

MERGE OR DISBAND SOME AGRICULTURAL AGENCIES



By Dr. Julius Kiiza

Several agricultural agencies are established by law to run matters under their jurisdiction. These include eight sector agencies, for example, the Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA) and National Genetic Animals Research Centre. There are six national research institutes and eight zonal research institutes. These agencies have substantial powers, sometimes leading to conflict with their parent ministry.

For example, the UCDA may borrow money and acquire or dispose of property. UCDA has a managing director and a board of directors. Its primary purpose is to promote marketing of coffee, control quality and monitor coffee prices. It may also conduct research and extension services.

National Agricultural Research

Organisation (NARO) versus UCDA roles
NARO, established by the 2005 Research Act, may raise funds, make grants, acquire and dispose of property, among other roles. It, too, has a director general and a governing council. Of the several functions of NARO, three are quite interesting. These include overseeing agriculture research, mobilising research funds and coordinating between Uganda and other countries or institutions.

However, overseeing and conducting agricultural research overlaps with UCDA's coffee-specific research. Also, mobilising funds for agriculture research, as stipulated under NARO, is supposed to be the role of the finance ministry. Therefore, this confusion causes erosion of power centres in the long run.

Some of these agencies like the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) have created their own empires. In the minds of many people, NAADS is more powerful than the agriculture ministry. In the midst of it all, it is hard to see how much control the Permanent Secretary in the agriculture ministry has over these agencies.

Multiplicity of funders

Most of these agencies are almost 100% funded by donors. In most cases, the workers spend 75% of their working time



Prof. Dezi Ngambeki, a researcher with NARO working under Kawanda Banana Programme, with visitors from the Economic Commission for Africa at Kangumira in Mpologoma parish, Luweero district

writing proposals to donors to qualify for finances. They spend a lot of the valuable time 'mastering donor' jargon to win grants and thereafter a lot of their time writing accountability reports to donors.

The other time is spent in donor-sponsored workshops and at the end of the day, their intended service to the common farmer is compromised. Because they are answerable to donors, imported ideas dominate a lot of their operations. And because these bodies are empowered to get money from donors, there is a multiplicity of projects doing the same work, but with different funders, different managers and different facilitations. This, of course, affects allocation of resources and results into duplication of work. In other cases, these bodies even end up reporting directly to the appointing authority, surpassing the Permanent Secretary and the ministry.

And even before the quagmire created by the so many power centres is solved, there are proposals that other crop-specific platforms, for example, for beans or maize be created. But will they perform differently when those existing ones like the UCDA has performed

dismally?

Merge them, disband others

There is need to merge or disband some of these agencies. And for the policy makers, merging them should not be such a tall order. All you need to ask yourself is, who would care if an agency is disbanded? Yourself or your family? Your voters or patronage network? Donors? Citizens? If the answer is not 'citizens', then go ahead and either disband or merge them.

There is need to reclaim the power of the Permanent Secretary to coordinate agriculture ministry activities. The Permanent Secretary must not just be known to be the linkman in the ministry, but must be seen to carry out these duties. The statutes that govern the various agencies must also be reviewed to stop any kind of duplication of resources, for example, coffee specific research done by UCDA is agricultural research that can be done by NARO. At the end of the day, you will have created a strong team that is linked together.

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