

Bwo'kumanya Kwa'bahingi

**The diffusion of innovations in sustainable land management: perceptions
of smallholder land-users in Uganda**



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Summary

In less than 40 years, Uganda's population is expected to grow from the current 34.5 million to an estimated 127 million people (UN, 2005). This population growth, as well as an expected improvement in living standards requires an enormous increase in agricultural output over the coming years. This, however, should be done in a sustainable manner so as not to jeopardize the state of the environment and future production (Tilman et al., 2002). Because the largest part (over 60%) of the global land-users practice smallholder farming, this can best be achieved by improving farmer knowledge (Fan, 2011). In most developing countries, like Uganda, smallholder farming is the main source of livelihood for the rural poor.

Therefore, focus should lie on farmer-to-farmer-learning which suggests that local rural communities know most about the land which they have lived on for generations and thus know which practices achieve the best results. However, because the current system of agricultural extension services is incapable to meet knowledge demands for smallholder land-users, it is advised to look towards more innovative approaches that integrate modern media and ICT in the provision of extension services and knowledge diffusion (Tenywa et al., 2011).

This report has been written under the auspices of the SCI-SLM project. It tries to identify the perceptions of smallholder land-users in Uganda regarding the most commonly used (in local terms) channels for knowledge diffusion. These are farmer-to-farmer, government extension services, text message information services; and, agricultural radio broadcasts.

Using the findings from fieldwork that was conducted in two research communities in Uganda (; respectively in the Banyakabungo Cooperative Society and Bandera 2000) as a basis of conclusion, this report tries to answer the question of how farmer knowledge is best spread by looking into farmers' perceptions of the quality of each medium and making recommendations on how this can be improved.

It can be said that no best practice exists regarding communication channels through which to diffuse agricultural knowledge. Combining the strengths of multiple information sources can increase information uptake. Where one information source lacks in perceived quality, another surpasses it. Combining different information channels can thus partially compensate for shortcomings of others.

The following recommendations have been devised based on the findings of this research and the conclusions that were drawn. They are meant to improve the dissemination of agricultural and SLM knowledge and innovation and serve as a blueprint for further research and / or generalized statements regarding the effects of media on local innovation and SLM sharing initiatives as perceived by rural smallholder land-users. For further elaboration and background information it is advised to read the full report or chapter 6 "*Concluding discussion and recommendations*".

- First and foremost, it is advised to **keep short-term focus on the discussed media channels (i.e. text message information services, radio, farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange and government extension / NAADS)**;
- It is recommended to **combine the best qualities of each channel by closer cooperation between them**;
- Government should **increase support of rural radio stations**. Support could come in the form of e.g. salaries for specialist personnel; training; donation of equipment; or the provision of technical support;
- Similarly, it is suggested to promote the **closer cooperation between the larger national media and rural radio stations**. National media could offer training and studio facilities, while rural radio stations can in return share new agricultural knowledge;
- What was found to be an important aspect of knowledge uptake is the **active inclusion of innovating farmers in information diffusion**;
- Additionally, **the quality of the knowledge of smallholder farmers** should be stressed as it was found that the quality of other farmers as an information source is perceived as fairly low;
- **Farmers prefer not to deviate from existing activities as this would add to the level of risk**. The simplicity of an innovation should therefore be taken into account during policy planning and when designing farmer-workshops as this is expected to increase farmer uptake the innovation;
- When it comes to communication range, most rural land-users do not know many people outside their immediate surroundings. However, business can be encouraged through **a communication platform that identifies farmers' requirements and connects them to the most suitable match**.