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Examining the Challenges to Formation, Management and Sustainability of Smallholder Farmer Groups in Uganda: A Case Study of Smallholder Farmer Groups in Oyam District Minakulu Sub-County

Uganda's population according to the 2002 Census has been doubling almost every 20 years; from 5 million in 1948 to 9.5 million in 1969; from 12.6 million in 1980 to 24.2 million in 2002. The mid 2007 population projection stood at 28.2 million. Eradicating poverty and attaining rapid, equitable and sustained economic development for social transformation becomes imperative to match the population explosion in the country. The Human Development Report (HDR) 2007 shows 70 per cent of Uganda's population engaging in agriculture, 42 per cent of these living below the poverty line. The approach to farming in smallholder farmer groups is to remedy the viscous occurrence of people wallowing in poverty and improve rural livelihoods through collective responsibility. The dilemma is that the existing farmer groups are informal, weak, ad hoc, and inconsistent. The objectives of this study, therefore, were to; to establish the group formation process, ascertain challenges in managing smallholder farmer groups, determine their benefits to members and explore sustainability strategies of smallholder farmer groups. The contextual scope of the study was confined to farmers working in organised smallholder farmer groups in Minakulu sub-county, Oyam district. The literature review covers essentially the group formation process advanced by Tuckman (1956), one of the original authors of group formation and management. Conflict management in small groups and communication skills in groups is also covered. The study engaged purposive sampling to select both key informants and farmer groups. The researcher employed the use of interview guides for key informants, and focus group discussions for the 8 farmer groups selected. This research reveals that, there is no formal procedure in the formation of groups. The idea of grouping is principally by external players and because of this, smallholder farmer groups exist as long as implementing NGO's do exist as well. Members working in these groups are oblivious of what the vision, goal or objectives of their groups are, because extension service providers duplicate them from other already existing groups. There is need for the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) to develop a comprehensive national curriculum that will be used to furnish farmers in the dynamics of group formation. Implementing partners ought to adopt a bottom-up policy that encourages participation of all stakeholders. This way, farmers will learn together, plan together, invest together, market together and grow together.

Keywords: Management and Sustainability, Farmer Groups, Uganda