

## **AGENCY FOR TRANSFORMATION (Aft)**

### **Theory of Transformation and approach**

#### **Introduction to the theory of transformation and approach**

Theory of transformation and approach is simply how we seek to make a difference. We understand Transformation as a change in mindset. The first step of transformation is therefore the individual and in this case, a farmer- in East Africa. A transformed farmer (farmers) will perceive new meaning to his/her life, to events, to numbers, and to interactions between people. Once the farmer understands the system of profound knowledge, he/she will apply it in every kind of relationship with other people. He or she will have a basis for judgement of his/her own decisions and for transformation of organisations he/she belongs to and firmly engage public institutions to serve interests of farmers. Transformation therefore means taking action based on continual learning. It is learning that hydrates the process of transformation. While all transformation is change, not all change is transformation.

#### **Positioning for transformation**

Why is it that at the root of this agenda- are farmers, their business, organisations and institutions? For countries across East Africa and Uganda in particular, farmers are crucial anchors of transformation because they produce food and wealth in rural areas. It is a simple, but so often forgotten truth: they establish new enterprises that bring forth employment opportunities for their children, who could also go to school because of their parents' entrepreneurship. Thus, the structural transformation of the economies in East Africa starts with farmer creativity and hard work. Indeed in for example, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi agriculture remains the most prominent economic activity and primary source of livelihood for over 70 per cent of the respective populations.

The theory of transformation puts farmers at centre of action by providing skills and platforms that increase their exposure to ferment of knowledge, information and practical tools to make service delivery work for them. Such channels include farmer centred policy research, fireplace conversations and harnessing the power of conventional and new media to promote farmer horizontal and vertical engagements – with useful information on deepening productivity, governing markets, promoting integrity in service delivery and finding new livelihood options in the rural. Transformation also means taking to scale solutions that already exist to the farmers who need them, E.g. Knowledge about managing soil and tools like drip irrigation that have potential to help poor farmers grow more food today and tomorrow. Let's take the case of agro-Extension services in Uganda and why a new thinking is critical;

## **Situational analysis**

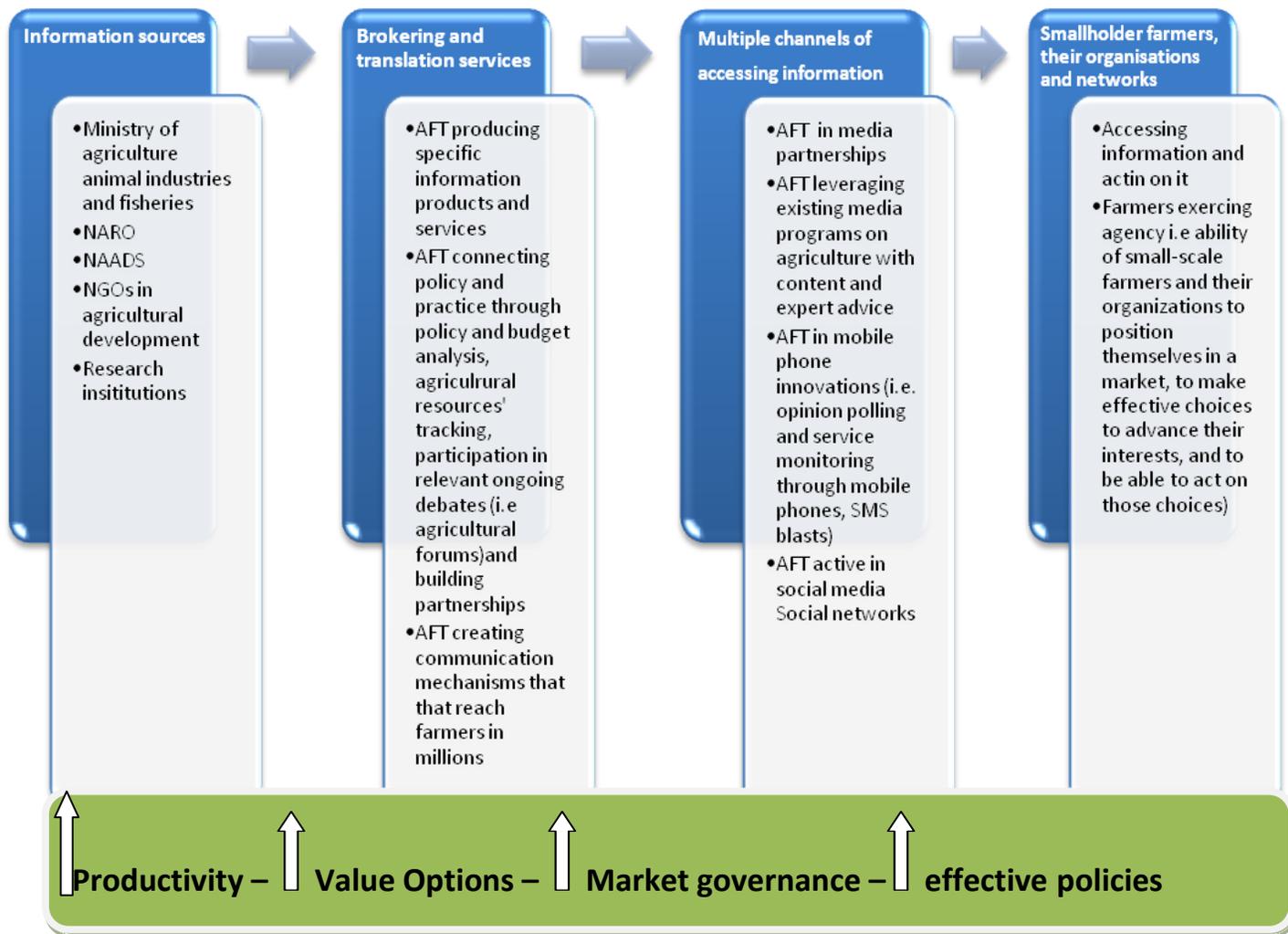
Moving majority out of poverty is going require the agricultural sector to be transformed; its major participants –the smallholder farmers have to be the focus for this transformation. Decades of seeing them as vulnerable under the current economic liberalisation and openness has only reinforced a victim mentality in which policies and business models act on their convictions of what is right to do for the farmers to enter the markets and increase their overall incomes. In reality, farmers are not passive recipients of development programs, they are economic actors in their right who are constantly making choices to advance their interests. The support smallholder farmers need is the kind that rouses the agency innate as economic actors to make decisions that make them succeed in markets. In retrospect, most approaches to farmer development have focused on how small farmers through their organisations can be empowered to compete in the market. The “one size fits all” attitude has resulted into policies and programs that only work within the parameters of formal farmers’ organisations. Outside this domain, there is not much attention paid to farmers who are not integrated in formal organisations yet they are the majority and contribute significantly to the food supply.

AFT uses the agency perspective to understand a variety of strategies by small holder farmers to seize business opportunities and design interventions that connect with farmers in their entirety regardless of the form of organisation or networks they have chosen by which to advance their interests. We believe better access to information about markets, remunerative crops and activities, climate resilient farming approaches and more of this will result in greater agency, helping them decide what and how to do business.

We are cognizant of the fact that information dissemination to farmers has been a major component of development interventions for farmers but there is still a need for brokering and translation services that make this information accessible and consumable by the farmers. Often than not, information to the farmers is not available in formats and channels most meaningful to them yet opportunities to transit information and provide services are more available particularly with the advancement in communication technologies. Millions of people now own a mobile phone or can use one from family, friend or neighbour and so is the radio. Listenership in Uganda is very high with interMedia estimating in 2005 that 100% of the population had listened to the radio in the past year, 92.8%in the past seven days and 73.7% as recently as the day before (InterMedia, 2005). Reaching farmers with information requires these information technologies coming together by which multiple ways of accessing information is made possible.

AFT believes by increasing the array of communication possibilities, we will provide an unprecedented ability to access information and more scope for famers’ agency. Our theory of transformation therefore positions relevant and factual information at the centre of transformation. This does not mean information alone is sufficient; improved transportation, appropriate credit and farm inputs are needed for transformation but to work with a limited supply of these goods as is the case requires practical information which helps farmers to make every investment count and succeed in dynamic markets.

## The Aft model



## The Aft model description

Aft recognises to a high degree that farmers need factual and relevant information to succeed in their chosen enterprises but most importantly, it has to be provided in formats and through channels that fit the lifestyle of an ordinary farmer. Second, a lot of information is held by public bodies and NGO and often research and development agendas emphasise new research rather than dissemination of existing information. Farmers also generate new knowledge but have limited opportunities to share it widely (Box 1) . AFT offers to liberate and popularize the information through a brokering and translation function (Box 2) and creates multiple channels through which information reaches farmers in millions while stirring discussions in the farming community (Box 3). In the end farmers are able to access information and exercise agency leading to overall improvement in the farming business (i.e. farmers able to make choices to move into remunerative crops, choosing which markets work for them whether traditional or high value markets, choosing the forms of economic organisations to advance their interests,

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expressing their views and making their voice heard in policy making and monitoring agricultural services delivery-box 4).

### **Goal**

To increase the sector's contribution to growth mainly through focusing on marketing services and innovations for small holder farmers

### **Specific objectives**

1. To increase uptake of factual and relevant information that will turn increase smallholder effective participation in policy process and the market.
2. To lobby for appropriate public finance allocated to support agricultural livelihoods and track the reach and use of revenues to measure and communicate value for money aspects.

### **Our focus**

#### **Transforming Uganda's agro-Extension Services**

Increasing information flow and skills transfer that in turn could enable small holder farmers try out new or improved approaches to production and marketing. Up to now, extension service predominates the means by which farmers connect with sources of information or knowledge. Despite the transformations extension service has undergone from being provided through chiefs to progressive farmers and now through contract extension systems, its major weakness is the ability to reach all farmers regularly and in time amidst resource constraints both human and financial. Recent statistics from UBOS indicate less than 14% farmers in Uganda see an extension worker per annum. Under National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) regime, there are only 16000 extension workers mandated to serve four million farmer households in Uganda. This is the ratio of 1: 2500 farmer households. Is this practical? How many days will a NAADS extension worker need to reach 2500 households? We have 365 days in a year. If a NAADS extension worker was working 7 days a week, it would take him/her 6.9 years to do just one round visit of farmer households. Can this old mechanism of extension deployment work efficiently? Or rather a dynamic mode of extension that leverages 10,400,000 mobile phones users who are mainly farmers to deepen advisory services should be tested. How about 3,200,000 internet users? Can this internet platform be used to scale extension and marketing of farmers' products? Things are already happening- with young urban and peri-urban farmers using the platform to market and sell eggs, chicken and vegetables. This can be indeed be scaled. How about the 228 FM stations that are broadcasting in local languages. These technologies are indeed a "social middleman". Transformation for us – means harnessing the potential of these existing expansive resources.

### **Opportunities for youth employment in agriculture**

Increasing youth response to opportunities in agriculture and agri business sectors is central to revitalizing agricultural livelihood and subsequently, lifting millions out of poverty. The sheer number of young people in sub Saharan Africa is the largest and will possibly remain so meaning alternative options outside agriculture are limited. Moreover, creating stability of food supplies through youth engagement over the coming periods will help save the progress that has been made in reducing the proportion of people living in hunger in Africa. Looking at Uganda's demographic profile, a new thinking becomes even more urgent. The country has the youngest population in the world; with a very high fertility rate of nearly 7 children per woman, Uganda's population is on a surge. The annual population growth is at 3.2%. In 1980 Uganda had 12.7 million people, in 2005, it pulled to 28.7 million- and in constant fertility scenario, by 2025, and Uganda will have 58.1 million inhabitants. By 2050, it will have 152.2 million people<sup>1</sup> with more than half comprised of young people. Building and strengthening opportunities for the youth in the agricultural sector is critical for future employment and food security. Presently, there are not many youth in the agricultural sector as they have in general shifted from agriculture towards manufacturing and services but most of them are still trapped in poverty and low productivity employment. The youth need to be attracted back to agriculture through targeted policy measures that address the constraints specific to the youth in agriculture and more importantly, overturn the negativity surrounding youth in agriculture.

### **Agricultural governance / Policy**

For farmers to drive their own development and determine their own future, they need to be able to engage in the decisions that affect their lives and influence policies and practices that impact them. Most importantly, farmers need a greater say in the resources they need to increase their incomes, (i.e. tools, seeds, advice, credit or access to markets), monitor expenditure and speak out and shape the future they want with agriculture. However, quite often agriculture policy is top heavy and mechanistic- excluding small holder farmers effective participation in policy process. It's mostly what policy makers want. It is not necessarily what small holder farmers want. Can agriculture policy be rescued to involve and put small holder farmers at center of formulation and action? Can small-scale farmers follow their money and speak out on service delivery? Across East Africa, small holder farmers are at the bottom of wealth pyramid. Yet their commitment to feed the region, continent and world remain undiminished. At AFT, we dress ourselves with farmers' daily struggles as we seek to innately understand how they interact with local, sub regional, regional and global policies that impact on their very livelihood.

AFT's core is in research and spread of information to support and build competent small holder farmer organisations and associations (harnessing farmers' fireplace conversations) to amplify their voice and shape policies that govern agriculture. Strong farmer agency is also

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<sup>1</sup> Beatrice and Madsen, 2010; The Effects of a very young age structure in Uganda

critical for checking corruption- a cancer that continues to hurt agriculture service delivery in Uganda. AFT works to facilitate the link between food production systems, natural resources, the market, the State and Civil Society. In Uganda, and generally throughout Africa, poverty is widespread in rural areas and agriculture is well placed to play a role in poverty alleviation and equity improvement. Yet the capacity and efficiency of African nation states to deploy resources in agriculture has been ebbing for the last 10 years.

A mobilised and organised small holder agency will increase pressure on nation states to act in farmers' favour. In the case of Uganda, the share of agriculture in the national budget, for the last ten years rotates at a paltry 4%, yet the sector employs 77% of the population (family farmers). For the last 10 years, the sector has been growing at a rate of 1.3% and its contribution to GDP shrinking to now 21%. The foregoing actually means that the value of economic activity for over 26 million people out of 32 million people is only 21%! AFT advocates for increased budgetary allocation to the agriculture sector and works with farmer associations and branches to track the 4% sector budget and other non-sector resources deployed in the agriculture sector- deepening integrity in delivery of agriculture services.

### **Natural resources, Environment and small holder farmers' sustainability**

Environmentally conscious farmers are a linchpin to managing adjuncts of climate change and deepening integrity of natural resources governance in Uganda. Uganda's economy is largely nature-based, yet the country loses 224 billion shillings (4% of its GDP) to environmental degradation. The country is losing its forest cover at an alarming rate. Farmers are culprits of this environmental catastrophe. Indeed it is small-scale farmers (rather than large corporations) who are wrecking much of the damage on forests, soils and ecosystems, due to low productivity, poor or absent title, and lack of non-farm opportunities. At the same time, because farmers interact with the environment on a daily basis, they face the brute of climate change with bare hands (limited knowledge, limited access to information and absolute lack of technology on adaptation to climate change). This situation is unacceptable because once equipped with adaptation tools, farmers constitute huge potential for resilience, adaptation and mitigation- even turning climate change into an enduring economic opportunity.

Uganda is also endowed with oil and gas resources. The advent of oil exploration and exploitation is having and will have deep impact on the business and livelihoods of farmers. Farmers' voice on management of oil and deployment of oil resources is of utmost importance if their enterprises are to survive and grow. AFT works to mobilise and provide farmers with information on how the new Uganda (Uganda in the Oil age) will impact on them. This information will stimulate their involvement in shaping their future in a new Uganda.