



FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative

STUDY OF THE VILLAGE AGENT MODEL IN UGANDA

What

The village agent model (VAM) is a private-sector driven approach to agricultural value chains that uses produce marketers to help farmers increase production. USAID/Uganda supported the creation of best practices and standard operating procedures for the VAM, which enabled agents to provide efficient production and marketing services to farmers in the coffee, maize, and beans value chains. The Government of Uganda is rolling out the VAM and training 32,000 village agents over three years. The bolstered services would give a ratio of one village agent to 181 agricultural households instead of the 2016 level of 1:1,900 ratio of extension agents to households. Compared to the previous iteration, the current VAM model includes a greater focus on extension and includes contracts between village agents and farmers and levies for traders and farmers.

Why

The Government of Uganda is helping farmers transition from a subsistence to commercial orientation. The VAM complements agricultural extension service delivery and addresses shortages of public agricultural extension workers. The VAM has an opportunity to transform Ugandan extension but needs to be implemented properly. DLEC conducted a study to analyze possible impacts of the VAM as implemented by the Ugandan government and propose solutions to improve the model's implementation.



Photo Credit: Jen Watson/IFPRI

How

Key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and document review were used to answer three key questions:

1. Can village agents effectively deliver last-mile extension services?
2. Are contracts desirable, necessary, logistically feasible?
3. What impacts would taxation have on value chain actors, production, and the VAM?

Timeline

July - September 2019

Partners

- Developing Local Extension Capacity (DLEC)
- USAID Uganda

Findings

Effectiveness:

Village agents can reach farmers for last-mile service delivery and provide limited extension, but should not be relied upon to meet full extension needs. Incentives are weak for provision of services by village agents and their effectiveness



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is challenged by lack of technical knowledge and a focus on produce marketing.

Contracts:

Contracts are intended to lend formality to markets, facilitate credit for traders, and ensure incentives and assurances for village agents to offer services. However, contracts between village agents and farmers should be secondary to building trust in relationships (both in importance and timing).

Taxation:

The government VAM proposes three main levies and fees: a fee by participating farmers each season, a fee be paid by participating traders each season in each district in which they work, and a Local Service Tax of 3% of the value of agricultural production to be paid by traders each season. Our results showed widespread concern that tying taxation to the VAM could derail implementation.

The VAM has merit but cannot completely address agricultural extension staffing shortages and service delivery challenges. The general benefits of the model are what most stakeholders- including key staff in the Directorate of Agricultural Extension Services- are interested in, rather than the provision of agricultural extension services. The VAM is threatened by the relatively recent additions of contracting requirements, seasonal fees and local government taxes. Recommendations arising from the study are as follows:

1. Facilitate innovation for provision of extension services
2. Do not require contracts, let them evolve naturally
3. Postpone plans to affiliate VAM with revenue generation
4. Put traders and buyers at frontline of recruiting agents and organizing trainings
5. Foster improvements to quality of agricultural produce
6. Define terms in VAM
7. Standardize and document operating procedures
8. Engage stakeholders and key ministries
9. Phase in the VAM, focusing on commodities with well-defined markets
10. Clarify whether the model is mandatory or voluntary



Figure 1. Classic Village Agent Model
Source: Adapted from Robert Anyang, Chemonics

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