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A MANIFESTO TO ENSURE A VOICE FOR FARMERS IN UGANDA

GOOD PRACTICE SERIES

ADVOCACY



INTRODUCTION

Farmers make a substantial contribution to the economy of Uganda, as they do in many other developing nations. Indeed, increasing agricultural production and productivity is highlighted as a national priority to transform Uganda into a modern and prosperous country within 30 years, as part of the Government's Vision 2040.

Yet while the agriculture sector accounts for about 26 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), 80 percent of employment and 40 percent of foreign exchange earnings, farmers' voices are rarely heard, especially in a political context.

Productivity in Uganda remains low, with current yields of maize, millet, rice and sorghum estimated to be just 20–33 percent of the potential estimated for rainfed agriculture. In the case of coffee, Ugandan output ranges between 600 and 1 600 kg per hectare (ha), compared with 2 500 kg/ha in Viet Nam.

Evidence shows that Uganda is well positioned to double or even triple its agricultural output if challenges are addressed that include poor farmer access to water for year-round production, as well as to inputs such as improved seed and fertilizer, labour saving technologies and solutions to pest and diseases.

However, national development efforts continue to be concentrated on non-agriculture sectors, such as finance, infrastructure development and energy. Despite being a signatory to the Maputo Declaration, which binds parties to allocate at least 10 percent of the national budget to agriculture, Uganda only designates 3 percent for this purpose.

In an effort to focus more attention on the agriculture sector, and the investments needed to galvanize it, the Uganda National Farmers Federation (UNFFE) – an umbrella group for farmer organizations in Uganda – has developed a Farmers' Manifesto. Timed to coincide with the country's national election in 2021, this is the second manifesto organized to address the needs of the agriculture sector, the first one being in 2016.

Sustainable Development Goals



Objective

This good practice fact sheet describes an initiative to canvas the views and demands of Uganda's smallholder farmers on measures required to boost the country's agricultural performance as a driver of both the national economy and for raising incomes among agricultural value chain players. The creation of a Farmers' Manifesto, and its presentation to political parties in the run-up to a general election, may be an experience relevant to other developing nations as an advocacy process, where agriculture plays an important role in generating gross domestic product (GDP), but receives insufficient funding and attention for it to achieve its full potential.



STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

Uganda National Farmers Federation
National-level farmer organizations
Agricultural civil society organizations



METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

A Farmer's Manifesto is defined by UNFFE as a set of prioritized ideas/issues generated and presented by farmers for the purpose of buy-in by political parties, and other spheres of influence for action.

The Farmers Manifesto 2021 was a countrywide initiative, involving national-level farmer organizations and agricultural civil society organizations reaching out to farmers to obtain their views, for packaging into a collective document to be presented to political parties and other bodies seeking farmer support. Launched in September 2020, it was designed to last for at least 5 years, timed to coincide with the general election scheduled for 2021 and remaining in place until the next government elections, due in 2026.

A total of 2 000 farmers were consulted during the process to compile the manifesto, in the country's four regions: Eastern region, Northern region, Western region and Central region.

Consultations were conducted through questionnaires, surveys and focus group discussions coordinated by farmer organizations. A consultant hired for the purpose assembled questionnaire tools, a radio data collection tool and a survey monkey to collect the views of farmers for inclusion in the manifesto.

Radio proved a particularly effective medium, especially given social distancing restrictions due to COVID-19, and a total of 10 radio talk shows were organized in the country's different subregions, according to the language spoken in the area. This exercise helped to generate discussions and interest among farmers. Many of the radio stations became engaged in the debate and gave airtime free to the topic. A key question asked was: 'What would you want the next government to do for you as a farmer?'

Support from partners, including non-governmental organizations and agricultural civil society organizations, was critical in developing plans and strategies, coordinating responses and generating resources to advance the Farmers' Manifesto initiative. Some of these partners also helped to connect with grassroots farmers.

The complex planning process, which involved drawing up a concept note, budgets and work plans, sharing these with prospective partners and holding a series of meetings, started 9 months before the manifesto launch, to allow time to obtain and collate farmers' opinions from a wide area and from different cultural backgrounds. Other steps in the planning phase included donor and stakeholder mapping, as well as data collection as an evidence base.

After completion, the Farmers' Manifesto was presented to the country's main political parties, as well as to partners from the media, to increase awareness of the manifesto and disseminate information about its content. More than 30 presidential candidates for the 2021 elections were identified as targets to be engaged regarding the Farmers' Manifesto. With support from UNFFE communication staff, a media list was developed to map which outlets – especially radio and television – had appropriate audiences and should be contacted to promote interest in the Farmers' Manifesto process and its final output.



Geographical coverage

The area covered by the experience was nationwide.*



A powerful advocacy tool for farmers

Coordinating and recording the opinions of farmers over a wide geographical area has proved central to the successful development of the two Farmers' Manifestos organized to date in Uganda. Behind this ambitious undertaking was the Uganda National Farmers Federation (UNFFE), which groups together more than 116 farmer organizations, with a registered membership of over 3 million Individual farmers based in 450 000 rural households.

Since its inception in 1992 UNFFE, previously known as the Uganda National Farmers' Association, has been at the forefront of advocating for the farming community by presenting farmers' opinions in national policy-making arenas, strategically linking farmers to partners, and developing farmer organizations' capacities to offer better services to their members.

In 2015, after repeated efforts to influence policy in favour of farmers and the agriculture sector through traditional channels, the organization decided to diversify its strategy by packaging smallholders' voices into a Farmers' Manifesto. Typically developed and presented in the run-up to electoral campaigns, these capitalize on farmers' numbers and potential clout as potential voters, as well as on political parties' greater readiness to listen and pledge action at a time when they are seeking (re)election.



RESULTS/OUTPUTS

Farmers came together and clearly articulated their demands for a greater say in policies that affect their livelihoods, but also the national economy. Specifically, they called for measures to make agriculture more resilient to climate change, and for solutions to address low crop prices, limited support for production and poor access to research and its outputs.

Other demands centred around the issues of extension, access to agricultural inputs, agroprocessing and financial services and the need for greater involvement in key decision-making processes, from which farmers are generally excluded.

Transport of produce, and the cost and logistical difficulties faced in conveying produce to often distant market centres, was a problem highlighted by many farmers, as were high taxes and interest rates on loans. These and unreasonable collateral demands discouraged the majority of farmers from scaling up production, and they asked the Government to extend financial services on more favourable terms, to encourage investment and diversification.



IMPACT

The Farmers' Manifesto proved an important exercise in identifying, collating and prioritizing the needs of farmers and major challenges requiring political action, while soliciting commitments from political contenders to address the issues raised, if they are elected to government.

The requests acquired greater weight and credibility due to the process engaged in to canvas the views of farmers on the ground, with day-to-day experience of the challenges involved in producing food for consumers.

The Farmers' Manifesto 2016 produced significant impact:

- Uganda's main party, the National Resistance Movement, as well as other political leaders, contacted UNFEE to request more details about the manifesto.
- Various media outlets contacted the Farmers' Manifesto team to spread information about the initiative, at zero cost.
- An analysis after the 2016 elections of the issues that the political parties had taken into account revealed that 60 percent of the issues raised in the Farmers' Manifesto had been included in the manifestos of the various parties.



SUCCESS FACTORS

Farmer organizations were key to the successful development of the Farmers' Manifesto. They were engaged from the outset, ensuring the participation of farmers on the ground and helping to mobilize other partners through their contacts and linkages.

Farmers were generally enthusiastic about the exercise, partly due to its bottom-up planning approach, giving them ownership of the process and confidence that it would result in their opinions being listened to and acted on, unlike some previous policy discussion initiatives.

Radio programmes were highly effective in replacing physical meetings with farmers, following restrictions on gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This plan B proved more effective than anticipated, with radio emerging as a major contributor to encouraging discussion and achieving wider dissemination of the manifesto and the issues it raised.

Key demands from farmers

The Farmers' Manifesto 2021 calls on the Government of Uganda to:

1. Consider reviewing the list of priority commodities, to align it with the range of commodities preferred by farmers.
2. Support farmers to improve their decision-making in the choice of value chains, and how these are run.
3. Review its planning framework to recognize smallholder farmers/agriculture as the major food producers, and as a sustainable income-generating activity.
4. Urgently address the recurrent problem of 'low quality' and 'continued counterfeiting' in the agro-inputs subsector.
5. Step up sensitization of farmers to increase awareness and uptake of improved critical inputs to enhance productivity – both volumes and quality – of smallholder farmers.
6. Stimulate investment in the agro-inputs industry, to bring about a reduction of input prices.
7. Sensitize farmers on post-harvest handling technologies, especially for storage using available cost-effective methods.
8. Promote rural cottage industries that add value to/process raw food, as part of the storage solution for perishable goods.
9. Prioritize solutions/opportunities to mechanize smallholder farmer operations.
10. Explore appropriate irrigation technologies and actively promote their use, including as a climate change adaptation strategy.
11. Prioritize measures to reduce high interest rates, as these are a major disincentive.
12. Redirect funding for agricultural finance to Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations (SACCOs) and relevant financial institutions that reach farmers.
13. Strengthen farmer organizations with a view to working with them to increase farmer access to financial services.
14. Increase financial literacy sensitization among farming communities.



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To ensure that the best use possible was made of radio, a concept note was developed to guide interventions via this specific channel. This was then reviewed by partners and refined to fit the purpose.

With agreement from partners, an independent consultant was hired to collect and document the views of farmers. This resulted in greater impartiality than if the exercise had been performed in-house.

The timing of the Farmers' Manifesto was critical to ensure the best possible prospects of influencing the various political parties engaged in the forthcoming general election. Allowing plenty of time for preparation was essential, especially in the light of COVID-19, which erupted after the planning phase had begun.



CONSTRAINTS

The COVID-19 pandemic restricted movements and gatherings, making it impossible to organize regional and national activities as planned – with the aim of encouraging farmer discussions of the issues to be presented – and hampering evidence-based data collection.

The disease outbreak also limited the participation of some partners, and led to difficulties in mobilizing resources, since many potential development partners had experienced a cut in their own funding as a result. In contrast with the Farmers' Manifesto 2016, when most of the financial resources were generated from one single partner, on this occasion sourcing the total budget of UGX 520 million (USD 140 540) proved problematic, and involved securing funding from multiple donors. On the positive side, fewer farmers' meetings and less travel translated into lower costs.

Language was a barrier in some rural parts of the country, where farmers were unable to understand English, the official language used for the initiative, and team members were unable to communicate in local languages.



LESSONS LEARNED

- Farmers account for the majority of voters in Uganda and therefore constitute a significant lobbying group, if their voices can be heard and presented in an organized and collated manner to influence policy related to the agriculture sector.
- The carefully planned manifesto development process was important in enabling farmers to express their concerns and demand strategic action from political leaders on a range of key issues.
- Despite the importance of a well designed planning process, it is crucial to maintain flexibility so as to address unforeseen events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.



SUSTAINABILITY

The presentation of a Farmers' Manifesto has the potential to become a standard instrument to influence political leaders and parties prior to general elections. The process requires careful advanced planning, to coincide with what is currently a five-year general election cycle in Uganda.



REPLICABILITY AND/OR UPSCALING

This exercise in monitoring and coordinating farmers' opinions as an advocacy tool for policy development has potential to be replicated in other settings, where agriculture makes a significant contribution to local, regional and national economies, and where farmers make up a substantial proportion of the electorate.



CONCLUSION

Presenting farmers' concerns through a coordinated manifesto during an electoral campaign season can be an effective strategy for acquiring greater visibility for the issues that affect their livelihoods and the economy in general. Careful timing can be instrumental in helping to elicit commitments on agricultural challenges from political parties. A Farmers' Manifesto represents an innovative way of ensuring that the people responsible for feeding the population are allowed to express their concerns and influence policy. With careful advance planning and adjustments to suit local conditions, the formula may be appropriate for other national settings, in countries where farmers' voices are rarely heard and where agricultural investment is lagging.



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Experience capitalization is a systematic, iterative and participatory process through which an experience is analysed and documented. This creates knowledge, which can be shared and used to generate change.

FAO and the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) organized an online course on experience capitalization in 2020. The hands-on series of mentoring webinars helped learners to work on their case studies.

What are you going to capitalize upon? Who for? What for? What happened? How and why? What have you learned?

This case was capitalized by Prudence Ayebare, based on her experience in developing the Farmers' Manifesto for the Uganda National Farmer Federation.



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EXPERIENCE CAPITALIZATION

e-learning course on experience capitalization
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Massive Open Online Course on experience capitalization
<https://elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=659>

FAO Good practice template
<http://www.fao.org/3/as547e/as547e.pdf>

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