AIRTEA

Strengthening Agricultural Knowledge & Innovation Ecosystem for Inclusive Rural Transformation & Livelihoods in Eastern Africa

Digital Connectors for farming Communities in Uganda

AFAAS

Uganda Forum For Agricultural Advisory Services UFAAS

Ag Connectors

POLICY BRIEF ON
DIGITAL CONNECTION FOR FARMING COMMUNITIES IN UGANDA

Introduction

Uganda's agricultural extension face challenges like fake inputs, climate change, limited market information, gender related issues and the higher numbers of extension to farmer ratio. The departure from the non-conventional agriculture to more digital agriculture led to the existence of digital connection for the farming communities where the last mile is the main target group to benefit since it provide faster solutions to the problems faced through providing extension services and agricultural inputs digitally.

The purpose of this dialogue was to deliberate on district policy environment for innovation Platforms activities and the delivery of digitalized agricultural Extension Services issues, so as to inform both policy and practice with regard to implementation of the AIRTEA Digital Connectors for farming communities. The main objectives were to highlight the importance of digitalizing AEAS and its central role in the development of farming communities at district, present the current policies and how they impact / support digitalization of AEAS, identify key policy recommendations relevant to digitalization, discuss the current capacities (gaps and needs) of the different categories of extension actors and farmers and come up with recommendations for effective District digital AEAS delivery in the district. The digital connectors provide services like areas like provision of quick quality inputs, provision of digital advisory services at a fee, provision of finance and whether information, agricultural Insurance, digital Packaging Solutions for agricultural produce, advisory information and market place for rabbit farmers, irrigation Management

How information was gathered

Policy dialogue was held amongst the stakeholders ranging from civil servants, politicians, technical staffs, farmers, farmer organization and financial institutions in the districts of Luwero and Bugiri districts. During the dialogue, participants were able to share ideas and participate freely. Different categories of policies in line with agriculture extension, digitalization and ICT in agriculture were shared. This was done to enable stakeholders appreciate the existing policies related to agriculture sector in Uganda. The policies analyzed from secondary source includes; The National strategy for youth employment 2017, Agriculture sector strategic plan 2016, The national animal feeds policy, ICT policy 2014, The national irrigation policy, MAAIF-national ICT strategy agriculture sector 2019-2023 and Vision 2040.

Needs assessment of the Innovation Plat forms was carried out by administering questions through a focused group discussions to categories of value chain actors. The Innovation platform's important value chain actors, services they offer and benefit they obtain from the Innovation platform were identified. The activities carried out during needs assessment were common enterprises/value chains, key services and gaps in services provided, services in high and low demand, digital services provided and the solution provider, pitching the business models, its relevance, why it is relevant to the IP and what is expected from each of the business model to contribute to the community. During the needs assessment, four groups were formulated that is to say; Technical staff, Local leaders, Farmer organisations/farmers and the stake holders e.g., Private sector, Financial Institution

Results

During the dialogue, the stakeholders were able to appreciate the existing policies that supports ICT and digitalization in agriculture. These policies were found to provide an enabling environment for the implementation of the AIRTEA Digital Connectors for farming communities.

The existing value chain actors were found to be very relevant to the innovation platforms and these included, Village agent and extension who provides agricultural information, Stuckist whose role is to provide agro-inputs and advisory services, Local leader provides space for renting and link the Innovation platform to government, helps in land conflicts/ disputes resolution, Data collectors who profile farmers and collecting accurate information, financial institution who trains on financial literacy and offer credit to farmers at a lower interest rate. The benefits these value chain actors receive includes; skills through hands on training and practical experience, networking, link to research, market information, allowance, commission and facilitation fee.

Gaps and Needs

In Uganda, there is still low uptake of E extension amongst the farmer and farmer organizations. This is because of high cost of tools and services like internet and electricity, limited knowledge on policy that supports digitalization and ICT in agriculture. Limited capacity to use ICT tools, inadequate collaboration between NGOs, government and research organization, poor network connection, limited knowledge on information packaging, lack of digital kits like smart phones, limited access to universal platform, no e-dairy, inadequate knowledge on digitalization, generation gap that is Age versus ICT and expensive ICT gadgets.However there is need to sensitize and build capacity of the farming community, create awareness on digital agriculture, mindset change, link farmers to the relevant services providers along the value chain and build masks to help in providing network to rural areas.

Conclusion

The delivery of digitalized agricultural extension services in Uganda requires more efforts for a successful implementation of AIRTEA digital connectors for training communities. By adopting the current approach of extension, making the best use of policies that provide an enabling environment to allow for digital extension and prioritize needs of every value chain actor for further development in agriculture sector in Uganda

Recommendation

- Building capacity of digital connectors and the farming community to use ICT tools and gadgets
- Improve coordination and encourage stakeholder engagement
- Extend the electricity services to rural areas at a reduced price
- Subsidise cost of ICT tools and gadgets Reduce tax on services like internet.
- Establish access to digital portal, extension of internet servers to the rural areas
- Establishment of digital hub centres and formation of multi stake holder platform
- Subsidise the cost of inputs accessed digitally.

