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## Participation without Negotiating: Influence of Stakeholder Power Imbalances and Engagement Models on Agricultural Policy Development in Uganda\*

**Mastewal Yami**

*International Institute of Tropical Agriculture*

**Piet van Asten**

*International Institute of Tropical Agriculture and Olam International*

**Michael Hauser**

*International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-arid Tropics and University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences*

**Marc Schut**

*International Institute of Tropical Agriculture and Knowledge, Technology and Innovation Group, Wageningen University*

**Pamela Pali**

*International Institute of Tropical Agriculture*

**ABSTRACT** Although the political context in Uganda exhibits democratic deficit and patronage, research and development actors have given little attention to the possible negative impact these may have on agricultural policymaking and implementation processes. This article examines the influence of power in perpetuating prevailing narratives around public participation in agricultural policymaking processes. The analysis is based on qualitative data collected between September 2014 and May 2015 using 86 in-depth interviews, 18 focus group discussions, and recorded observations in stakeholder consultations. Results indicate that while the political setting provides space for uncensored debates, the policymaking process remains under close control of political leaders, technical personnel, and high-level officers in the government. Policy negotiation remains limited to actors who are knowledgeable about the technical issues and those who have the financial resources and political power to influence decisions, such as international donors. There is limited space for negotiation of competing claims and interests in the processes by public and private actors actively engaged in agricultural development, production,

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processing, and trade. Thus, efforts to achieve good governance in policy processes fall short due to lack of approaches that promote co-design and co-ownership of the policies.

### **Introduction**

In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), low agricultural productivity remains a major development challenge (Vanlauwe et al. 2014). In response, regional agreements such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program and the Maputo Declaration have focused on increasing public investments and creating an enabling policy environment to increase agricultural productivity (AU 2003). SSA countries are required to improve their abilities in designing and implementing policy measures to reduce poverty and improve rural livelihoods (FAO 2005; Reardon et al. 1997). Similarly, the use of approaches that promote the co-design of policies accompanied by reallocation of power and responsibilities to the public is important for better implementation of policies (Gready 2010). However, the lack of good governance and well-functioning institutions that enable participatory decision making and consensus building among key stakeholders in policy processes hampers credibility of the policies (Kararach 2014).

In Uganda, the growth of agricultural outputs declined from 7.9 percent in 2000–2001 to 0.1 percent in 2006–2007, only slightly improving to 0.9 percent in 2010–11 (MAAIF 2010; UBOS 2007). The failure to keep agricultural production growth on pace with the 3.2 percent annual population growth has compromised efforts to achieve food security and sustainable livelihoods in the country (MAAIF 2010). Reasons for low agricultural productivity include the low soil fertility, land tenure insecurity, inefficient agricultural input and output markets, and policy-related problems such as lack of an enabling environment (Kappel, Lay, and Steiner 2005). Shortage of land is also an important obstacle to meeting the food demand by bringing more land under cultivation in Uganda. Thus, shifting from area expansion to the intensification of cropping systems is recognized as an important strategy to increase crop productivity in Uganda (Nkonya et al. 2005; UBOS 2007; World Bank 2007).

Accordingly, the Ugandan government has made efforts toward creating an enabling environment for sustainable crop intensification. Since its implementation in 2000, the Plan for Modernization of Agriculture has been a policy framework to reform agriculture through commercializing smallholder farming and linking farmers to local, regional, and international markets (Government of Uganda 2000). The plan has been followed by other development plans, such as the National

Development Plan and the Agricultural Sector Development Strategy and Investment Plan, that also aim at transforming the sector. The policy documents share similarities in the emphasis given to the relevance of intensifying farming systems to meet the food requirements of the population (MAAIF 2010).

However, Uganda's low level of policy implementation forms a critical bottleneck to achieving sustainable intensification and agricultural development. Many argue that the policy implementation falls short of addressing the needs of smallholder producers and other (private) actors along the value chain due to lack of participation, and is hampered by political interference (Joughin and Kjær 2010; Mwenda and Tangri 2005). These shortfalls have resulted in lack of “ownership” of the national policies among stakeholders that implement policies at local level (Yami and Van Asten 2018).

Several studies examine the gaps in performance of agricultural policies and explain why they fail in addressing poverty and food insecurity in Uganda. For example, Opio-Lokone (2002) indicates that poor capacities of government ministries to undertake policy analysis constrain policy processes. Kappel et al. (2005) reveal that the focus of policies on increasing economic growth undermines interventions toward reducing rural poverty. Analysis of policy processes of the health sector in Uganda by Okuonzi and Macrae (1995) points out that donors' strong influence in policy processes has weakened the credibility of the policies. However, no systematic efforts have been made to understand the influence of power on public participation in the development of policies that support sustainable crop intensification. Such insights can, however, strengthen the governance of policy development and the legitimacy, credibility, and implementation of agricultural policies.

Uganda provides an interesting context in which to examine the influence of power on public participation in policy processes in relation to sustainable crop intensification for two reasons. First, Uganda has high potential for increasing the productivity of its agricultural sector, which is a primary means of income for the majority of its rural population. Second, Uganda is known for its successful efforts in implementing market liberalization policies. This reform was expected to create an environment for market drivers of sustainable crop intensification to function optimally. However, uptake of farm inputs and technologies that support sustainable crop intensification has been minimal (see, e.g., Van Asten et al. 2010). Such gaps require responsiveness from the country in revisiting the “soft systems” hampering policy processes supporting sustainable crop intensification.

This study aims to answer the question of how power influences public participation in the formulation and implementation of policies supporting sustainable crop intensification in Uganda. Our analysis of the influence of power on public participation in policy processes contributes to the current debate on the importance of good governance in the policy and practice of agricultural development in SSA (Bishop and Davis 2002; Head 2007; Roberts 2008). The study is based on the analysis of local- and national-level stakeholder perceptions of policy processes related to the national agricultural policy, the national seed policy, the national fertilizer policy, and the agricultural extension reform. The use of good seed varieties and fertilizers and access to knowledge through agricultural extension and advisory services are key ingredients for achieving sustainable crop intensification in the region (Schut et al. 2016).

### **Good Governance and Policy Development**

Good governance, a concept for framing the allocation of power and public participation, is defined as a process in which different stakeholders take decisions that affect their livelihoods in an inclusive, transparent, and accountable manner (Gisselquist 2012). In the 1980s, the concept of good governance was introduced by development donors, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as a precondition for aid aiming at improving the policy and legal contexts of the recipient countries (Doornbos 2001). Lately, the concept has increased in popularity in response to the demand for governance systems that address failures of states and markets (Rogers and Hall 2003). The literature reveals the importance of good governance for better implementation and impact of policies and programs aiming at rural poverty reduction in SSA (e.g., Harrison 2005; Kiwanuka 2012). Among other functions, good governance plays an important role in policy processes by enabling joint decision making and enhancing the legitimacy and credibility of the policies (IRC 2011). Most of the elements of good governance refer to participatory decision-making processes (see Figure 1). Jones and Tembo (2008) and Yami and van Asten (2018) also argue that in countries such as Kenya and Uganda improving the effective involvement of policy actors including civil society organizations (CSOs) and legislators in policy processes could enhance good governance in the political systems.

However, the realization of good governance depends on the allocation of power and how stakeholder participation is understood and put into practice by policy actors. For instance, Mercer (2003) observes



Figure 1. Elements of Good Governance (source: adapted from IRC 2011).

that policy actors in Tanzania have used “good governance” as a mere instrument to demonstrate partnership in legitimizing debt relief and adjustment reforms with little emphasis on the achievement of concrete changes in the policies. Also, achieving good governance in policy development is associated with the efficacy of public participation in the initiation, formulation, and implementation stages of the policy cycle. Hajer (2003) underlines that the failure of established institutional arrangements to deliver the required policy results on their own has led to increased emphasis on public participation in policymaking processes. Public participation often builds social capital among policy actors and increases their demand for changes in policies, thereby enhancing good governance (Mansuri and Rao 2013).

The meaning and practice of public participation has evolved in response to the increasing demand for good governance in policy processes. Historically, public officials and other stakeholders viewed public participation as a linear process in which government allows some public participation at a specific moment in the policy processes (Bishop and Davis 2002). Linear approaches whereby public authorities and donors dominate policy processes and make policy choices were dominant in the 1970s, but are still common (Gready 2010; Gulhati 1990). However, more interactive forms of public participation in policy process have been established since then (Grindle and Thomas 1991). Bishop and Davis (2002) elaborate how the shift derives from the lack of trust among the public in having others speak for them and the rise in interest among the public in having a direct say in policies. McGee and Brock (2001) point out that the shift happens in response to an increasing interest for democratic governance and empowerment of citizens in

making policy choices. Here, scholars emphasize the need for equipping the public with knowledge and power to negotiate the policy choices and the relevance of networks in policymaking (Head 2007; Keeley and Scoones 2000).

Accordingly, different models of participation have been developed to address the challenge, including Arnstein's (1969) "Ladder of participation," which illustrates a range of stakeholder participation from high (citizen control) to low (manipulation) levels, and the varied impact of the level of participation on decision-making processes. Pretty (1995) also developed typologies of participation based on the notion that decision-making processes should not be entirely controlled by authorities, but should involve other stakeholders. In addition, Bryson et al. (2013) provide guidelines for designing public participation in policy and development interventions. Cornwall (2008) indicates that the relevance of any participation model could depend on clarity on the goal of participation, and on who participates and why they participate in the decision-making process. Johnson et al. (2004) illustrate the benefits and pitfalls of different participation models including the consultative type, in which decisions are not made with stakeholders, and the collaborative approaches that involve sharing of power among stakeholders in "participatory" natural-resources-management projects.

Participatory processes that do not take into account the dynamics of power relations among stakeholders at national and local levels could end up benefiting the elite members of communities more than the poor and marginalized groups (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Guijt and Shah 1998). Power shapes the approaches used in the policy processes, and powerful actors are often assumed to dominate policymaking processes (McGee and Brock 2001; Yami and van Asten 2018). For example, consultations are considered insufficient because they could conceal the different interests and power relations within the public and among public officials (Bishop and Davis 2002). Approaches such as deliberative democracy have been successful in enabling the public to directly influence the policy decisions, represent different public agendas and policy alternatives, and thereby increase the credibility of the policies (Abdullah, Rahman, and Fitri 2015; Forester 1999). Even in such cases, however, power relations among stakeholders have lowered the success of deliberative democracy in policy processes (Escobar 2015).

In Uganda, the continuous participation of different stakeholders in agricultural policy processes is essential for three reasons. First, different stakeholders provide various insights into biophysical, technological, and institutional dimensions of problems and what types of agricultural innovations are technically feasible, economically viable, and socioculturally

and politically acceptable (Schut et al. 2014). Second, stakeholders become aware of their interdependencies and power relations, which can provide a basis for concerted action to address collective constraints and reach their objectives (Messely, Rogge, and Dessein 2013). Third, stakeholders are more likely to support or implement specific measures or strategies when they have been part of the policy process (Neef and Neubert 2011). The latter is particularly relevant given the limited public resources to implement policies.

Different actors play different roles at the various steps of the policy cycle, and designs for actors' involvement might not consider how best they could contribute to the specific policy processes (Joughin and Kjær 2010). For instance, Golooba-Mutebi (2004) points out that public participation in policy development in Uganda is shaped by the government's aspiration to enhance democratic governance and by the donors' agenda of promoting public participation in the country. In particular, the democratic deficit and patronage in Uganda and elsewhere in SSA could lead to policy processes shaped by actors with unparalleled power and could work against the achievement of good governance. This situation is critical especially in the agricultural sector, considering the importance of the sector for income and livelihoods of rural communities (Hicks and Buccus 2008; Mwenda and Tangri 2005).

From a rural sociological standpoint, our arguments around power and public participation receive insights from several theoretical perspectives. Our reasoning aligns with actor-oriented thinking (i.e., integrating structural and agency perspectives) as suggested by Long (2001). We also employ the structuration theory to examine how the political or institutional structures allow agency and influence the behavior of actors toward taking an action (Giddens 1987). In presenting his theory, Giddens (1987) argues that both agency and structure have importance in influencing decision-making processes. Often, government fuels the reinforcement of agency and structures using its narratives, thereby shaping the relationships among actors with different resources for and interests in regard to the policies (Long 2001; Wang 2010). Studying narratives including assumptions, texts, messages, and metaphors also helps us understand how the government might use power over other actors in the development of agricultural policies (Burnham et al. 2008). Narratives then become a core instrument in perpetuating the status quo.

The government of Uganda aims to enhance inclusive decision making following the narrative of participatory policy development (Brock, McGee, and Ssewakiryanga 2002). Government actors maintain the narrative using different forms of power (e.g., legitimate power from being

elected or appointed by elected officials, relational power) (Long 2001). Following Wang (2010), we argue that communicative power (i.e., the ability of strategic actors to compose and disseminate stories to maintain the narrative of participatory policy development) is used to maintain narratives and thereby influence policy processes. In like manner, widely shared narratives such as that of participatory policy development might function as a silent agreement on the status quo by the public and lead to “pseudo-inclusiveness” in the processes (Gready 2010; Keeley and Scoones 2000). In fact, the narratives remain instrumental in the realization of agricultural transformation in Uganda. However, open questions are: (1) How is agricultural transformation to be achieved with realization of greater democratic involvement of citizens against the backdrop of prevailing narratives, and (2) which actors and processes play strategic roles to introduce or establish alternative narratives to the agricultural sector?

In this article, we use elements of good governance such as: (1) the participatory decision-making process, an element that provides the public an opportunity to participate in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the policies; (2) inclusiveness, an element that provides the public including marginalized groups opportunities to participate in policy processes; and (3) responsiveness, an element that addresses the concerns of the public (Allan and Rieu-Clarke 2010). We use these three key elements of good governance in analyzing the influence of power on public participation in the formulation and implementation of policies supporting sustainable crop intensification at the national and local levels in Uganda (Figure 1).

### **Materials and Methods**

We gathered data for this article through in-depth interviews with 25 informants at the national level and 61 informants at the local level (Bugiri, Butaleja, and Tororo Districts in eastern Uganda and Kabale, Kanungu, and Kisoro Districts in southwestern Uganda [Figure 2]). We selected the study sites for their high potential for crop intensification based on the agroecological zoning in Uganda, with good opportunities for intensification of irrigated rice in eastern Uganda and potatoes in southwestern Uganda (Yami and Van Asten 2018).

To select participants for the interviews at both levels, we used the snowball sampling technique as suggested by Ostrander (1993), identifying informants who have participated in agricultural policymaking processes at both levels for the initial interviews. Then the informants were asked to suggest people who have firsthand experiences in policy





Figure 2. Location of Potato-Growing Districts of Southwestern Uganda (Left) and the Rice-Growing Districts of Eastern Uganda (Right).

processes supporting sustainable crop intensification. The sample size was determined by data saturation. Informants include policymakers, political leaders such as members of local councils, agricultural experts, CSOs, private sector actors, academicians, donors, farmers, and village elders. Participants represented different categories of stakeholders involved in policy processes; 6 to 8 participants represented the different categories. In total 20 female and 66 male informants participated in the interviews. It was not possible to balance the number of male and female informants due to the availability of fewer women directly involved in policy processes. We collected data during September 2014 and May 2015 using semistructured questionnaires. Participants were asked open-ended questions on issues surrounding the challenges for increasing crop productivity, effectiveness of policies to address the challenges, relevance of public participation in policy processes, and perspectives on power and its influence on public participation in the policy processes.

In addition, separate focus group discussions with females, males, and particularly youth took place at each site. Participants of focus group discussions were identified from the list of dwellers in the subcounties. In total 18 focus group discussions occurred, with each group discussion comprising 10 to 12 participants. The focus group discussions addressed the challenges to intensifying cropping systems, decision-making processes about cropping systems, the influence of power on public participation in the formulation and implementation of bylaws and ordinances, and the link between the district- and national-level policy processes.

Furthermore, we recorded observations during several multistakeholder meetings including policy review meetings, public policy dialogues, and stakeholder validation workshops organized by the Ministry

of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) and development partners in 2014 and 2015. The objectives of these meetings were to review and discuss the national seed policy and national agricultural policy with stakeholders. All national-level interviews were done in English; interviews and focus group discussions at local level were held in the local languages of the study areas (Lusoga, Lunyole, Japhadhola, Ateso, Rukiga, and Rufumbira). Male and female translators interpreted the discussions. We tape recorded and transcribed all interviews, then undertook deductive coding based on the themes, including the characteristics of a good policy process, meaning of public participation, mechanisms of public participation, inclusiveness of policy processes, responsiveness of policymakers, participatory decision-making processes, and influence of power on public participation in policy processes. We then conducted data retrieval and interpretation, using NVivo10 software in the data analysis (Bazeley and Jackson 2013). Notes from the observation sessions were also used in the data interpretation.

## **Results**

### **Public Participation in Policy Processes at the National Level**

The government's intention of making policy development processes open to the public is well appreciated by all informants at the national level. Among others, MAAIF's decision in June 2014 to take the draft national seed policy that was already approved by its highest management back to the stakeholders after their request to discuss and comment on the draft was perceived as a positive effort to strengthen stakeholders' involvement in policy design. However, informants underline that the lack of demand-driven approaches in policymaking constrains the participation of stakeholders in the formulation of the national seed policy and the national fertilizer policy. Technical experts are perceived to lead the initiation and formulation of the policies and they have the strongest influence on the policy formulation process of all the stakeholders (Table 1).

All informants agree that capturing agricultural challenges at the grassroots level and getting the acceptance and "ownership" of the local stakeholders can be achieved with stakeholder participation. Agricultural experts emphasize that inclusive policymaking processes have importance in improving the implementation of the national seed policy, the national agricultural policy, the national fertilizer policy, and the agricultural extension reform. Some 40 percent of the interviewees at the national level indicated that technical experts often design draft policies without interacting with people at the grassroots level and without

**Table 1. A Summary of Actors' Involvement at Each Stage of the Policy Cycle**

Actor Type	Policy Cycle Stages			
	No Policy Yet	Initiation	Formulation	Implementation
Private sector (including farmers)	Yields are low due to problems with access to and control over (quality of) inputs including knowledge.	Only very few private sector actors are consulted by MAAIF and donors to ensure that there is a relevant policy need.	Only very few actors are involved and their concerns are often perceived as too diverse.	Private sector is not aware of new policies or policies do not address their primary needs.
Local government	Tries to address some of the key problems with ordinances and bylaws.	Consultation with few local governments to ensure that there is a relevant policy need.	Few local governments have the chance to join consultations at the national level.	Local government is not sufficiently informed or equipped to implement policy.
National government	Does not undertake action yet, though some signals about problems are reaching it.	Initiates action within MAAIF and with a few stakeholders to identify priority entry points.	Top policy management and technical officers steer the policy design.	Resource constraints limit implementation and oversight of policies.
Donors	Observe in their projects that development and private sector underperform and note challenges.	Donor-funded programs/projects contact MAAIF to initiate policy dialogues.	Donors support MAAIF and bring in external (foreign) experts to help design the draft policy.	Donors fund development projects in line with new policies.

*Note:* Dark shades of cells represent greater influence, light shades of cells moderate influence, and unshaded cells little influence.

generating adequate evidence for other stakeholders to understand the problems that trigger the policy measures. This approach is criticized for excluding nonexperts from initiating policies or contributing to their design. Whereas private sector actors including farmers are the first to struggle with agricultural production constraints, their participation and that of the local government in the policy initiation and formulation is perceived as very limited, as Table 1 illustrates. Consequently, policies are often considered insufficiently tailored to their needs and implementation is weak.

Similarly 12 informants from the private sector and CSOs refer to the consultation approach as “a fashion to legitimate even the illegitima[te].” The informants stress that the technical experts could miss a chance to transform the issues at ground level into policies that are presentable and clear to the stakeholders. The informants agree that the problem partly emanates from the form of administrative governance in which policies are developed at the national level, while the actual implementers of policies operate at local levels (Table 1). For example, an informant comments on the development of the national seed policy:

The policy documents originate from MAAIF and are then put on a table. This is what they call consultation. The big question is: whose ideas are put in the policy document? I believe that there is a misunderstanding of the term “consultation” among policymakers. Consultation is asking me about my ideas: We have this issue here, tell us your ideas, and explain to us what processes you propose to strengthen this idea through consultation? But calling people to read a document is not a consultation. (Interview, private sector actor, January 2015)

Likewise, informants emphasize that the participation of stakeholders in the formulation of the national agricultural policy, the national seed policy, and the national fertilizer policy is often limited to consultations at the national level in “expensive hotels” in or near the capital, while very few consultations occur at the local level. This approach causes a problem for the credibility and legitimacy of policy processes, since feedback from the “consultations” will be taken as the views of all stakeholders, while these are actually the views of only a few stakeholders.

Agricultural experts at the national level agree that the poor engagement of smallholder farmers, traditional leaders, and local governments in policy initiation and formulation has contributed to poor interpretation and implementation of the national agricultural policy and the agricultural extension reform at local levels. The inclusion of a couple of

farmers' representatives in national workshops is considered inadequate because these few farmer “representatives” do not adequately reflect the broad range of views of a diverse farmer community. One donor asserts:

Due to [a] shortage of resources, they [organizers of workshops] look for the easy ones or those nearby or those who can facilitate themselves or the powerful ones. You will find the same representatives in most meetings with regard to national seed policy and national agricultural policy. The problem of farming in one area could be different from the problem somewhere else. It is difficult to expect the few representatives to bring out those challenges to the policy meetings. (Interview, donor, December 2014)

All informants at the national level highlight that agricultural sector stakeholders have brought positive results by negotiating policy measures toward sustainable crop intensification with the government. For example, the government intended to impose a tax on farm inputs. However, the measure is still not in place due to the stakeholders' assertion that putting taxes on fertilizers, pesticides, and seeds could further reduce the attractiveness of farming and affect the process of increasing production and productivity. Policymakers reveal that a few stakeholders attend consultations for the sake of “participation allowances,” and might not be concerned about making meaningful contributions. Here, it is important to mention that the MAAIF and development partners made efforts to develop and disseminate a popular version of the national agricultural policy to stakeholders at national and district levels. Such initiatives are important in addressing the challenges related to the lack of a clear presentation of policies, which often leads to poor policy implementation and impact.

In stakeholder meetings, policymakers appear more focused on the number of attendees than the contributions of stakeholders in the policy debates. Some stakeholders tend to fear talking about policy issues, thereby hampering their participation in policy processes; that is, people discuss issues in smaller groups informally but become reserved in the consultations because of fear that they might be labeled as opposing the policymakers. The perception that talking in consultation meetings does not change things also hampers people from making contributions. Hence, the majority of the informants label the policy processes as “democratic” on the one hand but “complain” about the little engagement of stakeholders on the other hand.

Informants at the national level assert that some authorities impede stakeholder participation when disagreeing with issues that emerge in

the discussions. For example, during the national seed policy debate, the MAAIF authorities resisted the suggestions of stakeholders that they consider novel institutional arrangements (i.e., the setup of a semiautonomous body overseeing seed introduction and quality control) to realize the policy outcomes. Moreover, several nongovernment actors perceived that some technical staffs come to the consultations with a prejudiced belief that other stakeholders might not understand policies and policy design. Such an attitude limits the participation of stakeholders who feel that their contributions are undervalued. Conflicts also arise when donors demand that certain issues be included in the new policies when they financially support these formulation processes.

### **Influence of Power on Public Participation in Policy Processes at the National Level**

There is a consensus among informants that the power relations among stakeholders constrain the formulation of inclusive agricultural policies. While the political setting and some stakeholder workshops provide space for debate, some actors seem to largely control the policymaking processes. There is a consensus among all informants that politicians show a lot of interest and influence in the policy processes since they can capture the attention of voters, most of whom are smallholder farmers. In particular, agricultural experts and CSOs underscore that the political leadership plays a key role in aligning the policy processes with the targets of the government, and often policies only move forward if the political leadership puts real interest in them.

Policymakers and agricultural experts emphasize that the permanent secretary, top policy management committees, and the cabinet have the power to influence policy processes. They observe that the top policy management committees not only help initiate and design policies but also evaluate the relevance of or need to use stakeholder input. For example, top policy management committees control the initiation of new policies and choose which donors and stakeholders to involve in the policy processes including consultations (Table 1). While policymakers agree on the relevance of formulating policies based on research and public demand, the experience so far reveals that policies are largely based on in-house expertise at MAAIF, on national development plans and targets, and on party manifestos and electoral speeches.

At the national level 18 of 25 informants indicate that policy processes reveal bias toward actors that are knowledgeable about technical issues or actors who have the power to influence decisions. There are different views on how far the interests of smallholder farmers should

be considered in the policy processes. For example, informants from academia and CSOs argue that the failure of policymakers to empower farmers to voice their views contributes to poor implementation of policies, and deprives farmers of securing their rights in policy and legal frameworks. Other informants argue that policymaking has to focus on actors who have the power to influence policies, and assert that farmers are the least powerful in influencing policy decisions and have limited knowledge of the technical issues. One informant commented:

Farmers may suggest things but they reach a point not to be able to influence a policy. But the assistant commissioner can influence the policy because he or she knows the technical issues needed to succeed in the agricultural sector and the government accepts them. Also, the cabinet and parliamentarians have the power because they can also send a policy back if they do not agree. Only powerful actors can make a policy to go this way or that way. Thus capturing the interests of the powerful actors is crucial to come up with effective policies. (Interview, agricultural expert, October 2014)

However, donors argue that the assumptions of policymakers that crop productivity remains low because smallholder farmers dominate farming limits the policy space given to smallholders. They also highlight the importance of recognizing the influence of local governments on policy outcomes because local governments make decisions on which elements of policies to implement and what to delay or give priority to.

Agricultural experts at the national level assert that sometimes authorities prioritize their individual interests in strengthening the departments that they lead over what could work better to implement the policies more generally. The problem becomes prominent when policymakers compromise the interests of those responsible for enforcing the regulations later on. Consequently, the power relations among different interest groups could lead to biased decisions on the way policies are put in place. The influence of power relations has been explicit in the agricultural extension policies. Informants at district levels agree that political interference at different levels, particularly at district and subcounty levels, has disrupted the delivery of the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) program services.

Additionally, respondents mentioned political interference in service delivery when politicians put pressure on NAADS coordinators to favor specific farmers or villages over others in service delivery. We observed in policy meetings that the government and donors have contested relationships due to the use of NAADS as a political instrument in some

localities. Some donors shy away from participating in the policy processes on agricultural extension reform. The government has designed a single-spine agricultural extension system whereby both public and private agricultural actors provide extension services. Meanwhile, following a directive from the political leadership, agricultural inputs are no longer distributed by the former NAADS extension agents, but are distributed to farmers by military intervention. Informants at the national and local levels argue that the intervention is a political measure to engage the “retired” military in activities so that they are less involved in the political arena. Thus the measure does not target improving the agricultural extension system. An informant explains:

If soldiers have to distribute farm inputs, then they should have been complemented by technical people. It should not have been politics, but a technical decision. The politicians should sit together with the technocrats and say we want the army to distribute farm inputs and how can we do this, then discuss [how] to involve the district extension staff and other agricultural experts. The extension system could have benefited from the logistics of the military system and the expertise of the technical staff. (Interview, academic, September 2014)

The government's recognition of the role of nonstate actors in policy debates has a positive influence on the policymaking processes. There is a consensus among policymakers and CSOs that the nonstate actors have become stronger in negotiating with policymakers about the national seed policy. The informants reveal that the relationship among the politicians and nonstate actors has improved as they have opportunities for interaction and debate. Policy processes are also benefiting from the change in approaches of nonstate actors from confrontation to constructive advocacy.

Nevertheless, there are concerns among stakeholders at the national level that the MAAIF technical staffs have insufficiently opened up space to interact with nonstate actors. Sometimes, the failure of policymakers to consider CSOs as legal representatives, voices, and alternative focal points and the lack of negotiation skills of the CSOs make their interactions in the policy processes remain minimal. Besides, the relationship faces challenges in cases when the nonstate actors come up with opposing views, and when they demand not only that their voices are heard but that they should also count. Observations in consultation meetings and workshops on the national seed policy also confirm that evidence, suggestions, and opinions of nonstate actors are given little or no consideration when they contribute to the policy debates. Some CSOs explain



that this bias could arise from lack of trust of some of the nonstate actors and the suspicion that they might not support the incumbent regime and could use the debates to favor their own political interests.

### **Policy Processes at the Local Level and Influence of Power on Public Participation**

There is a consensus among informants that the district and subcounty councils play a key role in the agricultural policymaking processes at local levels. The councils are responsible for the development and implementation of bylaws and ordinances with regard to agricultural productivity. There is a consensus among representatives of local governments and agricultural experts that participation of different stakeholders in the policymaking processes allows for integrating voices of farmers, increasing “ownership,” and enabling better implementation of the bylaws and ordinances. The agricultural production unit of the subcounty organizes meetings with political leaders, agricultural cooperatives, and farmer groups to identify problems that require policy measures and to report these to the district council. These meetings enable the local governments to have stronger influence prior to the stage of policy initiation (Table 1). Informants assume that the decisions at district council levels are forwarded to the ministry, allowing policymakers to include their “issues” in the drafting of agricultural policies at the national level.

However, the formulation of the national agricultural policies in fact appears to fail to include the inputs from the district councils in that development. Rather, all interviews and focus group discussions in the study sites confirm that national policymakers only capture the views at local levels by inviting a few farmer representatives to policy meetings at the national level and sometimes using surveys. For example, participants in a focus group discussion in Kisoro assert:

The local government may not have a guideline that clearly indicates when and how to engage farmers in policy processes. We [farmers] do not have a proper view of how our voices can influence policy processes at the local and national levels. The subcounty chief comes to the village and tells some farmers that there will be a meeting and that there will be allowances for attending the meeting. Those farmers who got the invitation will attend the meeting with little [or] no information about the policy issues under discussion and the impact of the meeting on the policies and laws under formulation. (Focus group discussion, men, April 2015)

Participants in focus group discussions and informants reveal that the involvement of stakeholders in policy processes at the local level is influenced by the technical knowledge and power of the stakeholders. Similar to the dynamic in the national context, political leaders and agricultural experts are the main decision makers in district councils. Political leaders are involved at different levels of policy processes representing farmers. For instance, political leaders lobby for proposals that are of individual interest to them, though the proposals might not benefit the public, in council meetings at subcounty and district levels. An informant in Kabale District explains:

The politicians have a lot of influence in their constituencies and they can make or break interventions. They can lead to success or failure of policies. Those relations do exist. In fact, politicians are powerful in the local communities. If we [agricultural experts] need the politicians not to distort our message, then it is important we first get them to understand what we are trying to do. Because they promote a popular version that may not be what we want to achieve. (Interview, agricultural expert, February 2015)

Informants argue that the development and implementation of by-laws and ordinances often precede the development of agricultural policies at the national level. Such disconnect between policymaking processes at the local and national levels has reduced harmony between local and national policy instruments and limits the participation of local governments in policy processes. It has also led to lack of proper interpretation and implementation of national policies at local level.

There are mixed views with regard to the relevance of the involvement of community leaders in policy processes. Some agree that community leaders are “custodians of knowledge” and they could make important contributions to policies. Yet others argue that community leaders might not address the concerns and interest of smallholder farmers. For example, an informant in Kanungu District comments:

Most of the community leaders and village elders in our area have bigger chunks of land. When it comes to crop production, they are the landlords. ... It is common here that such people rent out land to farmers and refuse to allow the use of inorganic fertilizers or pesticides [on] their land because of their perception that applying chemicals on land makes the land infertile with time. Therefore, these community leaders and village elders can sabotage crop production and some associated policies. (Interview, farmer, February 2015)

There is a consensus in all focus group discussions and interviews on the lack of involvement of women groups, development partners, and private sector actors in development of bylaws and ordinances at local levels.

### **Discussion**

The lack of effective public participation in policy processes is attributed to (1) the fact that consultative meetings are mostly limited to the national level only and (2) doubts by the nonstate participants that their contributions can effectively impact the policy design processes. Consultations are often used as an instrument to illustrate good governance, and to seek public acceptance in policy design, but rarely do these consultations exhibit real influence on the design process. The situation in turn results in poor engagement of stakeholders in the development and implementation of agricultural policies. Yet active involvement of the public could have enhanced the legitimacy, credibility, and ownership of the policies by the stakeholders that ultimately have to implement the policies. Our analysis also reveals positive views on the need to involve traditional leaders and informal institutions in agricultural policy processes. Yami and Van Asten (2018) highlight the relevance of informal institutions in facilitating farmers' access to land and financial resources, thereby supporting the interventions toward sustainable crop intensification. In contrast, Ng'ombe et al. (2012) point out that social and cultural norms that subordinate the views of rural communities to those of traditional leaders lower the interest of rural communities in participating in policy processes in Zambia. In the latter case, the use of negotiation instead of participatory approaches could accommodate the different interests of different groups of communities (see, e.g., Leeuwis 2000).

The realization of good governance and the achievement of policy outcomes in sustainable crop intensification and agricultural development become unlikely without stronger ownership of the process by the nonstate actors that are affected by the policies. The negative consequences related to insufficient nonstate and local-government participation and negotiation in the policy process are (1) insufficient ownership and understanding and (2) a mismatch between actor demands, ultimately leading to (3) poor implementation of the policy. There is a need for improving the quality of engagement of stakeholders in the policy processes by (1) strengthening local-level consultation and feeding this into the national process, (2) organizing more frequent and smaller discussion groups to allow nontechnical actors to learn and express their

views, (3) diversifying feedback mechanisms (e.g., surveys) other than workshops by invitation, and (4) requesting the lead policy design team explain how it has responded to the issues raised by nonstate and local-level actors.

Studies in Africa and elsewhere (e.g., Barnes et al. 2003) also reveal that consultations in policy processes are often used as means to disseminate information on the programs of the governments, but limited inclusion of nonstate actors during formulation has reduced the legitimacy and credibility of the policies. In this regard, Uganda is not much different from South Africa, for which Hicks and Buccus (2008) confirm that policy processes fail to engage stakeholders due to their late engagement in the formulation process.

In addition, nonstate actors could also collaborate with other stakeholders in generating evidence for policies. For example, policymakers could take advantage of the strengths of CSOs in mobilizing funds for research and their close relationships with rural communities and local governments. The approach of inviting “like-minded” actors into policymaking processes is also observed in agricultural policymaking in Rwanda. For example, Gready (2010) points out that the participation of CSOs in policy processes in Rwanda depends on the ability of the CSOs to work with the state, such as having an institutional arrangement that enables them to play roles as both an “insider” and “outsider.”

The powerful actors have strong influence, indeed dominance, in the initiation and formulation stages of policy processes (Table 1). The bias toward powerful stakeholders in the policy processes indicates that power relations could lead to processes that ensure the interest of the powerful actors while sidelining those of others in policy processes. Brock et al. (2002) also point out that the unequal distribution of powers and capacities for developing and interpreting policy agendas among the different parties involved constrains “ownership” of policy processes in Uganda. Mohammed (2013) in Ghana and Keeley and Scoones (2000) in Ethiopia reveal similar results in that policymaking processes favor the interests of elites while the interests of unorganized and marginalized rural communities are ignored. Arts and van Tatenhove (2004) describe how different stakeholders struggle for certain individual outcomes in policymaking processes, which one gets while others do not. This phenomenon puts the very idea of achieving good governance in policy processes at risk.

Therefore, there is a need to address the negative influence of unbalanced power relations on public participation in the policy processes. Among other steps, skillful facilitation in policy processes could ensure that those who have the knowledge and resources do not dominate

the processes and distort policy decisions. Moreover, the less powerful stakeholders such as the smallholder farmers could also be organized on issues of their interest and make their voices heard by policymakers. Actors and institutions at the local level could also be better engaged in local-level policy processes for better implementation and greater impact of the policies. Multistakeholder policy platforms could provide a space for interaction, collaboration, and contestation. A study by Sanginga, Kamugisha, and Martin (2010) in Kabale District also reveals that local-level policies for natural-resources management bring positive outcomes under conditions whereby policy processes build on social capital and networks of farming communities. However, merely setting up these platforms does not guarantee stakeholder engagement or impact, as Warner (2006) shows.

Further, our findings contribute to the discourse around agency, power, and narratives in the rural sociology field in two ways. First, the findings indicate how development discourses and the narratives of policymakers shape policy processes. For instance, the mere reliance on the views of technocrats to define problems and develop policy agendas instead of using up-to-date evidence (e.g., scientific data and information on the perceptions, needs, and priorities of rural communities) to inform policy limits inclusiveness and credibility of the policies. Davies (2005) and Allman (2013) also underline the importance of understanding the consequences of participation or nonparticipation of individuals and groups across the continuum of social exclusion to social inclusion. Second, the findings contribute to the field by providing more evidence on the influence of interest groups, power, and authority in policy negotiations that impact the livelihoods of rural communities. For instance, the finding that more powerful actors such as politicians and international donors have much more control over policy processes than the less powerful ones such as CSOs and farmers' groups confirms the relevance of the agency perspective in analyzing how individuals or groups might use power to dominate over others in policy processes.

Equally important, the agency of powerful actors and institutional and political structures create “space” to allow participation with little or no negotiation over processes and outcomes of agricultural policy development. This finding resonates with the structuration theory (Giddens 1987) in that the agency of actors coupled with structures and the “rules of the game” influences decision-making processes to the advantage of those in power. Similarly, Keeley and Scoones (2000) reveal the use of the agency of different interest groups to control decision-making processes in the adoption of the Sasakawa-Global 2000 approach in the agricultural extension system of Ethiopia. This study also identifies policy

actors who might make or break the realization of a participatory policy development narrative or bring in alternative narratives to agricultural policy development in Uganda, including donors, technocrats, and politicians.

### **Conclusions**

The study demonstrates that policy processes in Uganda insufficiently involve nonstate and local actors, leading to a poor match between end-user needs and policy support. Working toward an alternative set of engagement narratives will be essential for future policy co-designs. Policy processes to support sustainable crop intensification should focus on empowering nonstate actors and local-government actors by strengthening their (1) technical knowledge and evidence gathering; (2) financial capacity to participate at the local and national levels; (3) ability to aggregate, consult, and negotiate among “like-minded” actors; and (4) ability to use alternative means to voice their needs and opinions, for example through online surveys or interactive radio programs whereby people can call in or send feedback by short message service. Hence, mechanisms to enhance public participation should go beyond seeking validation at an advanced stage of the policy formulation process, but should take a more proactive and demand-driven approach through a series of local- to national-level consultations. Stakeholders could use the resulting available space to enhance negotiation and address competing interests over the policies. Development partners such as international donors should follow up on the quality of engagement of stakeholders in policy processes that they finance. Moreover, the approach of bringing in “outsiders” as consultants in drafting national policies needs to be assessed carefully. While such an approach brings in more expertise to the process, it could do more harm than good by reinforcing power constellations among policy actors if not carefully managed.

We recommend that formal and informal networks of interest groups be established by governmental and nongovernmental organizations for building trust and improving relationships among different stakeholders, steps that are crucial for taking into consideration the different views and interests of those actors. Establishing participatory research units in collaboration with governmental and nongovernmental institutions and making research funds available play an important role in generating credible evidence for policymaking. Likewise, involving farmer groups and development partners in the teams and committees responsible for making agricultural policies enhances communication. The

networks can also be used to facilitate generation of evidence, sharing of information, and creation of a suitable environment for dialogue among interest groups. Ultimately, a policy that is co-designed and co-owned by the entire sector will function like a road map to which all agree, reducing pressures on the government to fund the implementation of the policy, so as to allow it to invest more of its resources in regulation and oversight.

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