

Governance & operational dilemmas of a pluralistic and demand-driven extension services

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Abstract

Governance and operation of a pluralistic and demand driven extension services system is very different from a top down centralised system of extension. While many actors sing about it unfortunately this has eluded many. We designed a qualitative study to understand how a pluralistic and demand driven extension service is governed and operated in Malawi. We identified four districts two of which were known to have successfully implemented and the other two were struggling in implementing pluralistic and demand driven extension services. We targeted two structures and these were the Area Stakeholder Panel (ASP) and District Stakeholder Panel (DSP). Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were conducted with actors at ASP and DSP respectively. We used content analysis to analyse the data. Our findings showed that governance and operation was double faced. On one had we found that the structures were there on paper. On the other hand we found that actors had not embraced pluralistic and demand driven extension service provision. Ultimately we noted a dual existence of top down and bottom up approaches with a dominance of the former. There is in general a big governance and operational dilemma amongst the actors as they try to embrace pluralistic and demand driven services. There are struggles amongst actors for recognition and attribution of results of projects. On the other hand there is an inferiority complex amongst farmers and local structures over shadowing each other. There is also political interference in the structures. We recommend setting up a district sector wide approach for single basket pooling of resources. Besides we strongly recommend for attitudinal change through capacity building on governing and operating a pluralistic and demand driven extension services.

1. Introduction

Many governments have transformed their extension systems to be pluralistic and demand driven in response to changes from transfer of technology model (ToT) to agricultural innovation system (AIS). In this paper we consider governance and operational dilemmas of providing pluralistic and demand driven extension service in Malawi. We are inspired by the definition of governance by Cheema et al., (2007, p6) which states governance are those institutions and processes through which government, civil society organisations, and the private sector interact with each other in shaping public affairs and through which citizens articulate their interests, mediate their differences, and exercise their political, economic and social rights. In our specific context we call all the players actors who interact in the provision of pluralistic and demand driven services. In this paper we interchangeably use the phrases “AIS” and “pluralistic and demand driven extension services” to mean the same thing.

1.1 The perceived importance of the AIS approach

The Agricultural Innovation System (AIS) perspective emerged as a response to the challenges of the theory of adoption and diffusion of innovations, which was preoccupied with studying why and how people come to adopt or not to adopt new agricultural innovations and practices (Assefa and Waters-Bayer, (2007) in Leeuwis 2004). The adoption and diffusion theory was felt to be top down and non-responsive to farmers needs while the AIS is increasingly being recognized as an organizational phenomenon influenced by individual and collective behaviours (World Bank 2006 in Ekboir et al (2012). Douthwaite et al (2001) argued that a successful technology represents a synthesis of the researcher and key stakeholder's knowledge sets, and creating this synthesis requires more interaction and negotiation instead of assuming a new technology is 'finished' when it leaves the research institute. The importance of interaction, coordination, and collective action in innovation systems has been recognized for more than two decades (Freeman, 1987; Lundvall, 1992; Nelson, 1993- in Mundial, B. (2012). Some of the important reasons include what Ekboir, et al., (2012) argued that AIS actors need to interact and address issues collectively including improved identification of opportunities for and challenges with innovation; leveraging of human and capital resources; learning and information sharing; and economic and/or social benefits. Ekboir et al., (2012) added that interaction and coordination may also improve the design and implementation of innovation policies by allowing more actors to voice their needs and concerns, resulting in more inclusive policies and faster diffusion of innovations. Stronger interaction and coordination also induce all actors, especially public research and extension organizations, to be more aware of and responsive to the needs and concerns of other actors, especially resource-poor households.

1.2 Practical challenges of AIS approach

Promoting interactions amongst actors is not a simple and straight forward thing as there are governance and operational challenges to surmount. There is a need for 'systemic instruments' focused on enhancing multi-actor interaction, reducing institutional barriers (Smits et al., 2004; Wieczorek et al., 2012 in Turner et al., (2013) and seeking complementarities among structural elements in the AIS. Turner et al., (2013) added further that remaining challenges to effective interaction between research organisations and knowledge users include ongoing competition for funding, historic research culture of operating in disciplinary silos, and funding mechanisms that focused on academic evaluation criteria. Turner et al., (2014) gave some examples of systemic problems as: (i) a lack of facilitative and transformational leadership and systemic intermediaries to support the formation of strategic innovation agendas in vertically and horizontally fragmented industries; (ii) a culture of hunting for funding within research organisations; hindering sustained involvement of researchers in innovation, (iii) a large number of actors in the R&D component of the AIS competing for public resources to pursue uncoordinated innovation agendas; and (iv) a lack of institutional support for interactions amongst actors and roles such as innovation platforms and innovation brokers. Turner et al (2014) further added that the existing New Zealand AIS limits innovation to a linear process; restricting opportunities for innovation to occur and fostering competition amongst organisations that collectively have much to contribute to innovation in the agricultural sectors through constructive collaboration and roles in all facets of the innovation process. A study by Pamuk, et al., (2014) found that adoption of agricultural innovations through innovation platforms robustly promoted the adoption of crop management innovations across research sites but there were no significant effects for other domains of innovation. Their results also showed that not all innovation platforms were equally successful and they presented evidence that the performance of these platforms depended on specific dimensions. Friederichsen, et al (2013) found that competing models of innovation informing agricultural extension, such as transfer of technology, participatory extension and technology development, and innovation are often presented as antagonistic or even mutually exclusive but yet extension workers as well as managers integrate the reform discourses into the still-dominant transfer of technology model.

From the literature, we find that there are different interests, agendas, resource endowments, standpoints amongst actors in as far as AIS is concerned as such it became interesting to see how governance and operational dilemmas are dealt with in a pluralistic and demand driven extension service provision. We

also noted that in the literature cited there is so much focus on innovation as technology. While that is accurate we find that other aspects that together constitute AIS are ignored. Poppe (2012) mentioned that there are four aspects of innovation and these are product, process, marketing and organisation form. In this study we are concerned with governance of all components of innovation. The following research questions were answered in this study; (1) to determine what are the governance and operational dilemmas that exist in a pluralistic and demand driven extension service (2) to assess how and to what extent various actors were interacting (3) to determine whether and how actors were responding to farmers' demands.

In the context of Malawi, the pluralistic and demand driven extension services which is implemented through the District Agricultural Extension Services System (DAESS) herein is defined as the Pluralistic and demand driven services. According to Malawi Government, (2006) several structures have been set up and through which farmers are supposed to be represented in the Area Stakeholder Panel (ASP) and the District Stakeholder Panel (DSP). There are other structures but we identified the two because they include farmers while the other structures are for experts and council members only. In the sections below we give some detailed information about the ASP and the DSP.

1.3 The District Stakeholder Panel (DSP)

The DSP is a platform where service providers and farmers plan and coordinate their activities. The purpose of the DSP is to act as a forum for dialogue among all actors thus providing agenda for demand and feed-back to which the services system as a whole has to respond. The DSP represents all actors in the agricultural sector at district level. The panel is composed of heads of agriculture technical departments at the district level, representatives of Smallholder Food Security Farmers (who should form 50% of the total membership), Semi-Commercial and Commercial Farmers, Farmer Organisations (FOs), NGOs, agribusiness groups, community-based organisations and a member of a relevant service committee of the assembly. Each DSP has not more than 20 persons for effective management and in the spirit of equalisation, marginalised sectors of the community have good representation in the DSP.

1.4 The Area Stakeholder Panel (ASP)

The ASP represents all actors in the agricultural sector at traditional authority (TA) level. The ASP is composed of all extension workers of the Ministry of Agriculture. Other members are representatives of Smallholder Food Security Farmers (who should form 50% of the total membership), Semi-Commercial and Commercial Farmers, Farmers Organisations, NGOs, agribusiness groups, community-based groups and relevant committees of the assembly. The Agricultural Extension Development Coordinator (AEDC) provides secretarial services. The ASP is a member of the Area Development Committee (ADC). The ADC looks at general issues of development at Traditional Authority (TA) level while as the ASP is solely responsible for agricultural activities at that level. Figure 1 below shows the structures studied and how they relate to each other.

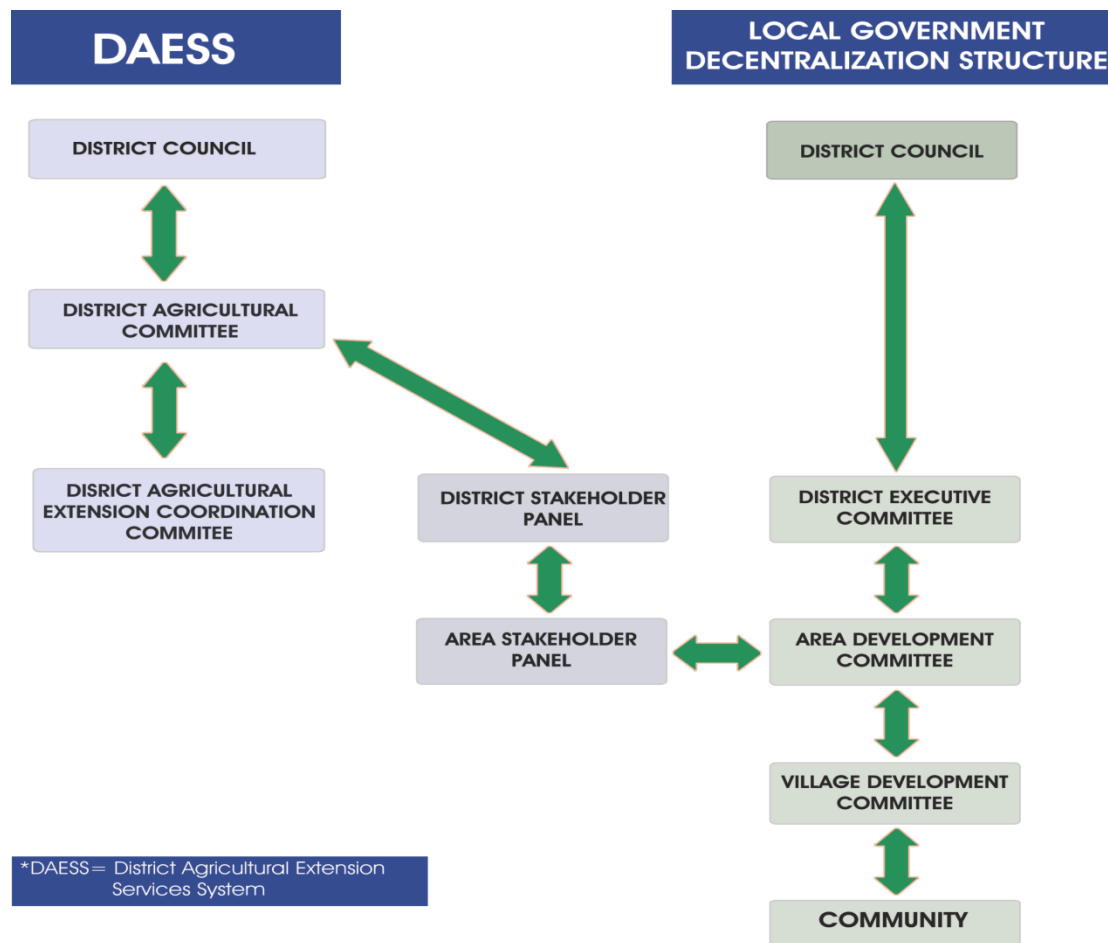


Figure 1: ASP & DSP in relation to other local government structures

The two structures described above (DSP and ASP) were the centre of analysis in this study. They are the only structures where farmers are represented. The other platforms namely District Agriculture Committee-(DAC) and the District Agricultural Extension Coordination Committee (DAECC) have not been included in this study on the basis that they do not have the participation of farmers.

2. Study methodology

The study was qualitative in nature and we used grounded theory to guide data collection methods and analysis (Glaser, et al., 1967). Primary data were collected from various actors using purposive sampling as we specifically targeted members of ASP and DSP (Mammen et al., 2012). The actors included government officials, NGO officials at district and field levels and farmers. We used key informant interviews and focus group discussions as key tools in data collection. Secondary data were obtained from documents collected from the various actors. We purposively sampled four districts with Mulanje and Ntcheu known to be performing well in implementing pluralistic and demand driven extension services and another Mchinji and Nkhatabay known to be struggling with implementation of the pluralistic and demand driven extension services- (Limhani, personal communication, Jan., 2016). Map of Malawi are provided in Figure 2 below with the study districts highlighted.



To increase reliability and validity of our findings we used several theoretical assumptions of qualitative research (Gelo, (2012). First we used epistemological assumptions in trying to reduce the distance between the research team and the respondents. We collaborated to a great deal with the respondents by spending a lot of time in the field. We also used ontological and rhetorical assumptions (Gelo, (2012). Ontologically we have reported the results of the study using quotes and themes of words of respondents and we have provided evidence of different perspectives. We have also rhetorically reported the results by using an engaging style of narrative. We have used first person pronoun.

2.1 Selection of respondents

Respondents were selected based on their membership in both ASP and DSP meetings. To make sure that this was a reality, the District Agriculture Development Office (DADO) which is the secretariat for agricultural activities at the Council level remained a contact and starting point. The DADO listed the actors that were active in the DSP and ASP. While there was motivation to conduct 100% sampling, there were challenges that were encountered so a few were left out as explained under study limitations. Key informant interviews were conducted at DSP level while Focus Group Discussions were conducted at ASP level. Table 1 below lists the actors who were engaged in the study both at ASP and DSP levels.

Table 1: List of actors engaged in the study

District	Actor's name	Structure
Mulanje	District Stakeholder Panels	Key informant interviews participants
	District Agriculture Development Office-DADO	2
	Adventist Development and Relief Agency- ADRA	1
	Churches Action in Relief & Development- CARD	1
	Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust- MMCT	1
	Area Stakeholder Panel	Focus group discussion
	Mimosa	1 (13 participants)
	Mthiramanja	1 (11 participants)
	Thuchira	1 (16 participants)
	Mulanje Boma	1 (12 participants)
	Nkhatabay	District Stakeholder Panels
District Agriculture Development Office-DADO		3
Livingstonia Synod AIDS Programme –LISAP		1
National Association of Smallholder Farmer's Association of Malawi- NASFAM		1
Catholic Development Commission in Malawi- CADECOM		1
Area Stakeholder Panel		Focus group discussions
Malenganzoma		1 (12 participants)
Mkumbira		1 (11 participants)
Fukamalaza		1 (15 participants)
District Stakeholder Panels		Key informant interviews participants
Ntcheu		District Agriculture Development Office- DADO
	National Association of Smallholder Farmer's in Malawi- NASFAM	1
	Center for Community Organisation and Development- CCODE	1
	Protofeeds	1
	Catholic Relief Services- CRS	1
	Hunger Project	1
	Catholic Development Commission in Malawi- CADECOM	1
	Area Stakeholder Panel	Focus group discussions
	Kwataine	1 (9 participants)
	Champiti	1 (14 participants)
	Nsipe	1 (12 participants)
	District Stakeholder Panels	Key informant interviews

		participants
Mchinji	District Agriculture Development Office- DADO	2
	Farm Concern International	1
	Heifer International	2
	International Potato Centre	1
	Concern Worldwide	1
	District Council	1
	Galaxy Radio	1
	Churches Action in Relief & Development- CARD	1
	Catholic Development Commission in Malawi- CADECOM	1
	Area Stakeholder Panel	Focus group discussions
Zulu	1 (15 participants)	
Msitu	1 (11 participants)	
Kapondo	1 (16 participants)	
Dambe	1 (15 participants)	

2.1 Data collection, handling and analysis

To ensure data quality, the researcher engaged experienced graduates in the area of rural development and extension who were thoroughly oriented on the objectives of the study and the tools that were used (Shenton, (2004) & Patton, (1999). We conducted a day-long training with research assistants where the research tools were reviewed and pretested. The questions were deliberately open ended to guide a technical discussion where probing helped extract information from respondents as according to Legard, R. et al., (2003). All data from FGDs and key informants were recorded in an Ms Word File to facilitate content analysis of the data collected- Hsieh, et al., (2005) and Graneheim, et al., (2004). Table 2 below summarises the research design.

Table 2: Research Design Table

Objective	Source	Method	Tool	Analysis
To determine what are the governance and operational dilemmas that exist in a pluralistic and demand driven extension service	Govt officials Actors Farmers	KII	Checklists	
To assess how and to what extent various actors were interacting	Govt officials Actors Farmers	KII	Checklist	Theme identification
To determine whether and how actors were responding to farmers' demands.	ASP Executive members Extension Officers	Focus Group discussions Key informant interviews	Checklist	Content analysis

In analysing the data we considered a number of analytical frameworks and settled on one developed by Birner, et al., (2009) which disentangles the major characteristics of pluralistic and demand driven extension services into: (1) governance structures, (2) capacity, (3) management and organization, and (4) advisory methods. Birner's framework enables us to consider all the four aspects of innovations which are product, process, marketing and organizational (Poppe, 2012). An alternative framework by Turner, et al., (2014) has a narrow view of innovations toward the co-development of technologies. We summarise and describe the four characteristics of AIS in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Four characteristics of AIS according to Birner etal (2009)

#	Characteristics of AIS	Description
1	Governance structure	institutional set-up of agricultural advisory services; public-private-partnerships in financing, level of decentralization and Partnerships/linkages
2	Capacity	Human resources (staff numbers, training levels, skills and experience) as well as physical infrastructure, the vehicles and financial resources.
3	Management	Management style (top-down or participatory, rule-focused or results-focused), as well as the procedures for planning, monitoring, and evaluating advisory activities, and for managing financial and human resources.
4	Advisory services	Advisory methods used by the field staff in their interaction with farmers

Adapted from Birner, et al., (2009)

3. Results of the study

We have presented results of the study with respect to the criterion developed by Birner et al., (2009) as such there are three subsections. We first present findings with respect to governance structures and then we present findings with respect to capacity. We conclude by presenting combined findings for management and advisory services. We noted that that the characteristics are very much intertwined. Our interest was on the content and as such we have not separated issues per DSP nor ASP or each particular district.

3.1 Governance structures

Each district in Malawi has a Council which coordinates activities of various ministries including agriculture. The agriculture office (herein referred as DADO) is secretariat for all agricultural activities at district level. According to DAESS the DADO is responsible for forming and making sure that DSP and ASP are up and running. As such we found out that many actors looked at the DAESS as the responsibility of the DADO for example many actors said that they did not feel the need to work on enhancing the structures of the DAESS so as to enforce unity and togetherness in providing services to farmers as their one client/ end user of various innovations they promoted. We found different scenarios in the districts in that in some cases some actors were not fully known by the DADOs. Likewise we also found some actors that had no idea about the DAESS. We also found that there was a tendency by most actors to form own contact groups such that there was a plethora of several contact groups within the same villages each formed at the behest of an incoming intervention bypassing the ASP.

In two districts where DAESS was known to be successful we learnt that DSP had met once per year while it was supposed to have met four times. In the other districts the meetings had not taken place at all over the past one year. The DADOs mentioned that massive staff turn-over was one contributing factor. The other factor that was identified was unavailability of financial resources to pay for provisions of the

meetings. This was a surprise finding, but digging deeper we learnt that in fact the real problem was not money as many actors could easily put together their financial resources to support either the DSP or the ASP. One respondent had this to say *“Let us be honest here as much as we would wish the extension providers to complement each other’s efforts each is bound by specific agenda and objectives which are formulated at headquarters level. Districts are points of service delivery; and most officers are not necessarily concerned with strategic objectives and planning. Their mandate is to implement .hence very doubtful they could effectively change the implementation approach”*-(Mulanje DSP member). We found out that the secretariat apart for receiving normal funding to carry out activities there were also special funds available whose allocation was supposed to be decided in consultation with farmers. This was not happening. In total the money available for extension services from all actors and government put together shows that more money is used as compared to past twenty years but due to poor coordination it feels like there is less money spent- Masangano, (2015).

In terms of partnership we found in all the four districts that several actors had entered into partnership agreements. The partnerships were not documented but a classical case was found in Mchinji where Heifer International (responsible for dairy) worked with various stakeholders i.e. DADO’s office, Water Department and Pump Aid for drilling boreholes to supply water to cattle, Ministry of Health for HIV & AIDS & Nutrition to education, World Vision Malawi engaged the people on Village Savings & Loans. Table below summarises the actors and their roles;

Table 4: Summary of roles and responsibilities in a partnership

#	Actor	Roles and responsibilities
1	Heifer International	Implementers of Mchinji Livelihoods Improvement Project- provides dairy cows to farmers
2	GoM-Agriculture (DADOs Office)	Provides technical veterinary services
3	GoM Department of Water/ PumpAide	Drilling of boreholes for water supply for the animals
4	GoM- Ministry of Health	Provision of training on HIV & AIDS prevention, mainstreaming and training on nutrition
5	World Vision Malawi	Provision of Village Savings and Loans services

Note: GoM represents Government of Malawi

We found similar arrangements in Nkhatabay where Harvest Help Find Your Feet had engaged with Community Based Organisations in various development initiatives. We also learnt that NASFAM was complementing CADECOM efforts in Disaster Preparedness and environmental preparedness by expanding the physical coverage.

Despite the positive side of the story we also found that there were issues that need to be considered in the Pluralistic and demand driven. We found out that Ministry of Agriculture had not been proactive and innovative enough as a secretariat to demonstrate leadership to operationalise pluralistic and demand driven extension services. Instead DADOs used irregular flow of finances as an excuse not to operationalise DSP. In the districts where the DAESS is not working at both levels (ASP and DSP members) the resounding theme pointed to the fact that DSPs have dismally fallen short of the roles as provided for in Malawi Government, (2006). In Ntcheu actors showed support only through attendance in functions of other actors when called upon.

At the lower levels we found that the ASPs were able to aggregate their demands but there was no DSP to consider the needs. We found that there was a new channel that had been created to take the issues from ASP to the district council. Ward Councillors (politicians) were taking issues from ASP to the DADO s office. This new channel did not constitute in any way an official position that the ASP reported to the Councillors. We also found that there was lack of a clear coordinated communication to villages about service provider operations and while it may not sound as conflict or competition; the symptomatic lack of

common approach or agenda in reaching out to the farmers resulted in confusion among farmers about project objectives and service providers' agenda. A case in point was that we found that both ADRA and NASFAM gave out sunflower seeds to farmers within the same locality with different repayment modalities. Lack of clear communication or collaboration in the delivery of these resulted in confusion in the community. While ADRA's "free" package was meant as a relief intervention after the crop was washed away, the one from NASFAM was meant as loan in kind to be repaid at harvest time. With preference for the easier way and lack of proper communication about the underlying objectives villagers misinterpreted and found fault with NASFAM for taking a 'tough' stance. We also found that the powerful actors were having an impact on Pluralistic and demand driven. We found sadly though that actors in the private sector participated the least across all districts. While there had been efforts to attract private traders to attend DSP and ASP meetings, the response had been disappointing. In most of the cases it was the small agro-dealers (generally originating from the same localities) that participated in meetings and delivery of extension. The big corporations/private companies could not avail themselves most of the times. In this regard we found that in all the four districts the issue of 'who's who' was clearly a bone of contention in offering extension services in collaboration. Each actor wanted to demonstrate to their donors the direct impact of their efforts.' So the question was who to attribute the positive results to given a joint undertaking? We learnt that some actors would want to exaggerate their contribution and attribute the success of an intervention to their individual efforts rather than acknowledge collaborative efforts even if their contribution was modest. A case in point was in Mulanje where one organisation was struggling with implementation and the other one helped and quickly placed a sign post in the village overshadowing the partner. In Mchinji we found that one organisation constructed a warehouse for the farmers to keep produce so that they could sell when prices are better and with passage of time another NGO came and built a bigger warehouse adjacent to the old one blocking its accessibility and visibility.

In Mulanje we found a strong political connection between development structures and the ruling party. The members of the Area Development Committee (ADC) whose subcommittee on agriculture is the ASP were all politically connected i.e. when politicians change, all the committees were changed. We found unique operating guidelines for ASP for example duration of the term of office for ASP Executives as one respondent remarked– "*we resolved that the ASP terms should coincide with national parliamentary and presidential elections calendar*". In the rest of the other three districts we still found power struggle between the ADC and ASP more especially on perceived benefits. We found that the ADC which looks at broader developmental issues and ASP is just one subcommittee at traditional authority level sidelined the ASP on certain agricultural issues i.e. receiving visitors, disease outbreak were left to ASP but when it came to anything with immediate benefits like distribution of inputs, ADC took leadership and ASP was overshadowed. In all the four districts we found a dual membership of most members in the ADC and ASP despite apparent deep misgivings between the two structures. The relations between most ASP and ADC can be described as a mixed bag; at best one of convenience and at worst, one fraught with outright hostility and mistrust. Probing revealed that other ASP members were just co-opted from other groups in the village to save face. This is explained by the concept of elitism and elite capture in the extension system in Malawi (Mapila, etal (2010) whereby the elites take up positions of influence. We also found that there were differences in categories of representatives of interest groups in ASP for example in NkhataBay they emphasized representation of vulnerable groups like the HIV & AIDS affected, others in Ntcheu on mother care groups active in persuading retention of adolescent girls in school and this was different in all the districts.

3.2 Capacity

The Pluralistic and demand driven has allowed many actors to come together and deliver services. We noted the differing sizes amongst the actors and the difference in actions towards each other. We learnt that the DADOs office had carried out awareness on the demand driven extension services but still participation from private sector was very low. Within the private sector the seemingly small actors were doing much better unlike the big, national wide organisations. It was revealed that the decision making

bureaucracy in many organisations contributed to minimal participation of the 'bigger' actors. However in terms of financial support to activities like field days, more was coming from the 'bigger' actors.

We found out that there were big differences in terms of the level and capacity of field agents representing different actors in the districts. Likewise we found that different field agents got updates on new innovations at different rates. There were substantial variations in access to internet, newsletters, extension job aids among extension agents. We found that some actors were satisfied when they interacted with farmers during field days and agricultural shows and not through ASP or DSP meetings. They had a feeling that these were adequate avenues for interactions. We learnt that 'big' agro-dealers would easily pump in money in field days and demonstrations but they would not come and be present on the function to interact with farmers. Most agro dealers were satisfied with showcasing result demonstrations and not process demonstrations through trials. We noted that entrepreneurial objective of wooing potential customers was the overriding one. Capacity building was not prioritised in this respect.

3.3 Management and organization and advisory methods

We present results for two different aspects of the Birner's et al (2009) Framework on *Management and organisation* and *Advisory methods* because we found that there is a close link between the two. On Management, the framework talks about either top-down or participatory, rule-focused or results-focused while it talks about the specific advisory methods used in the field under advisory methods aspect. Every time we asked about delivery methods all actors were quick to speak highly about pluralistic and demand driven extension services. All that was meant to emphasize that there was a shift from top down approaches to bottom up approaches which encourage responding to demands of farmers. In our interactions we learnt a number of methods that were being used to deliver extension services including Farmer Field Schools, Farmer Business School, REFLECT, Model Villages, Demonstrations, Field Days, clusters, lead farmers, agricultural resource centres, multimedia campaigns, farmer cooperatives and associations, mobile platforms such as 321, or 212. Mobile platforms (321, 212) are toll free phone lines managed by different actors which are used to interact with farmers through a call centre where farmers call and get their questions responded to. The list of participatory methods used increased with the sample which was an indication that there was indeed pluralistic of bottom up approaches just like there is pluralistic number of actors. This confirmed a desire for a shift from top down approaches to bottom up approaches.

However despite this purported shift the reality on the ground was different. Our interactions with the ASP pointed to the fact that there is still top down approaches being used. The service providers are bound by specific deadlines and agendas from their organisations. We learnt that in cases of response to demands, they were so inflexible. At the time of the study there were already indications of drought in certain areas but the ASPs complained of no response to address the drought through irrigation. A case in point was ADRA which had facilitated REFLECT methodology in Mulanje West leading to actions plans and villagers developed proposal most of which were not immediately responded to. This led to the frustration of the communities because the responses had always been that they would find for them the suitable service provider/donor for their projects. And yet farmers thought ADRA would respond urgently to their proposal for irrigation support with the looming drought. With a missing link from ASP to DSP, it was difficult for actors to claim to deliver demand driven extension services. We found that actors valued and prioritised infrastructural projects bridges, roads over the direct soft livelihood projects unlike agricultural as this was manifested in allocation of resources for agriculture at Local Development Fund (LDF). In Mulanje and Ntcheu the little resources sourced from LDF were being used without consultation of ASPs. The ASPs though aware of the availability of the funds were not privy to the exact details and processes involved to access and use the funds. So we found that centralized planning was still the order of the day in most organizations.

In the absence of ASP and DSP at the district level we found that there was no structure that linked farmers and actors including research. In some situations we found actors would work together (for example CARD and OXFAM in Mulanje) leaving the DADO aside. In all districts, ASP members expressed discontent about being blatantly sidelined and shunned by several actors both at grassroots, demand aggregation level and secondly at planning and service response level. They claimed service providers implemented what they had planned.

As a result of various actions of actors, there were notable innovations that we found out. NASFAM had created Associations which were producing and adding value to various items including rice, groundnuts and chillies. Through the pluralistic and demand driven services there had been adoption of technologies which had failed many years in the past for example intensification of Rice technology in Kilombero planting in Nkhatabay promoted by NASFAM and Department of Agricultural Research Services which increased seasonal quota from 9 tonnes to 16 tonnes of rice- a variety newly introduced to cater for market demands which was introduced to replace FAYA and other locally preferred but less marketable varieties. NASFAM offered the farmers practical alternatives to marketing constraints and formed associations to help with bulk transportation and storage function. NASFAM also convinced farmers to prioritize production of marketable Kilombero Rice variety over traditional FAYA and other less marketable varieties. In addition we found that crop varieties that were new had been introduced in areas that never grew them i.e. pigeon peas in Nkhatabay. The major preoccupation of people of Nkhatabay is fishing and with dwindling fish supplies, there was need for alternative livelihoods so through the efforts of actors the people have accepted and learnt how to produce pigeon peas. In Mchinji we found significant adoption of what is popularly known as Sasakawa-one seed one planting station planting method which had been rejected over many years ago. Farmers argued that *'maize stalks needed to talk to each other'* as a reason why they stuck to the past practice of planting three seeds per station.

Lack of coordination amongst actors again manifested itself when we found out that there were conflicting methods used by various actors. Some actors gave out cash to farmers for attending meetings, while others provided food and others yet nothing. These conflicting approaches are a sign of failure to pluralistic and demand driven extension services.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In this study we have used Birner et al., (2009) framework to understand how governance and operation of the pluralistic and demand driven extension services. The four components of the framework have been used in presenting the results. We noted that somehow issues in the framework are intertwined such that in some components we just had to combine them and then present them together. Nevertheless the framework has been able to provide results which show that pluralistic and demand driven services have a governance and operational structure. We hypothesized that there were proper governance and operational structures which were working perfectly. We found a mixed situation with more negatives than positives. As we found that coordination of actors at the district level faces a lot of challenges. Most of the challenges start with lack of proper regulation of extension service delivery. There is no single work plan at the district level. A unified work plan could be a trap to attract funds into a basket for delivery of extension at district level just like there is ASWAP at national level (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, 2011) where donors and government put money for agricultural development. With joint planning and execution, it means that governance will be facilitated as there will be no different approaches used. Failure of governance has reared its ugly head in many respects in Malawi's extension system and the results are always disastrous.

Since 2006, the pluralistic and demand driven concept has been prepared and shared with actors in the agriculture sector. However the major problem of ownership stands out clearly. Many of the actors think that pluralistic and demand driven services are the responsibility of the DADOs office. This is even common with other departments for example livestock, crops, land resources within the public service.

Pluralistic and demand driven services requires high levels of accountability and responsiveness amongst actors and yet actors prefer to implement activities as designed from their own corners ignoring farmers and even fellow service providers. Actors deliberately run away from ASP for their convenience of implementing initiatives and ultimately run away from accountability. It is known that participatory methods delay implementation of projects despite the known benefits that come in the long term (Claridge, (2004). We noted that actors valued and prioritised infrastructural projects like bridges, roads over the direct soft livelihood projects and agricultural activities. This is common when actors want to show tangible results at the end of the fixed period initiatives. Organisations compete to access funding and as such there is a tendency to engage in activities which can easily be identified unlike provision of skills and knowledge. Capacity building projects are difficult to show results (Hailey, et al., (2005). Issues of social distance between actors and farmers are also affecting implementation of pluralistic and demand driven services as noted by Bentley, (1994). Farmers suffer from inferiority complex such that they don't have the confidence to demand services from the perceived superior extension service providers given pre-existing socioeconomic inequalities and relations of power (Agarwal, 2001). Issue of culture is also impacting on pluralistic and demand driven extension services. Malawian culture promotes respect to elders and therefore chiefs say is always taken even when it is not useful/right. So ADCs where chiefs are members do override powers of ASPs and the members just take that with a pinch of salt.

Pluralistic and demand driven services assumes democracy has been fully embraced. Malawi value system is yet to accommodate the democratic governance principles. There is a slow pace of mindset change among all actors. The majority of older generation of extension workers still stuck in the traditional technology transfer philosophy that farmers knowledge is inferior hence need to look up to extension to provide solutions to the prevailing problems. Farmers still unconvinced that they can question extension and demand better services. Ultimately this forces service providers to be rooted in the old top down approach and not ready to listen to criticism from the farmers or to demand for accountability as advocated by pluralistic and demand driven services. In this era of pluralism, it has become common for actors to engage with villages through traditional leaders to facilitate formation of "own" contact groups bypassing both the ASP and DSP. It apparently looks fashionable that each organization is establishing its own coordination committees in the villages instead of empowering the already existing groups (ASP). The councils seem to be less bothered by this proliferation of several development committees in the same locality; it certainly has brought about ad hoc implementation pattern in the pluralistic and demand driven system. We think that if the existing structures were empowered and properly capacitated there would be no need for organisations to do baseline studies to collect data which is always available in the ASP.

So far we note that actors are still following functional participation approach as described by Cristóvão et al., (2005) where extension service providers engage communities with pre-packaged objectives and activities with the expectation that peoples' problems will fit in these predetermined objectives. Nevertheless, the benefits derived from pluralistic and demand driven services have allowed farmers to benefit knowledge and technologies that they are implementing to advance their farming businesses. The intervention by Ward Councillors in place of ASP is uncalled for because they are political players who represent interests of certain people and not others. The office of the DADO has now to single handedly address issues which could be addressed by a broad spectrum of actors. There is a strong call to detach development from partisan politics as it serves interests of particular groups and not entire population. The sizes of actors have a bearing on pluralistic and demand driven services as well. In some organisations, decision making is still centralised while they are operating in a decentralised environment. If all actors decentralised properly it means that even low level staff could make decisions on budgets, mandates and approaches.

Through this study we have been able to demonstrate that there are governance and operational dilemmas in as far as pluralistic and demand driven extension services. There is need for serious capacity building and change of attitude for it to become a reality. Further we suggest that starting from the

DADOs office, each and every actor should embrace pluralistic and demand driven service provision. DSP and ASP need to start running effectively. It is clear that farmers and other rest of the actors' reservations about capacity and effectiveness of ASP and DSP have evolved on the back of other frustrated and demoralized structures that crumbled under weight of dormancy and inactiveness. The way pluralistic and demand driven services has performed so far requires that some elements be modified to reflect the context in which it is operating. The people, the culture and capacities need to be considered otherwise we will be stuck with top down approaches while disguising as bottom up approaches. It would be necessary to set up a district basket fund where different actors would put in money and use it for implementation.

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