National Resistance Movement (NRM). The second phase (Figure 3) starts with the introduction of the input subsidy program in 2005, the first major departure from the original reform model. The period covered by this study ends in 2012, when the contracts of the top NAADS staff, members who had been leading the organization since its creation, were not renewed by the Government.

Figure 2: Key events in the reform process leading to establishment of NAADS

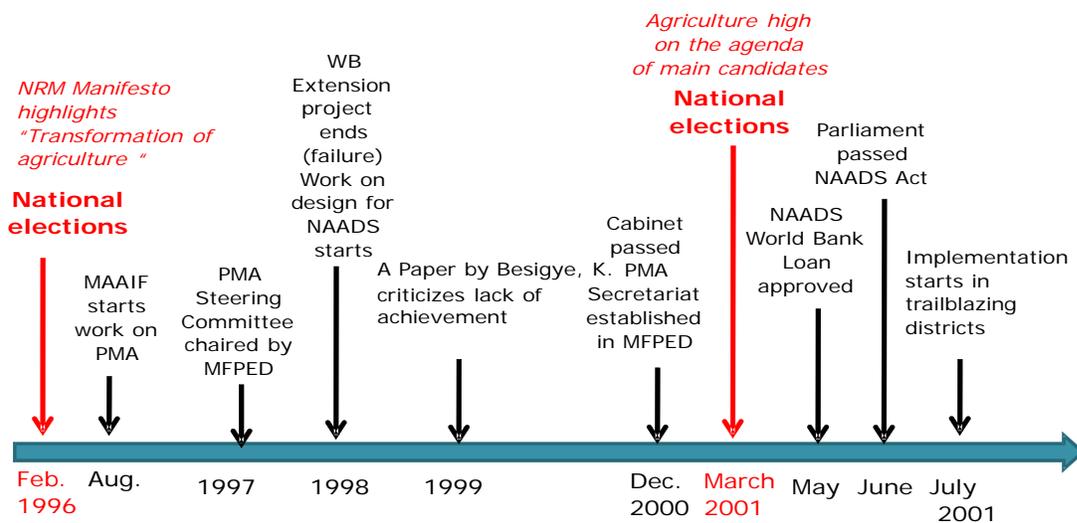
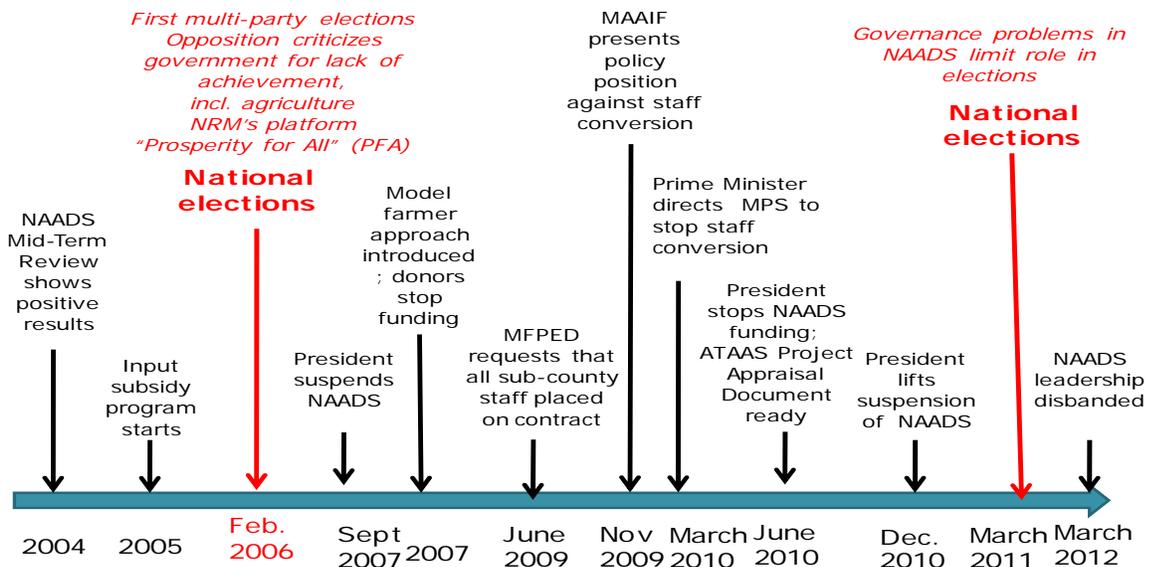


Figure 3: Key events in the reform process leading to changes in the NAADS program



3.2 The design phase of NAADS (1998-2001)

3.2.1 Institutional and administrative context

The institutional design of NAADS has to be placed in the context of the decentralization reform in Uganda, which came into effect when a new Constitution was passed in 1995. This Constitution stipulated that substantial authority had to be transferred from the central government to the districts. In 1997, the Government commissioned a post-constitutional restructuring report, which specified the implications of the decentralization reform for the agricultural sector (Ministry of Public Service 1998). The report recommended transferring the agricultural extension services to the districts, a reform that was implemented in 1998. As a consequence, the Ministry was downsized at national from over 1,300 staff to about 300. The Directorate of Agricultural Extension in MAAIF was disbanded as a consequence of this reform (R 11, R 14).

In the same year, the World Bank-funded Agricultural Extension Project that had started in 1993 came to an end. This project had mainly been designed according to the Training and Visit (T&V) model and was referred to as the Unified Agricultural Extension Project. According to its Implementation Completion Report, that project was characterized as follows: outcome unsatisfactory; sustainability unlikely, and institutional development modest (World Bank, 2000 p. 1). According to interview information (R 67, 69), agricultural extension was intensively discussed at the same time in a Thematic Group in the World Bank. According to the World Bank's website, Thematic Groups are "the heart and soul of the Bank's knowledge program". They are "voluntary communities of people who share a common interest and passion for their topic."⁷ Extension was discussed in the Thematic Group on "Sustainable Agriculture Systems, Knowledge and Institutions" (SASKI). At the time, this group consisted of approximately 180 members from within the World Bank and 40 members from outside the Bank. The group commissioned studies and carried out consultations with international NGOs, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). This group recommended the replacement of the T&V model with a new model that was market-oriented and farmer-driven. Members of SASKI also participated in the Neuchâtel Initiative mentioned in the introduction, which promoted the same model. In Latin America, first experiences had already been made with this model, and the SASKI group made efforts to establish this new model as part of the World Bank's agricultural extension policy more generally.

The group was able to convince the respective managers in the World Bank to design the new agricultural extension project for Uganda according to the principles of the new model. The failure of the previous Unified Agricultural Extension Project facilitated this effort. As the Directorate of Extension of MAAIF had already been disbanded at the time when the design phase of the extension project started, the World Bank staff in charge (hereafter referred to as the "design group") had no direct counterpart among the technical staff in the Ministry. They could have worked with other staff, but they came to the conclusion that the staff in MAAIF would not support the reform effort they had in mind. As one interviewee from the group remarked, "MAAIF is the most bureaucratic ministry and not flexible to new thinking and approaches. Officials in MAAIF continue to live in the past and are resistant to reforms. It is very difficult to

⁷Quoted from <http://go.worldbank.org/Z5LIKMGUR0>

advocate for agricultural extension reforms within MAAIF”(R 33). Another respondent expressed a similar view: “MAAIF has frustrated efforts to reform and only keeps blaming and opposing any reform efforts.”(R 53)

The interviews held with the staff of MAAIF reveal a different picture. According to them, the need to reform agricultural extension was clearly recognized in the Ministry, and this effort had already started when MAAIF organized an inter-ministerial retreat in 1997, which brought together more than five ministries to deliberate policy reforms needed in agriculture following the adoption of the decentralization policy. The outcome of this retreat was the development of the Medium Term Agricultural Modernization Plan. The plan proposed an increase in resource allocation to agricultural extension and research, and to strengthen the link between research, extension and the farmers. MAAIF intended to continue with the role of linking research, extension and farmers since, in their assessment, the private sector at the time was still underdeveloped and lacking the necessary skills. The view of MAAIF was that the reforms should proceed gradually. As one respondent from MAAIF explained, “The radical agricultural extension reforms, as being advocated by the NAADS program, are institutionally disruptive and destabilizing; technically destructive; and may not be sustainable in the long run.” (R 44)

MAAIF staff also felt that their own efforts were not taken seriously, and that the World Bank and other donors (referred to as “development partners” in the current development discourse), had taken over the process. As one interviewee remarked, “Suppose the World Bank was not involved, would these policies be in existence? And if it pulled out now, would these policies hold? These questions, if answered, would indicate who defines the problem and who determines the policy options.”(R 14) Another interviewee (R 48) expressed his frustration as follows: “Agricultural extension reforms have been pushed by an alliance of development partners, and a group of “reformers” within the government system who have worked closely to undermine the authority of MAAIF in the reform process.”

The World Bank-led design group adopted the strategy of identifying individual and institutional allies whom they involved in the reform process while edging out those perceived to be opposed to the reforms. While they were not convinced of the support of MAAIF, they identified a main ally in the Minister of Agriculture at the time, who was interested in a trying a new approach. The World Bank invited him to a trip to Latin America to see the new extension model there in practice. The other ally for the design group was the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED), which was interested in working with donors to guarantee funding of the reform program. Yet another important ally was the selected staff from the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO). International extension experts and scholars, who were keen to see the World Bank abandon their T&V model were also supportive of the effort and attended, for example, NAADS design workshops (R 67).

3.2.2 The emergence of two discourse coalitions

Applying the combination of the Advocacy Coalition Framework and the discourse analysis described earlier, one can define two discourse coalitions that emerged during the design of NAADS, based on the analysis of the discourses and policy beliefs identified in the interviews. The first one, which was led by the World Bank staff that designed and later managed the NAADS project, can be referred to as “Radical Reform Coalition.” The other coalition, which was led by the technical staff of MAAIF, can be described as the “Gradual Reform Coalition”. Table 2 lists the members of the two coalitions and describes their self- and other-perception.

The findings of this study indeed showed a considerable level of contempt, distrust, and suspicion between the two discourse coalitions. This distrust is ably illustrated by the following quotations sampled from each coalition: The first quotation is from a member of the gradual reform coalition, who stated: “The Government has chosen to establish two parallel systems in the agricultural sector: the first is the liberal and flexible system through agencies, such as NAADS, dominated by the so called “reformers” who in effect are rent-seekers and captured by reform models designed in western capitals. The second is the mainstream bureaucratic system of civil service of MAAIF and local governments. Donors found it convenient to foster reforms that best suit their interests, through the liberal system.”(R 35)

Table 2: Overview of the two discourse coalition

	Radical reform coalition	Gradual reform coalition
Main belief	<p>Improving agricultural extension through reforms within the public sector is impossible; new approaches involving the private sector and civil society are needed.</p> <p>Farmers’ involvement in decision-making on the kind of services they needed is critical</p> <p>The role of the public sector should be limited to financing, facilitation and coordination; and service delivery should be a responsibility of the private sector because it is more efficient.</p>	<p>Extension can only be achieved through a gradual reform within the public sector; the outsourcing model is not appropriate for Uganda in its presentation situation</p> <p>Subscribed to the concept of farmer empowerment but did not believe in the NAADS approach; preferred a gradual and systematic approach to farmer empowerment through group formations</p> <p>The public sector still has an active role to play in the provision of extension services and that it too early to divest extension services to the private sector.</p>
Self-Perception: How the coalition members perceived themselves	True reformers; defending farmers’ interests	True understanding of the system; able to identify what can work
Other-Perception: How the coalition members perceived the other coalition	Defending vested interests of bureaucracy and politicians; opposing any reform	<p>Captured by donor and their reform models; dominated by rent-seeking behavior</p> <p>Not open to locally adapted solutions</p>
Members	<p>Ministry of Finance,</p> <p>Donors led by World Bank, Co-opted NARO Staff</p> <p>NAADS leadership</p>	<p>Ministry of Agriculture*</p> <p>Local Governments, Farmer Organizations,</p> <p>NARO, PMA, Academia</p>

* The Minister of Agriculture who was in office in the early phase of NAADS was part of the Radical Reform Coalition.

Source: Authors, based on analysis of interviews

Further interview information revealed that the gradual reform coalition was inclined to reforming the existing public extension system to make it more efficient and accountable other than creating new extension delivery systems. They argued that past agricultural extension projects were characterized by weak monitoring and accountability systems and what was important was to address these inherent weaknesses; and also to gradually position the public extension system to form the core of the pluralistic extension environment as advocated by proponents of reform (R 11, R 14). The view of the radical reform coalition can be illustrated by the following quotation: “Since colonial times, agricultural extension has been a domain of the public sector, highly centralized with the traditional vertical bureaucratic structure. Public extension agents protect themselves and hide their inefficiencies behind this bureaucracy. The NAADS program is attempting to break this tradition and it is expected to face resistance from the traditional bureaucrats.” (R 21)

3.2.3 Divergent views on problem identification

While the two discourse coalitions agreed that agricultural extension policy making needs to be informed by the history of agricultural extension in the country, they disagreed on the extent to which that happened in the case of NAADS. The Radical Reform proponents argued that the design of NAADS was derived from the past failures of the different agricultural extension approaches that have been implemented in Uganda. They also argued that the design was guided by Uganda’s own public sector institutional reforms, following the adoption of the policy of decentralization; and by the need to balance power relations between the farmer and the extension agents. In addition, the Radical Reform Coalition pointed out that extensive technical studies were conducted prior to the design of NAADS; and were used as Working Papers during the design of the program (Republic of Uganda, 1999).

The design group certainly has to be credited for major efforts to adjust the principles of demand-driven extension reform developed in Latin America and in international extension circles to the Ugandan context. Several extended workshops with national and international participation were held to discuss institutional design issues. According to interviews with World Bank staff, the design group organized three intensive events (workshops) in Kampala, each lasting three weeks, attended by over 50 participants from different institutions in the public and private sectors, farmer organizations, donor agencies and international academics. MAAIF was represented by the Commissioner for Agricultural Planning and Development and several technical officers. The workshops identified the key principles adopted to guide the program design as: Decentralization, farmer empowerment, private sector involvement, accountability, and the principle that extension should not be related to distribution of inputs. Field trips were held to consult with local stakeholders, such as district and sub-county governments to discuss various ideas for the design of NAADS (R 67).

The Gradual Reformers criticized that this approach did not start from the question as to what the problems actually were that had to be resolved in the specific Ugandan context. They rather perceived this approach to be a pre-conceived idea by the development partners, who only used the history of extension as a justification to gain acceptance for the design principles they had already developed within their internal and international fora before. In the view of its critics, the Radical Reform Coalition assumed that the problems of public sector extension were universal, and that the design principles of demand-driven extension were the answer. Therefore, the main design question only was how to apply them in Uganda. Members of the Gradual Reform Coalition also criticized the fact that the technical studies that supposedly informed the design of

NAADS were mostly written by international consultants, which indicated—in their view—that the reform was largely externally driven.

The members of the Gradual Reform Coalition also pointed out that major decisions on the design of NAADS had already been made in overarching policy documents, which were largely driven by donors. According to one member of the Gradual Reform Coalition, “the donors were in the lead during the development of Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) and PMA, through the provision of all the necessary technical assistance. They strategically positioned the NAADS design elements in these two documents that were to guide the agricultural sector for years to come. The design elements were largely drawn from international experience. Even if there were alternative policy options at the design stage of NAADS, it was impossible to deviate from PEAP and PMA which had been adopted as the government policy documents. The problem definition and identification in agricultural extension had already been done for us in the PEAP and PMA documents.” (R 03) Consistent with the view of the Gradual Reform Coalition, a review of the relevant documents (PEAP 1997, 2004 and PMA 2000) showed that the NAADS design elements had indeed already been integrated within the overall government policy framework. Key elements included there are the following: a shift from the concept of farmers as beneficiaries to users and clients; a shift from system operated by public employees to that largely operated through contracting arrangements; a shift from the public sector as the provider of services to the role of stimulating the development of a private market for advisory services.

What is remarkable is the extent to which technical staff of MAAIF remained excluded from the design process, in spite of the remarkable extent of stakeholder participation that was otherwise achieved. It remains an open question to what extent this was due to self-exclusion as a form of silent protest in view of the attitudes expressed towards them (see quotes above), and to what extent it was due a deliberate decision by the design group to exclude them. The fact is that senior officials who had experience in extension were not part of the design process. This was the case not only for extension reform, but for the broader reform under the “Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture” (PMA), of which the extension reform was part. Out of the 16 Task Managers for the thematic areas addressed under PMA, MAAIF had only one representative. The Task Manager for the thematic area of agricultural extension was the head of one research institute under NARO at the time, who later became the Executive Director of NAADS. In justifying the marginal representation of MAAIF in the steering and drafting committees of the PMA, the then Minister in charge of MAAIF reasoned: “Agriculture planning is all about economics. The technical people in MAAIF only need to provide the necessary information, and the rest of planning can be done by economists.”

3.2.4 Divergent beliefs on the institutional design of NAADS

In the design phase of NAADS, important decisions had to be made on the institutional set-up of the new extension system. These decisions had far-reaching implications for the governance challenges that the system was confronted with later. Not surprisingly, the members of the two coalitions had rather different views on the institutional design of NAADS.

3.2.4.1 The creation of a semi-autonomous agency

One important consequence of the Radical Reform Coalition’s belief that reforms were impossible within MAAIF was the decision to set up NAADS as a semi-autonomous agency. As one member of the Radical Reform Coalition remarked, “I do not think we would have achieved what we have so far if we were operating within the Ministry of Agriculture. The semi-

autonomous status has enabled the program to reach out to more stakeholders, some of whom we would never have reached under MAAIF arrangement.”(R 49)This type of institutional set-up was also in line with the principles of New Public Management, which served as a basis for many of the World Bank’s administrative reform efforts (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). One advantage of a semi-autonomous agency, in the view of the Radical Reformers, is the fact that it can be managed outside the hiring rules and salary structures of the civil service, an approach that was subsequently used for NAADS.

The Gradual Reform Coalition had, not surprisingly, a different view on the topic. One former World Bank staff member, who had become frustrated with this reform model pointed out: “My experience of 25 years at the World Bank has made me come to believe that promoting institutional change is the most difficult undertaking, and in most cases you end up with suboptimal structures; create a whole army of enemies; and it is incredibly time consuming. The best option is to work with existing institutions and help people to come up with good results.” (R 68)Another member of the Gradual Reform Coalition criticized the setting up of semi-autonomous agencies more generally: “The reform process ... within the agricultural sector, over the years resulted in creation of eight semi-autonomous agencies. The establishment of these agencies drained MAAIF Headquarters of both human and financial capital; thus, limiting the capacity of MAAIF to effectively coordinate, regulate and manage the agricultural sector.” (R01)

3.2.4.2 Short term-contracts for service providers at the sub-county level

The contracting out of extension services was a main institutional element in the NAADS reform, which was supposed to solve the accountability problem. To empower farmers, the contracting was designed in such a way that farmer representatives alone would be in charge of procurement. According to the guidelines, the voting members of the NAADS Procurement Committee are only farmers’ representatives (MAAIF 2000). It was decided that contracts should only be given on a three-six months basis depending on the enterprise selected, apparently with the goal to reach a high level of accountability. This was later revised to one-year contracts. The Gradual Reform Coalition members did not believe that short-term contracting was an appropriate solution.

The discourse analysis suggests that this disagreement was due to rather different views on role of small-holder farmer. Members of the Gradual Reform Coalition tended to view the smallholder farmer as someone who needs to be accompanied over a substantial period of time to change his mind-set and attitudes to adopt new technologies. One member observed: “The smallholder farmer, who is largely subsistence in nature, needs to undergo a process of capacity building to be able to make good decisions and demand for services” (R 11). In contrast, Members of the Radical Reform Coalition viewed the smallholder as an entrepreneur: “Government does not ask the smallholder farmer to go to garden, nor does it advise him what to plant in a particular season. The farmer makes his own investment decision and determines which enterprise to engage in at any one particular time. This farmer, therefore, if well guided, is capable of demanding for the services. The challenge is that he lacks information on the availability of these services” (R 51).

One of the main governance challenges of NAADS, which largely contributed to its lack of success, were problems in contracting. Contracting of a public agency with the private sector is a well-known potential entry point for corruption and political interference, as the World Bank’s own experience and publications show (Ware et al., 2007). Kick-back payments for awarding contracts are a common problem, which leads to the selection of sub-standard service providers.

In political systems with political party competition, a typical problem is that business owners finance political candidates and get contracts as rewards in return. Decentralized procurement in a system with weak local capacity is well-known to be particularly vulnerable to governance challenges, because supervision and auditing is more challenging (Adipalae et al., 2003). Yet, decentralized procurement was the system that was introduced under NAADS. The implementation manual shows that some provisions were made to prevent political interference, such as the exclusion of any politicians in the procurement process, the certification of service providers, and instituting strict technical support and supervision to evaluate competitive bidding, among others (MAAIF 2000). Interviews held in the first phase of the program with members of the Radical Reform Coalition indicated that they did not envisage contracting problems to become a major issue. Members of the Gradual Reform Coalition, in contrast, identified lack of capacity for contract management in the public system as a potential constraint (R 03, R 11, R 14).

Some members of the Radical Reform Coalition pointed out that they would have preferred a direct transfer of funds to farmers' groups to avoid corruption at the local government level, but the existing regulations did not allow for a transfer of public funds to non-governmental entities. This argument is questionable since exactly this arrangement was implemented in another World Bank-funded project, the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF), under which funds are directly transferred to the Bank accounts of groups formed under the program. This arrangement also has considerable governance challenges, as well, such as local elite capture and failure to account for funds (Birner et al., 2012).

3.2.4.3 Limiting contracts to three commodities

One problem that also seemed to have been underestimated were the transaction costs involved in making yearly contracts at the sub-county level. This problem appears to have forced the NAADS management in the early phase of implementation to decide that extension contracts at sub-county level could only be made for three priority commodities (R 11, R 26, R67). This decision obviously limited the inclusiveness of the program to a considerable extent. NAADS serves approximately 1,000 farming households at sub-county level (World Bank 2010), which certainly have more demands than advice on three commodities only. It seems almost ironic that a program that placed so much emphasis on being demand-driven introduced a rule that limited the demand it could meet in such a far-reaching way. The commodity approach also made it difficult to address concerns that cut across commodities, such as natural resource management and pest management. Hayami (2009) emphasizes the importance of community-based extension in addressing these and other crosscutting agricultural related activities. The approach to focus on three commodities also limited the possibilities of extension agents to fulfill other important functions that the extension service had performed before, such as livestock and crop disease control.

One reason why it became difficult for MAAIF to fulfill such other functions is the fact that more than 40 percent of the agricultural sector budget was committed to the NAADS program (MAAIF Annual Policy Statements 2005-2008). One of the members of the Gradual Reform Coalition observed accordingly: "The skewed financing of NAADS, and continued neglect of the other complimentary components of agriculture, isolated the program from the rest of the agricultural system. It was perceived as the solution to all agricultural challenges, at political and at local levels. Yet the program lacked the capacity to respond to the challenges facing the agricultural sector."

A case in point is the control of tsetse flies, the vector for trypanosomiasis. Vector control is an important public good for livestock keeping households, and hence a typical activity for the public sector. MAAIF's vector and disease control functions in this field were not only reduced by allocating a large share of its budget to promoting only three commodities in a sub-county, but also by the retrenchment of the relevant technical staff at lower levels, including laboratory technicians. Most of the district-based animal diagnostic and entomological laboratories were virtually closed. Interview information indicates that the members of the Radical Reform Coalition had limited knowledge of such functions of MAAIF, or considered them either unnecessary or non-performing (R 05, R10, R11, R14). This limited understanding of the functions of MAAIF are addressed in a MAAIF policy paper (2009, p. 9), which criticized the demand of the Radical Reform Coalition to lay off all public sector extension staff: "The functions of extension, regulation, quality assurance and disease control fuse as one descends the administrative ladder so much that the frontline extension officer determines the kind of service to deliver at the point of service delivery to the farmers. The position paper (on laying off of public extension staff) if implemented is likely to paralyze the functions other than advisory services and, consequently, there will be need to recruit technical staff for the said functions at grassroots. The cost implication may not be sustainable and critical issues of institutional memory have been ignored".

3.3 Adoption and early implementation of NAADS (2001-2004)

The adoption and early implementation of NAADS after the design phase was closely linked to the political cycle, as the following account shows.

3.3.1 Adoption of NAADS by Parliament

The design of NAADS was carried out as part of the Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture (PMA), which played a major role in the 2001 presidential elections. These were the first competitive elections under the monolithic movement system (see figures 2 and 3). The main candidate of the opposition, Dr. Kizza Besigye, had criticized the government for its inability to effectively deliver on its 1996 electoral promises, including its promise to promote agriculture (The Daily Monitor 2000). As the NRM had made the transformation of agriculture a major topic in the 1996 elections, the political pressure to show progress in this area was substantial. In May, 2001, two months after the elections, the World Bank approved the 45.0 million US\$ loan for the establishment of NAADS (World Bank 2001). The introduction of NAADS required an Act of Parliament, which was passed in June 2001.

The two discourse coalitions had rather different views on this process of policy adoption. The Gradual Reform Coalition criticized the rush to establish the new program, which did not allow for any extensive debates in Parliament. One member commented: "The NAADS Act 2001 was expeditiously pursued and passed by Parliament in record time with the full support of the Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries even when he was aware about resistance to some provisions in the draft bill from his own court yard" (R 14). Members of the Gradual Reform Coalition further argued that there was no clear agricultural extension policy in place to guide long term extension service delivery in the country. They observed that the NAADS Act 2001 was specifically enacted to implement the NAADS program, and was guided by the program documents (R 04, R06, R11, R44, R50). One member observed: "The PMA document, from which NAADS program was designed, envisaged the development of a NAADS policy before implementation. For unclear reasons, the drivers of reform chose to enact a law before the policy was in place. Even after putting the program in place, they never bothered to go back and

develop the policy. The challenges facing NAADS today are partly attributed to lack of clarity, which would have been provided by the policy. The NAADS Act did not give careful consideration to social factors and dynamics that impede technology uptake; and also never envisaged the level of political interference we are witnessing today. The NAADS Act 2001 alone is not sufficient to provide guidance on the long term delivery of agricultural extension services” (R 06).

Another criticism of NAADS Act refers to the fact that the Act only provided guidelines for the extension services provided under NAADS rather than providing more comprehensive guidelines for the functioning and coordination of the full range of actors that could play a role in a pluralistic extension system.

The Radical Reform Coalition had a rather different view on the role of the NAADS Act. They viewed the NAADS Act of 2001 in connection with the PMA, the Local Government Act 1997, the NAADS Master Document and the operational manual, and they argued that these were in fact the policy documents guiding agricultural extension. They reasoned that these documents had been systematically developed, that they were linked to each other, and that they focused on the extension service delivery (R 21, R25, R26, R27, R33). One member of the Radical Reform Coalition asserted that “the NAADS Act 2001 provides in detail the policy and institutional framework for delivery of agricultural advisory services in line with the principles of the PMA. The NAADS Act 2001 is well aligned to the Local Government Act 1997; the latter provides for a decentralized extension service delivery”(R 54).

Whether one follows the interpretation of the Radical or the Gradual Reform Coalition, the fact remains that the parliamentary process did not provide space for consensus-building, which could have otherwise helped to create a shared vision among key actors in the policy process. The literature on policy processes suggests that this would have been helpful for the implementation of the program (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, Brock, McGee and Gaventa 2004).

3.3.2 Early implementation

In July 2001, the implementation of NAADS started. The NAADS reform program was designed to be implemented in phases over a period of 25 years. In the early phase of implementation, the Radical Reform Coalition continued to have the upper hand, while the Gradual Reform Coalition remained in the background. This was clearly demonstrated during the NAADS mid-term review in 2004, where there was not a single head of a technical department of MAAIF among the 200 participants of the review. Interview information revealed that this was a form of passive resistance by the Gradual Reform Coalition to the reform (R 02, R06, R14).

The two discourse coalitions differed significantly with regard to their interpretation of the implementation of the NAADS program. The Radical Reform proponents interpreted NAADS as a permanent institution, established by law, to manage agricultural extension services in the country. One member asserted during a meeting: “NAADS is a program established by an Act of Parliament and mandated by the NAADS Act 2001 to implement agricultural advisory services. This means that NAADS is a permanent institution with clear established structure, rules and procedures as is the case with all the other MAAIF agencies”(R 52).

The Gradual Reform Coalition largely interpreted NAADS as an agricultural extension model still in experiment, intended to come up with an improved model of extension service delivery system that can be adopted at the end of the program. One member put it this way: “NAADS is an experiment intended to assess whether the private sector can deliver extension services”(R11). Likewise, a 2009 Policy Paper by MAAIF stated, “NAADS is a program model still in experiment as it has not been implemented anywhere else in Sub Sahara Africa. It is our understanding that a final working and proven NAADS model is to be expected at the end of the program when sufficient empirical evidence justifies the change.” Some members of the Gradual Reform Coalition expressed the concern that the experiment was conducted on too large a scale to be sustainable (R 05, R07, R14, R10). In the words of one respondent, “NAADS is such a big and expensive experiment, conducted on such a large scale that it cannot yield the desired or expected results. It can only survive as long as donors are still interested to continue with the experiment. I am yet to be convinced that NAADS is a program intended to solve the extension problems of the rural farmer”(R 02).

3.4 Rapid expansion and political interference (2005-2008)

3.4.1 Expansion of NAADS

Though NAADS was designed as a 25-years program, it spread rather rapidly, as indicated earlier. The Master Document of the NAADS task force and joint donor groups (MAAIF 2000 p.30) foresaw the roll-out of the program as follows: six districts in the first two years, ten more districts in the third year, another six districts in the fourth year, and then eighteen additional districts in the subsequent three years. The pace of expansion was to be determined by the experience in the initial six trailblazing districts. In practice, however, the roll-out proceeded much faster. By 2004, the program had spread to 21 districts and 153 subcounties (NAADS 2004). By 2006, the program had reached 345 subcounties in 49 districts; and by 2008 NAADS had covered the entire country (World Bank 2010).

Commenting on this rate of expansion, one member of the Gradual Reform Coalition observed: “The program was spreading so fast that any experienced development practitioner should have been able to tell that the speed is not sustainable and does not match the institutional capacity” (R 11).According to the discourse analysis, both coalitions agreed that this rapid expansion caused problems to the program, especially in terms of capacity constraints. One member of the Radical Reform Coalition attributed problems in the implementation to processes outside the purview of NAADS: “The decentralization process was implemented in an unorganized way. MAAIF was directed to decentralize and reform on deadlines, and the sector lost many professionals. The World Bank had put a freeze on recruitment in local governments, until decentralization was in place and this created capacity gaps in local governments, yet the NAADS design had assumed existence of these capacities” (R 27).

In spite of some agreement that the rapid expansion caused problems, the two coalitions differed with regard to their interpretation on the causes of this rapid expansion. For the members of the Radical Reform Coalition, the main driving force was the success of the program in its early phase, which created a strong political demand for rapid expansion(R 25, R26, R27, R54).

The gradual reform coalition had a different view. They pointed out that at the beginning of the program, the proponents of extension reform were overzealous to prove to critics that the program model was working and exaggerated the few achievements of the program. The exaggerated advertisement of the achievements invited political demands for expansion of the

program, and since the proponents of the program were keen to win political capital, they responded to these demands affirmatively (R 01, R08, R15, R30).

One issue that did not receive much attention in the evaluation of the NAADS program was the fact that the public extension system remained in place and ran in parallel to NAADS, because the conversion of staff to private service providers did not proceed as quickly as the program was rolled out. This contributed to a shortage of qualified private service providers for the NAADS program. This issue did not receive much attention in the literature. For example, the impact evaluation undertaken by IFPRI (Benin et al., 2011) did not control for the presence of government staff operating alongside NAADS, which might result in a bias in favor of NAADS as the impact of both NAADS and non-NAADS staff is attributed to the program.

3.4.2 The input subsidy program of 2005

In 2005, an input subsidy program was introduced into NAADS under the name “Institutional Support to Farmer Groups” (ISFG). This can be seen as the first major step of deviation from the original design that had strictly followed the design principles developed by the SASKI group and the Neuchâtel Initiative (see above). Expectedly, the interpretations of why this component was introduced differed among the two discourse coalition.

Members of the Radical Reform Coalition attributed the introduction of the input subsidy program mostly to the government’s intention to secure votes prior to the 2006 elections (see Figure 2). As in the 2001 elections, the government continued to face stiff criticism from the opposition for lack of achievement in the agricultural sector (Joughin and Kjaer 2010). Moreover, this was the first election after the NRM had come to power where opposition parties were allowed to compete. The NRM developed a new program called “Prosperity for All” (PFA), which served as their main electoral platform.

The introduction of the input subsidy also indicated that a third group of actors emerged: Policy-makers at national and local levels, who were not part of either the Gradual or the Radical Reform coalition. This group of actors, the political decision-makers who pushed for the input subsidy component, justified the intervention by pointing to a rising criticism by farmers that NAADS was not effective. According to them, the farmers complained that NAADS provided only advice, but left them without any access to the physical inputs required to put this advice into practice (R09, R23, R45). One politician stated: “NAADS was chosen as the main implementer of the Prosperity for All program because of the general outcry from farmers across the country that the NAADS program was giving advice without providing the accompanying inputs for technology uptake” (R 23).

The interviews suggest that the main donors agreed to the input subsidy component only with great reservations (R27, R53). According to Joughin and Kjaer (2010), the introduction of the input subsidy took the donors by surprise, therefore, they were not able to stop this measure and only complained amongst themselves. One may also assume that the donors were not able to stop the input subsidies because they did not want to take the risk that the government would stop the entire program. Considering the high profile of NAADS, a failure was definitely not in the donors’ interest. The fact that other components of the PMA, especially the rural finance program, had not been implemented did provide some justification, as well. Moreover, the program was designed as a revolving fund, which may have made it more palatable as substitute for a lack of access to finance. Farmers were to be provided with inputs on the condition that they pay back 75 percent of the costs of these inputs. This payment was to be made to the

farmers' group where it would be managed as a revolving fund, from which other farmers would borrow (R 26, R32, R56).

As it turned out, the roll out component of paying back 75 percent became unrealistic because of the fraudulent behaviour that occurred in the procurement of the inputs (UNFFE 2011). An illustrative example is the following: As a review by MAAIF showed, local breeds of goats were procured under the input subsidy component of NAADS in North-Eastern Uganda. They were deceptively provided to NAADS farmers as improved breed and valued at an equivalent of US\$ 130 each, while the prevailing market price for local goats was only between US\$ 30- 40 (MAAIF 2009). Obviously, farmers would not be willing to pay back 75 percent of the value of goats of improved breeds if they received local breeds.

To what extent the leadership of NAADS expected such problems to occur is not clear. Initially, they may have had an interest in the program as it provided substantial additional financial resources. In 2005/2006, the NAADS budget for the districts was equivalent to US\$13.2 million. The input subsidy added another US\$ 2.4 million to be spent in 101 subcounties in 19 selected districts during the first year of the subsidy program (NAADS Midterm Report, 2005).

Based on the experience with the input subsidy programs that MAAIF had implemented earlier, the members of the Gradual Reform Coalition had concerns that implementing the subsidy program under the decentralized procurement system of NAADS would lead to major problems of the sort described above. However, since they had adopted a mode of silent resistance, some of them viewed the introduction of the input subsidy program even positively, as they predicted that this approach would get NAADS into major trouble. One member commented: "The leadership of NAADS has become over-ambitious to accept responsibilities under PFA for which, we are aware that the program has no capacity to implement. It is a question of time for them to realize that, they will not be able to satisfy the political needs"(R 05). This fitted well with the mode of "sitting back and wait until the program would fail" that some members of the Gradual Reform Coalition had adopted.

3.4.3 The first suspension of NAADS in 2007

As mentioned above, in the 2006 elections, the ruling party had introduced the new campaign slogan: "Prosperity for All" (PFA). NAADS came to play a central role in the implementation of this program through the input subsidy mentioned above, which led to a further deviation from the original design principles. The events started with the suspension of NAADS by a decision of the President of Uganda in September 2007. As was the case with the introduction of the input subsidy program, the reasons for the suspension have remained debated. For the members of the Radical Reform Coalition, the suspension was simply a political ploy by the Government to capture the program, and to remove the carefully introduced provisions in the design of the program that aimed to protect it from political interference at the ground, such as the exclusion of local politicians from procurement committees. A representative of a donor agency lamented: "There is a lot of politics and we do not understand the cause. We have a legal document with the Government of Uganda which we follow. The Government has violated the agreement by suspending the NAADS program" (R 53). The President himself justified the suspension on grounds that NAADS officials were misusing the money for the program (New Vision 2007).

The members of the Gradual Reform Coalition held different views on the suspension of NAADS. According to one view, NAADS was suspended to pave the way for the implementation of the new PFA program. As one member observed: "The PFA originally had no

conceptual content and the NRM presidential candidate had not aligned the campaign slogan to a government program, although it was largely related to microfinance support services. The PFA had to be implemented through existing government programs, and since NAADS had spread to many districts, it became the most appropriate candidate to implement PFA. However, in order to integrate the PFA into the NAADS program, there was a need to restructure and change some of the design elements. The program was reportedly not performing well and it faced implementation challenges arising out of the conceptual design and wrong assumptions” (R 35).

Members of the Gradual Reform Coalition also interpreted the fact that the President could suspend the program as a consequence of NAADS’ set-up as a semi-autonomous agency. Moreover, the NAADS leadership, unlike the leadership of other semi-autonomous agencies in the agricultural sector, had chosen to act rather independently from MAAIF’s leadership. As one member pointed out: “The NAADS leadership, in the process of implementing the program, became over-ambitious to take on the roles of other institutions and the mother ministry as well. In the process, the program managers lost the required ‘bureaucratic protection’ and exposed themselves to political interference. Consequently, the program leadership began to respond more to political demands rather than to the objectives the program was intended to achieve” (R 05).

The concept of “bureaucratic protection” implies that in the case that the President wants to intervene in a program that is handled under MAAIF, he would never contact the responsible officer in charge directly, but rather go through the Minister and the Permanent Secretary (the administrative head of the ministry). Even though political pressure can, of course, also be exercised through this channel, there is more opportunity for negotiation, because the Minister has, according to the members of the Gradual Reform Coalition, more opportunities to defend the technical opinions of this staff. Another argument of this Coalition is that, as permanent staff members, the officials in MAAIF also have more independence than the staff of NAADS, whose contract has to be renewed every three years. Dismissal of a staff from public service, in contrast, requires an independent review panel. Members of the Gradual Reform Coalition were aware of cases where such panels supported the technical opinion of staff members who had become subject to political pressure. As the Gradual Reformers also pointed out in favour of their position, no other donor-funded agricultural program had ever been stopped by a direct order of the President.

3.4.4 The introduction of the model farmer approach

After the suspension of NAADS in 2007, the program was re-introduced with an expanded mandate to implement the Prosperity-for-All Program. Under the so-called “model farmer approach”, substantial input subsidies were provided to two individual “model farmers” per parish (group of villages). This model farmer program was to be implemented by NAADS in parallel with the regular NAADS program. The committee to select the model farmers included politically elected local officials, such as the LC3 Chair (the head of the local council at the sub-county level), the local chairperson of the ruling party (NRM), and the local intelligence officer (MAAIF 2010 p. 9). The subsidies were supposedly given on loans, but interviews held for a study conducted in Northern Uganda in 2010 indicated that the farmers rather considered these funds as a grant (Birner et al., 2011). The program had a provision that the fields of the model farmers would serve as a demonstration site for other farmers. According to the same study, no specific provisions were made in the study region to actually implement this provision. Respondents expressed concerns that the PFA component may negatively affect the efforts that

NAADS had undertaken on group formation, since the group members could easily become discontent with the fact that under PFA, an individual group member received a rather large share of funds (Birner et al., 2011, UNFFE 2011).

The members of the Radical Reform Coalition were opposed this reform element, and the donors threatened to stop funding the program altogether. Yet, they were not able to prevent this change. Neither was the leadership of NAADS able to prevent the imposition of provisions that made local party leaders and local intelligence officers official members of selection committees. They continued to argue that this change was simply an effort of the Government to further capture the program, as discussed above.

This explanation seems too simple, however. Even if the rationale was political clientelism, the government could have achieved much more political gain with the given funds if they had not concentrated such large amounts on only two model farmers per parish, thereby upsetting a much larger number of potential political supporters. Interview information suggests that this approach was rather motivated by a strong belief held by political decision-makers that focusing on model farmers was indeed an effective approach to promote an agricultural transformation. As the input subsidy program before, this idea was promoted by politicians who formed neither part of the Radical nor the Gradual Reform Coalition. According to interview information, the decision to introduce the model farmer approach was made in Cabinet, following a Cabinet retreat (R 09, R23, R45). As members of the Gradual Reform Coalition pointed out, this program was similar to a program implemented under colonial rule from 1956 – 1960. It was labelled the “progressive farmer approach” and was based on the assumption that by identifying and supporting progressive farmers, other farmers could learn from them. The program failed as the other farmers perceived those as a privileged class whom they could not emulate (R07, R24). Nevertheless, interview information indicates that the idea to focus on the most progressive farmers remained part of a widely shared mental model on how to modernize agriculture.

The members of the Gradual Reform Coalition saw the lack of ability of NAADS to prevent such far-reaching political interference, such as having party leaders and intelligence officers on procurement committees for agricultural inputs, as the outcome of NAADS’ semi-autonomous status. In earlier programs implemented by MAAIF, the Minister had been confronted with similar demands, but since MAAIF follows a procedure of consultations among technical staff, the Minister had been able to moderate such extreme political demands. Members of the Radical Reform Coalition disagreed with this position and argued that MAAIF would not have been able to prevent these program changes either, and that the political interference would have even been higher in the Ministry (R 53).

Yet, as the members of the Gradual Reform Coalition pointed out, there is some evidence to the contrary. MAAIF implemented a range of other programs at the same time, which were subject to similar pressures. One of them was the National Livestock Productivity Improvement Project (2005 – 2010), which involved the distribution of animals as part of a restocking program. Similar demands were made to the Ministry to involve politicians in the selection committees for the animals. The Ministry was able to prevent this by arguing that such committees needed to comprise technical staff, and that the main role of local politicians was to mobilize and sensitize the local population. Likewise, the ministry could insist on centralized procurement so as to reduce the numerous problems it had encountered with decentralized procurement under an earlier restocking program. Political interference may still have happened in the National Livestock Productivity Improvement Project, but at least the project outcome was rated

satisfactory (ADB 2011). Moreover, unlike NAADS, the Ministry was able to refer to technical arguments to prevent provisions such as having a local party chairpersons and intelligence officers becoming part of local selection committees. The level of political interference observed in NAADS might have been promoted by the fact that the leadership of NAADS came from outside a traditional ministerial bureaucracy. Hence, they might not have had sufficient experience on how to balance political and technical interests within a bureaucracy by using strategies such as referring to prior experience, referring to technical expertise in the ministry, and referring to potential implications that the Auditor General may rise.

3.5 Rising Criticism of NAADS and the design of ATAAS (2008-2012)

This last phase of extension reform studied here covers the end of the World Bank-financed project that established NAADS and the design of the successor project, which is called “Agricultural Technology and Agribusiness Advisory Services” (ATAAS) project.

3.5.1 Disenchantment with the NAADS Program

3.5.1.1 Increasing evidence of problems

By end of 2006, implementation challenges were mounting in the NAADS program. At the same time, the first phase of the program was coming to an end. The World Bank project that introduced and supported NAADS was officially closed in June 2008. Interview information and an increasing number of newspaper articles and reports⁸ indicated that there was mismanagement of program in local governments, including an increasing number of cases of corruption, lack of access to extension services by the majority of the farmers, increased costs of service delivery and declining quality of service providers.

The latter was largely attributed to flaws in the contracting process that was controlled by the subcounty administration and not the farmers as well as irregularities in the certification of service providers. Feder et al. (2011) identified the existence of a wedge between the actual service recipients and the issuers and enforcers of the contracts, which weakened providers’ accountability to the farmers who received advice, and thus diminished the incentives to provide high-quality service. Interview information revealed that as the program expanded, competition for service provision declined as the availability of private service providers diminished. This invited unqualified service providers into the market (R 22, R 25).

At the local level, there were also concerns about the skewed financing of NAADS towards three commodities, and the lack of adequate budget for the other agricultural components, such as disease and pest control and regulatory services. This was supported by evidence on repeated outbreaks of both plant and animal diseases such as Banana Bacterial Wilt, Panama wilt (Todura), Cassava Mosaic, Woodness disease in passion fruits as well as Rabbits, Foot and Mouth Disease, Brucellosis and Lumpy Skin Diseases in animals⁹. These problems made farmers abandon the affected enterprises, including those promoted under the NAADS program (R 11,

⁸See, for example: “Shs40m NtungamoNaads funds missing” (<http://www.assetrecovery.org/kc/node/6339858e-6570-11de-bacd-a7d8a60b2a36.1>), “NAADS: Sh2b sent to personal accounts” (<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/NAADS--Sh2b-sent-to-personal-accounts/-/688334/1610008/-/kwe1e5z/-/index.html>), and “Kasese District Cracks Down on NAADS Funds Embezzlers” (<http://direct.ugandaradionetwork.com/a/story.php?s=23328&PHPSESSID=64cb22e70d608e90d91ea675320f8a7>).

⁹Kabarole District Production Department: Quarterly Reports for 2006/2007 Financial Year.

R14, R 32). For example, interview information revealed that most of the NAADS groups that had selected passion fruits in western Uganda as their priority enterprise had abandoned it in favor of other enterprises (R 15, R 22, R 38). The reports about financial management problems in NAADS climaxed into the summoning of the Executive Director of NAADS to appear before the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament in 2009 to answer audit queries raised by the Auditor General.

3.5.1.2 Divergent interpretations of the problems

In view of this overwhelming evidence, the Radical Reform Coalition had to acknowledge that the program had run into problems. Not surprisingly, their interpretation of the reasons for these failure differed from that of the Gradual Reform Coalition. The Radical Reform Coalition continued to identify political interference as a major problem. As one member remarked: “At the design of the program, we never anticipated the level of political interference we are witnessing today and management never prepared for it. We are under a lot of pressure from both government and public to deliver, due to raised expectations. As a result, we are engaged more in public relations than in the development agenda the NAADS program was intended to achieve”(R 26). Capacity problems and the failure to lay off government staff were seen as another factor: “We overestimated the capacities of local governments to implement the program during the design and did not put into consideration that there were many similar government programs running in local governments. Yet we had also anticipated that local government staff would be laid off to provide services in the private sector. In my opinion, these assumptions were the greatest barrier to NAADS implementation”(R 27).

The speed of implementation, which was also seen as the outcome of political pressure, was identified as one of the reasons for the problems, too. As one member of the Radical Reform Coalition remarked: “The hurried manner in which we formed the groups did not give enough time for them to be coherent and visionary; and this could have undermined the very cardinal goal of farmer empowerment”(R 55). This observation was supported by the survey of the Uganda National Farmers Federation (UNFFE2011) that reported disintegration of farmer groups shortly after receiving inputs. The failure to implement the other pillars of PMA was also identified as a major barrier to success of NAADS program, as one member of the Radical Reform coalition noted: “After many years of planning, we expected PMA to be the guiding policy framework for agriculture for many years to come; and NAADS had paved the way for PMA implementation, but we are surprised at the turn of events and now PMA is no more”(R 27).

The Gradual Reform Coalition, in contrast, believed that the main barriers to agricultural extension policy implementation were located in the design of the program .Apart from the problems related to the set-up as a semi-autonomous agency, they also pointed out that the lack of efforts to achieve a consensus had negative implications, too. For example, they felt that the need to adjust the training to the new extension approach had been neglected: “Our training was basically on agronomic practices and that is what we have been practicing for a long time. In spite of the new paradigm shift, as advocated by NAADS, we still go to the farmer in an agronomic style. The educational institutions have not been re-oriented and they remain remote from the program. They continue to train in the same fashion and they were not even consulted as institutions during policy formulation and implementation”(R 32). Members of the Gradual Reform coalition also felt that lack of a common vision was also a barrier to implementation. One member put this concern as follows: “I doubt if the vision of the agricultural sector is

perceived uniformly by the Minister, Permanent Secretary, a Commissioner for agriculture, a district technical officer, an extension agent and the farmer who carries his hoe to garden every day. There is need for shared aspirations among these categories of stakeholders” (R 32).

3.5.2 The preparation of ATAAS and the fight for laying off public sector extension staff

In spite of the mounting problems, the Radical Reform Coalition continued to pursue the extension reform according to its original principles when the World Bank started to prepare the second phase of NAADS under a new investment project called “Agricultural Technology and Agribusiness Advisory Services” (ATAAS). One of the World Bank’s main demands in the negotiation phase of ATAAS was that the Ministry should lay off all public extension staff in local governments. This view had already been expressed by the World Bank in the early reform phase in 1998, where one of its officials explained: “We need to proceed to the next stage. We may call this “making markets work,” and “making decentralization work.” Not just “going to market,” but making it work! This means firmly establishing a legal and regulatory system that facilitates private sector activity that is reliable and well understood that can be counted on because it squeezes out of the system all the last vestiges of harassment, arbitrariness, uncertainty, and lack of transparency” (Donovan, 1998). This policy belief remained unchanged in spite of the capacity and procurement problems with contracting extension that emerged over time. As a member of the Radical Reform Coalition pointed out: “The NAADS program is revolutionizing the extension service delivery system by moving away from direct service delivery by the public sector to playing the role of facilitation, capacity building and setting standards of services. The private sector is responsible for the direct provision of the extension services to the farmers” (R 27).

The Gradual Reform Coalition held a different view and asked: “The proposal to build the capacity of the private sector to provide agricultural services is an acknowledgement that the private sector did not have the necessary capacity to impart the necessary advice to farmers. What are the causes of low private sector capacity to support agricultural service delivery, in spite of the abundance of major factors of production, i.e. land and labour? Why has the private sector not picked up these incentives to offer these services to date? What are the chances that the service provider market is strong enough to sustain consistent, integrated, and high quality services to an agricultural sector that has increasing challenges; and has demonstrably been under-performing even in comparison of the periods before 1970?” (MAAIF 2009b).

A review of official documents showed that the Radical Reform Coalition’s plan to convert all remaining public agricultural extension staff to NAADS was high on the agenda during the design of ATAAS. The ATAAS proposal stated that public extension staff in local governments had to be converted to NAADS on performance-based contracts; those that remained in public service would be assigned to non-extension functions (ATAAS Project Appraisal Document, p. 10). This proposal was contentious as interviews with government officials revealed. One MAAIF official observed: “This decision not to utilize the remaining public agricultural staff at sub-county, in a country where only about 10 percent of the farmers have access to extension services, is ill-conceived and does not serve the interests of farmers, the presumed key stakeholders in the reform program” (R 11). In spite of the eminent resistance, the Radical Reform Coalition continued to push for the reform. The Ministry of Finance through the Ministry of Public Service directed local governments to proceed with the conversion of staff. The Gradual Reform Coalition responded by mobilizing coalition members, who in turn petitioned and lobbied respective authorities that included the Minister of Agriculture, the

Speaker of Parliament, the Courts of Law and the President of Uganda (R 05, R10, R23, R38, R44). These petitions and internal consultations climaxed into MAAIF presenting an official policy position on conversion of public extension staff to NAADS (MAAIF 2009b). The policy position contradicted the position already agreed upon between the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and the development partners. The Prime Minister, who is the leader of government business, responded by directing the Ministry of Public Service to halt the conversion exercise (R 11). In this way, the Gradual Reform Coalition successfully reversed the implementation of one of the key reform elements that the Radical Reformers wanted to pursue in the NAADS program.

3.5.3 Changes in NAADS leadership

After the 2011 national elections, a new Minister of Agriculture was appointed. This change coincided with the upcoming expiry of the employment contracts of the leadership of the NAADS Secretariat. Unlike in the past, where the contracts were automatically renewed, the new leadership of MAAIF decided to have all the posts at the Secretariat advertised, signalling an intention to change leadership of the NAADS Secretariat. As it turned out, most of the senior officials' contracts were not renewed, and a new leadership of NAADS was appointed in 2012. Since the research ended in 2012, no discourse analysis of the statements of the new NAADS leadership was conducted. This change in leadership signaled a change in power relations between the two coalitions in the struggle for influence in the policy process.

However, the struggle continues. As Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) have pointed out, if core beliefs are at stake, as is the case here, opposing policy coalitions may persist for long periods of time, that is more than a decade. This seems to be the case here. As an indication, the World Bank's Uganda Office hired one of the senior NAADS officials whose contract was not renewed by the government and appointed him as the Country's Rural Development Specialist and also the Task Manager for the new ATAAS project. The members of the Gradual Reform Coalition were appalled. As one of them remarked: "How can the World Bank appoint an officer we have terminated services to be the supervisor of the same program he failed to implement?" (R23)

4 Discussion

The current literature on the failure of NAADS concentrates on the problem of "political capture", on lack of ownership, and on clashes in values (Joughin and Kjaer 2010, World Bank 2010, Kjaer and Joughin, 2012). While the analysis conducted here broadly supports these findings, the discourse analysis reveals a more nuanced picture.

4.1 Radical versus gradual reform

The analysis suggests that one of the major reasons for the lack of success of NAADS was the perception by leading officials among the donors that such a far-reaching institutional reform could be pursued without reaching a broad consensus among the relevant actors, including the technical staff in MAAIF. Yet, as this study shows, reaching consensus would have been essential. The findings of this study reflect a deep ideological rift between the two coalitions. Building a consensus on the agricultural extension reform process was, therefore, difficult to achieve, but all the more important. Using the concepts of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993), one can identify a clash in core beliefs, such as beliefs on the role of the private versus the public sector, and way in which reforms need to happen. In spite of trying to build a consensus to overcome the ideological rift, which would have required compromises on both sides, the proponents of rapid reform proceeded on "a winner takes it all"

basis. This was possible because, at that time, they had sufficient influence in the policy process, or, in terms of the framework presented above, they had sufficient political capital. The fact that they could use substantial donor resources as a leverage was perhaps the most important source of their political capital.

The radical nature of the agricultural extension reform, as implemented by the NAADS program, may also be seen as corresponding to what Murrell (1992 p. 90) termed “the crystallization of the faith in reason over experience and experiment.” Murrell argued that an evolutionary approach, referred to in this study as a gradual approach, values the accumulated experimental wisdom of society – the stock of its personal knowledge; and views with skepticism reforms that promote entirely new schemes derived purely from theory, particularly those that exhibit speed, irreversibility and large scale.

The institutional design issues identified in this study are one reason why ignoring context-specific knowledge can lead to problems. In the developed world, semi-autonomous agencies have indeed proved to be an institutional set-up that limits political interference (Cuckierman et al. 1992). One also can come to this conclusion from a theoretical perspective. However, the case of the NAADS program shows that such text book predictions do not always hold. The absence of committed administrative and technical support by MAAIF and local governments left the program vulnerable and isolated at all levels of implementation, making it a suitable candidate for political capture. In the semi-autonomous arrangement of the NAADS program, MAAIF was supposed to play the oversight and supervisory role, set standards for service delivery, in addition to monitoring and evaluation for impact and value for money (MAAIF 2000). In other words MAAIF was supposed to be “hands off and eyes on,” but it turned out to be “hands off and eyes off”. As discussed above in detail, the NAADS leadership had some discretion on how to handle its semi-autonomous status. Interview information indicates that other heads of semi-autonomous agencies do not interact with the President’s office without involving MAAIF. The fact that the NAADS leadership chose to do so left them without the options for “bureaucratic protection” discussed above.

The fact that technical experts in the various fields of agriculture were not participating in the committees responsible for the reform process, is an important reason why the accumulated country-specific expertise on extension could not be used for the reform. Given the fact that the gradual reform coalition was largely dominated by professionals and the academia, whose support would have been crucial for both design and implementation, it is evident that NAADS program was premised on a weak footing. It was technically discredited among professionals both at the centre and at grassroots levels, but politically embraced. Yet sustaining political support in the absence of the necessary technical support turned out to be unrealistic.

However, based on Niskanen’s (1971) analysis of the theory of bureaucracy, one can argue that some of the gradual reform adherents at MAAIF may have had additional motivations beyond their realistic assessment of the NAADS reform program, such as resentment to loss of power and budgets and the consequent loss of access to “rents” that was entailed in the formation of a new agency outside their sphere of control. Likewise, some of the radical reformers within government may have had their eyes on the highly remunerative employment within the autonomous new entity and on future rewards resulting from their close association with the World Bank, such as international consulting and employment opportunities.

The fact that NAADS played a prominent role in the international research community as the model to replace the T&V system involved both potentials and challenges. The international

attention to the program and the willingness of leading international experts to contribute their expertise to its design may be seen as an advantage. However, this role of NAADS also had major disadvantages: As the above analysis shows, it prompted a tendency to design NAADS exactly according to internationally agreed principles, ignoring local context, and it also created an incentive to “over-sell” the program and turn a blind eye to its problems, such as challenges of contracting, rather than using them as an opportunity for experimenting and learning. The role of NAADS as *the* program to replace T&V also contributed to the sidelining of local staff, whose policy beliefs did not coincide with the new “international consensus” on demand-driven services.

4.2 The role of development partners

The above analysis provides ample evidence that development partners played a key role in the design and implementation of NAADS. They also largely financed the program. The World Bank, the European Union and several other donors provided close to 80 percent of financial support required for NAADS (Benin *et.al* 2009). Moreover, as the analysis indicates, development partners were the key players in the Radical Reform Coalition, which was the major driving force of the reform for almost a decade. For most of the period of agricultural extension reform, development partners were contributing an average of USD 760 million annually between 2001 and 2010, registering the highest contribution of US\$ 1.2 billion in 2006/2007 financial year (www.finance.go.ug). This large financial share of the donors, to the budget of the Government of Uganda in general, and to NAADS in particular, gave the members of the Radical Reform Coalition a level of influence that the domestic actors could only match once the NAADS program had run into serious problems.

The fact that a high level of donor influence can have negative effects is well established in the literature, especially with regard to institutional reforms (van de Walle 2001). As Shirely (2008) argues, donors have limited possibilities to promote institutional reforms from the outside. Quite often, their efforts in this field are counterproductive. Their best chances are to support genuine home-grown initiatives. This view is also supported by Moyo (2010), who argued that Foreign Aid has over the years promoted despondency, undermined local innovations and initiatives, and compromised local capacity to define Africans’ interests.

5 Conclusions

This study makes it possible to draw some conclusions for agricultural sector reforms more generally. The findings reveal that for a far-reaching institutional reform, such as the NAADS reform program, there is a need to build consensus among key policy actors if the reform is to be implemented successfully. Building consensus makes it possible to draw on the accumulated experience of all involved, and it promotes ownership, which allows for policy-oriented learning. A reform built on consensus also has more flexibility to experiment and change approaches where necessary, as there is no pressure to show to the opponents and skeptics that everything is working as foreseen. The study indicates that for complex institutional reforms in the agricultural sector, such as extension, a flexible reform process is important for success. Instead, the NAADS reform was comprehensive and characterized by speed, irreversibility and commitment to the end-state. Such a radical approach to reform may be suitable for short term interventions that only require a “stroke of a pen” to be implemented, such as changes in exchange rates. The findings also indicate that the reform largely relied on experts with a background in economics, including staff from the Ministry of Finance, for major decision-making. Local professionals with expertise in a wider range of agricultural fields, such as crop and livestock production,

natural resource management and disease control were excluded, leaving the reform program with many technical issues unaddressed. As the debate on conditionality of aid has shown, this problem is common in donor-funded development projects, which often see a major partner in Ministries of Finance on which they can rely to push for the reforms they envisage. Hence, the constellation observed here might be quite common: development partners and the Ministry of Finance forming one coalition, and sectors-specific officials and stakeholders the other. Obviously, there are limitations regarding the general conclusions one can draw from a singular case study. Still, the analysis suggests that using a gradual approach and promoting policy-oriented learning across such coalitions with divergent beliefs may often be a more promising way to promote institutional reforms than a radical change approach, especially in institutions that involve every-day activities to be performed throughout an entire country, as is the case with agricultural extension.

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