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Market Orientation in Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services Approaches: Experiences from Service Providers and Farmers in Central Malawi

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ABSTRACT

Market-oriented extension and advisory services enable linkages among actors within agricultural value chains, which is necessary for commercialisation. The study analysed the market orientation of extension approaches employed by various service providers. Qualitative methods were used to collect data from 12 key informants and 84 farmers through 11 focus group discussions. The study targeted extension providers from public and private sectors and non-governmental and farmer-based organisations. We found that extension service providers employ the commodity specialised approach, farmer business school, project approach and smallholder horticultural empowerment and promotion approaches to reach farmers. There are differences in the market-orientation rating of the approaches. Unlike other service providers, public service providers perceived capacity gaps in all areas. The main challenges faced include inadequate funding, high extension worker-to-farmer ratio, poor policy environment and weak legal frameworks, lack of trust and information sharing among actors, poor coordination among extension service providers and actors, and high illiteracy levels among farmers. We conclude that most approaches are not fully market-oriented. Service providers of extension and advisory services should design and implement tailored market-oriented extension and advisory services for farmers commercialising to different levels.

Keywords: Agricultural Extension, Market-Based Extension, Service Providers, Rural Malawi

1. DEFINITION OF PROBLEMS

Agricultural extension and advisory services (AEAS) are "all the different activities that provide the information and the services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in

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a rural setting to assist them in developing their own technical, organisational and management skills and practices to improve their livelihoods and well-being" (GFRAS, 2012). AEAS plays the role in provision of information, technologies and innovations to help farmers make informed decisions to improve their productivity, food security, and livelihoods (Baloch & Thapa, 2018; Nordin & Höjgård, 2017; Ragasa & Niu, 2017; Olagunju & Adesiji, 2013; Ali-olubandwa, Kathuri & Wesonga, 2011; Waddington, Snilstveit, White & Anderson, 2010; Birkhaeuser, Evenson & Feder, 1991). There are arguments about AEAS not adequately achieving the roles because of the capacity of service providers, low funding, trying to do too much with little resources, and other policy and structural challenges (Masangano & Mthinda, 2012; Ponniah, Puskur, Workneh, & Hoekstra, 2008; Anderson & Feder, 2003). Others have argued that one of the difficulties in pinpointing the impact of AEAS is that it requires a conducive policy environment and other support services (Anderson & Feder, 2003). For example, AEAS provides farmers with knowledge and skills to produce, but production can only happen if farmers have access to productive resources, including land.

AEAS has struggled to keep up with the farmer's demand for new skills in a rapidly changing environment. With farmers' need to diversify and commercialise, extension workers must have skills in various crops, livestock and livelihood activities to adequately assist farmers (Van den Ban & Samanta, 2006). Additionally, with the growing calls to commercialise agriculture, AEAS are at the centre of driving this commercialisation agenda to provide the necessary capacity for different actors along the value chain (Scott, 1998). Commercialisation is a shift from subsistence farming to commercial farming (Von Braun & Kennedy, 1994), with the assumption that more engagement with both input and output markets is a positive step towards economic growth (Carletto, Corral & Guelfi, 2017), especially for countries whose economy is based on agriculture such as Malawi. Others have argued that AEAS has not adequately adapted to the changing needs of farmers as it has mainly remained production-oriented in messaging, designing, and programming, which limits the benefits farmers can get (Gebremedhin, Hoekstra &Tegegne, 2015; 2006a; 2006b; Gebremedhin, Jamaneh, Hoekstra & Anandajayasekeram, 2012). More recent literature posits that AEAS has struggled to account for socio-political factors in the delivery of extension services (Cook, Satizabal & Curnow, 2021).

AEAS providers implement different extension approaches to achieve their objectives. The extension approach is a course of action that informs, stimulates and guides the structure, leadership, programme, resources and linkages within an extension system (Kaur & Kaur, 2018). Studies have argued that the focus for AEAS should not only be on increasing agricultural production but also on enhancing incomes among rural households, hence the need for AEAS to be market-oriented to respond to the changing demands of farmers (Christoplos, 2010; Kahan, 2014; Musa Gwary, Makinta & Wakawa, 2019; Van den Ban & Samanta, 2006) However, the extent to which these extension approaches are market-oriented needs to be investigated. Gebremedhin *et al*. (2012) define market-oriented extension and advisory services (MOEAS) as total efforts that extension workers put in advising and supporting farmers to produce profitable market-oriented commodities and adopt appropriate technologies and practices, collecting and communicating market-oriented information, identifying profitable markets and buyers and linking farmers to buyers, building marketing capacity among farmers, and facilitating organisation of farmers to conduct collective marketing of their produce. A market-oriented extension approach enables production and provides market information, including enabling market linkages among different actors within the agricultural value chains and views farming not only as a production unit but as an enterprise (Gebremedhin *et al*., 2012). The study's main aim was to determine the market orientation of AEAS in Malawi through a critical analysis of the different stakeholders' approaches. Specifically, the study analysed the market orientation of the extension and advisory services, conducted mapping of actors and stakeholders working with targeted extension and advisory service providers, analysed capacity gaps of extension and advisory service providers to deliver market-oriented extension and advisory services (MOEAS); and identified challenges in the implementation of MOEAS. The study contributes to the body of knowledge on extension approaches used in the delivery of extension services and in shaping policy and practice in the design and implementation of extension approaches through an understanding of the impacts, gaps and challenges.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study Site

The study was conducted in Dowa (Lisasadzi Extension Planning Areas (EPA), Lilongwe (Mitundu and Ukwe EPAs), and Mchinji (Chiosya EPA) districts in central Malawi following

specific extension service providers employing particular extension approaches targeting different groups of farmers.

2.2. Data Collection Methods

We collected both primary and secondary data. Secondary data involved reviewing the extension approaches in Malawi, including extension policy, the National Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services Strategy (NAEASS), reports from public, private and civil society extension service providers and journal articles. The key output of the desk review was documentation of agricultural extension approaches being implemented in Malawi, their rationale, mandate, underlying assumptions, theoretical underpinnings, policy alignment and implementation strategies. We used these themes to evaluate extension approaches as guided by Swanson, Bentz and Sofranko (1998). Through the desk review, the study selected the extension approaches to establish their market orientation theoretically (based on desk review) and practically (based on interviews). The study was grounded on a constructivist epistemology, which recognises multiple realities based on the perspectives of different social actors. The research used a qualitative case study approach to allow AEAS providers' and farmers' perspectives to emerge, where focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) were the key research strategies. The researchers had a moderated interaction with AEAS providers and farmers. They collected data on their knowledge, experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes on the market-orientedness of agricultural extension approaches in Malawi. FGDs enable people to ponder, reflect, listen to the experiences and opinions of others, and interact (Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Krueger & Casey, 2000).

2.3. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Multistage purposive and snowballing sampling techniques were used to select the stakeholders to participate in the study. The first stage involved the identification of extension approaches that are used in Malawi. This was done through a literature review and expert consultation. The approaches include the general agriculture extension approach, commodity specialised approach, farmer field school, farmer business school, model village, lead farmer approach, project approach, smallholder horticulture empowerment and promotion (SHEP) approach and household approach. Through consultation with government extension officials on the approaches that are commonly used and have wide coverage, we selected the government extension approach, commodity specialised approach, farmer business approach,

and SHEP approach. The second stage involved selecting extension service providers and employing the approaches from different types of extension service providers. The choice of the providers was also informed by the value chains they are promoting. Their importance guided our interest in the value chains regarding food and income provision and diversification, i.e. maize, groundnuts, tobacco and livestock. The following service providers were selected based on how active they are and their coverage: public- the Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES), private- Agricultural Research Extension Trust (ARET), NGOs- HEIFER International and farmer-based organisation- National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM). The third stage involved selecting study participants using the purposive method to target those with experiences and knowledge crucial to the study. The study collected data from 12 national, district, and field key informants. We also gathered data through 11 FGDs involving 84 participants (See details in Table 1). The limitation of the study is that we did not collect data on the interests and needs of farmers regarding commercialisation so that extension services can be customised towards farmer's needs.

TABLE 1: Selection of Case Studies

Approach	**National level (KII)**	**District level (KII)**	**Field Level (KII)**	**FGD participants**	
				Men	**Women**
DAES General agriculture extension approach SHEP approach	Senior Agribusiness Officer	Agribusiness officer – Lilongwe East Mitundu EPA	Agricultural Extension Development Officer	8	10 9
General agriculture extension approach Farmer business school		Agribusiness officer- Lilongwe West UKWE EPA	Agricultural Extension Development Officer	6	8 7
ARET Commodity specialised approach	Extension services coordinator	Land husbandry officer	Extension agent	7	0

		Lilongwe	Nsaru, Lilongwe		
NASFAM Business oriented approach Farmer-to-farmer approach	Farm services coordinator Business and marketing development manager	-	Field officer Lisasadzi EPA, Dowa	6	9
HEIFER International Commodity specialised approach Project Approach	Director of Programs	-	- Chiosya EPA, Mchinji	6	8
Total	5	3	4	33	51

2.4. Data Analysis

This study adopted the constant comparison analysis approach developed by Glaser (1965). The analysis was done using audio-recorded transcripts and later manually transcribed. Transcript-based analysis is one of the most methodical and time-consuming styles of qualitative data analysis (Onwuegbuzie, 2009). The study used five steps to analyse the data. The first step involved meticulously reading and reviewing the transcripts of all FGDs and KIIs conducted in the four organisations (DAES), ARET, NASFAM and HEIFER International, to acquaint researchers with the subject matter. The second step was to categorise themes. The researchers identified four themes: 1) Actors in MOEAS, 2) Capacity of the MOEAS providers, 3) Challenges/barriers in implementing MOEAS, and 4) Market orientation of the approaches. Accordingly, in the third stage, the researchers developed a colour code for content related to the four themes. The fourth step was colour-highlighting and categorising the explanations that reverberated with each theme. The participants' explanations identified for each theme were then listed in an Excel sheet. The researchers then studied all the explanations and additionally classified these explanations into subclasses. For instance, all the explanations supporting theme one were sorted and categorised under that theme (Krueger & Casey, 2000). At this stage,

the data was ready for analysis. The results were linked to the research objectives and then mapped and interpreted (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Characteristics of Study Participants

TABLE 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	DAES (n=49)		NASFAM (n=12)		ARET (n=7)		HEIFER (n=16)		TOTAL % OF RESPONDENTS (n=84)
Sex of respondent	**Freq**	**(%)**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**%**
Male	15	(30)	3	(25)	7	(100)	8	(50)	**33 (39)**
Female	34	(70)	9	(75)	0	(0)	8	(50)	**51 (61)**
TOTAL	**49**	**(58)**	**12**	**(14)**	**7**	**(8)**	**16**	**(19)**	**84 (100)**
Marital status									
Unmarried	6	(12)	4	(33)	0	(0)	2	(12)	**12 (14)**
Married	43	(88)	8	(67)	7	(100)	14	(88)	**72 (86)**
TOTAL	**49**		**12**		**20**		**20**		**84 (100)**
Education level									
None	6	(12)	1	(8)	0	(0)	4	(25)	**11 (13)**
Primary	38	(78)	5	(42)	4	(57)	9	(56)	**56 (67)**
Secondary	5	(10)	6	(50)	3	(43)	3	(19)	**17 (20)**
TOTAL	**49**		**12**		**7**		**16**		**100.0%**
Household Head									
Male	43	(88)	8	(67)	7	(100)	14	(88)	**72(86)**
Female	6	(12)	4	(33)	0	(0)	2	(12)	**12(14)**

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TOTAL	**49**	**12**	**7**	**16**	**(100)**
Age (Years)			***Mean***		
	47	44	48	55	

Eighty-four smallholder farmers participated in the study, comprising 33 (39%) men and 51 (61%) women. These farmers were organised in groups and engaged in different commercial agricultural enterprises supported by different organisations. Out of the 84 farmers, 49 farmers (15 men and 34 women) participated under DAES, 12 farmers (three men and nine women) participated under NASFAM, seven farmers (all men) were involved through ARET, and 16 farmers (eight men and eight women) participated under HEIFER International. The 49 farmers that DAES supported came from two groups-- Tikondane Club (35 members) from Lilongwe West specialising in groundnut production, and Farmer Business School (14) from Lilongwe East producing groundnuts—the sampled households comprised 86% male-headed and 14% female-headed households. Most of the respondents were married (86%). Most respondents were primary school dropouts (67%), followed by secondary school dropouts (20%) while 11% never attended primary school. The mean ages for the participants were as follows: DAES 47 years (25 min- 63 max), ARET 44 years (27 min-75 max), HEIFER International 48 years (30 min-74 max), NASFAM 55 years (37 min- 61 max).

3.2. Market Orientation of Extension and Advisory Service Approaches

Market orientation rating was done using the Likert scale to assess the alignment of the approach to market-oriented extension principles, including resource-based, business principles, commodity development approach, based on value chain framework, and bottom-up and participatory (Gebremedhin *et al*., 2012). We asked extension staff to determine how well the approach aligns with the extension principles. Farmers were asked how well the approach helped them to take farming as a business. The analysis shows that all service providers are implementing market-oriented extension approaches, but the degree to which these approaches are consistent with market-oriented principles differs. Some are more market-oriented than others. Table 3 summarises the findings on the market orientation of the approaches.

TABLE 3: Market Orientation of Extension Approaches

Organisation	Approach	Market orientation rating	Reasons for rating
DAES	SHEP	4	SHEP has a principle that promotes 'growing to sell,' it also improves farmers' skills in producing and marketing the produce. However, it is not rated very best because it is new, and we have yet to see its full impact.
	FBS	3	Yes, it teaches farmers the principle of farming as a business. The approach has been there for a long time, but farmers are still facing challenges to improve their livelihoods. There is low horizontal and vertical mobility of livelihood activities.
ARET	Commodity specialised approach	3	In as much as it helps to concentrate on one commodity and improve production, which increases produce for sale, the approach is top-down in nature and does not consider the needs of farmers.
NASFAM	Commodity specialised approach	4	The approach under NASFAM helps farmers access inputs, markets and extension and advisory services, which are crucial in market-oriented extension and advisory services. It also ensures adherence to international quality standards for groundnuts to sell at international markets.
Heifer international	Project approach	3	Despite the approach being implemented quickly, farmers benefited from receiving dairy animals and extension and advisory

		services to take dairy farming as a business. Farmers also benefitted from physical infrastructure (building and cooling equipment)
Commodity specialised approach	3	Focusing on the dairy value chain's production and marketing activities helps farmers get the most benefits from extension and advisory services.

Note: 1=worst, 2=worse, 3=medium, 4=best, and 5=very best

The analysis shows that the SHEP approach implemented by DAES and the commodity-specialised approach implemented by NASFAM have the best market orientation rating because they adhere to principles of market-oriented extension. However, SHEP was considered the best because it applies the bottom-up and participatory principle, unlike the commodity-specialised approach, and because of its impact on farmers. Some of the effects that the SHEP approach has on farmers include improved income through producing more and selling more, group selling; accessing cheap quality seeds through collective buying; increased production through following recommended agronomic practices; improved food security through producing more and having access to income; engagement in off-farm businesses including grocery store; educating children; accumulating assets (e.g. livestock, oxcarts).

> *"We really make some profits if we have quality products. For example, at one point at Mitundu market, tomatoes were fetching different prices depending on quality. High-quality tomatoes were sold at 3.46 US$ per bucket, while low-quality tomatoes were sold at half that price (1.73 US$) per the same bucket. This is an indication that no matter how much large the yield is, if the product is well taken care of and is of high quality, it will fetch a lot of profits."* FGD with women, Kabambe village, Mitundu EPA.

3.3. Actors Working with Service Providers in Implementing MOEAS

The study mapped service providers and actors in the implementation of MOEAS. Figure 1 presents a summary map of the providers and the actors they work with in implementing MOEAS. Findings demonstrate various actors that work with DAES, HEIFER, ARET and NASFAM, falling in the categories including financial institutions, smallholder farmers,

produce buyers, seed and input suppliers, supermarkets, capacity building and transportation. Implementing decentralised and pluralistic policies in providing extension and advisory services has led to increased availability of actors providing extension services to farmers in most developing countries, including Malawi. Notably, among the actors, DAES networks more with HEIFER International than NASFAM while having no interactions with ARET. ARET, HEIFER International and NASFAM do not interact as they implement MOEAS. This demonstrates that HEIFER International gets more support from government extension workers in delivering MOEAS than NASFAM and ARET. What is clear about the providers is that they have a shared goal of improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers by developing their farming business capacity. However, inadequate and weak interactions among them may lead to differences in their knowledge and capacity regarding the skills or knowledge required to promote MOEAS. Lack of shared knowledge and practice among providers may contribute to the delivery of uncoordinated and duplication of efforts, thereby limiting the effectiveness of MOEAS delivery (Lamm, Masambuka-Kanchewa, Lamm, Davis, & Nahdy, 2020). Enhancing coordination and collaboration among the service providers is of utmost importance if their efforts to improve farmers' business capacity are to be fruitful.

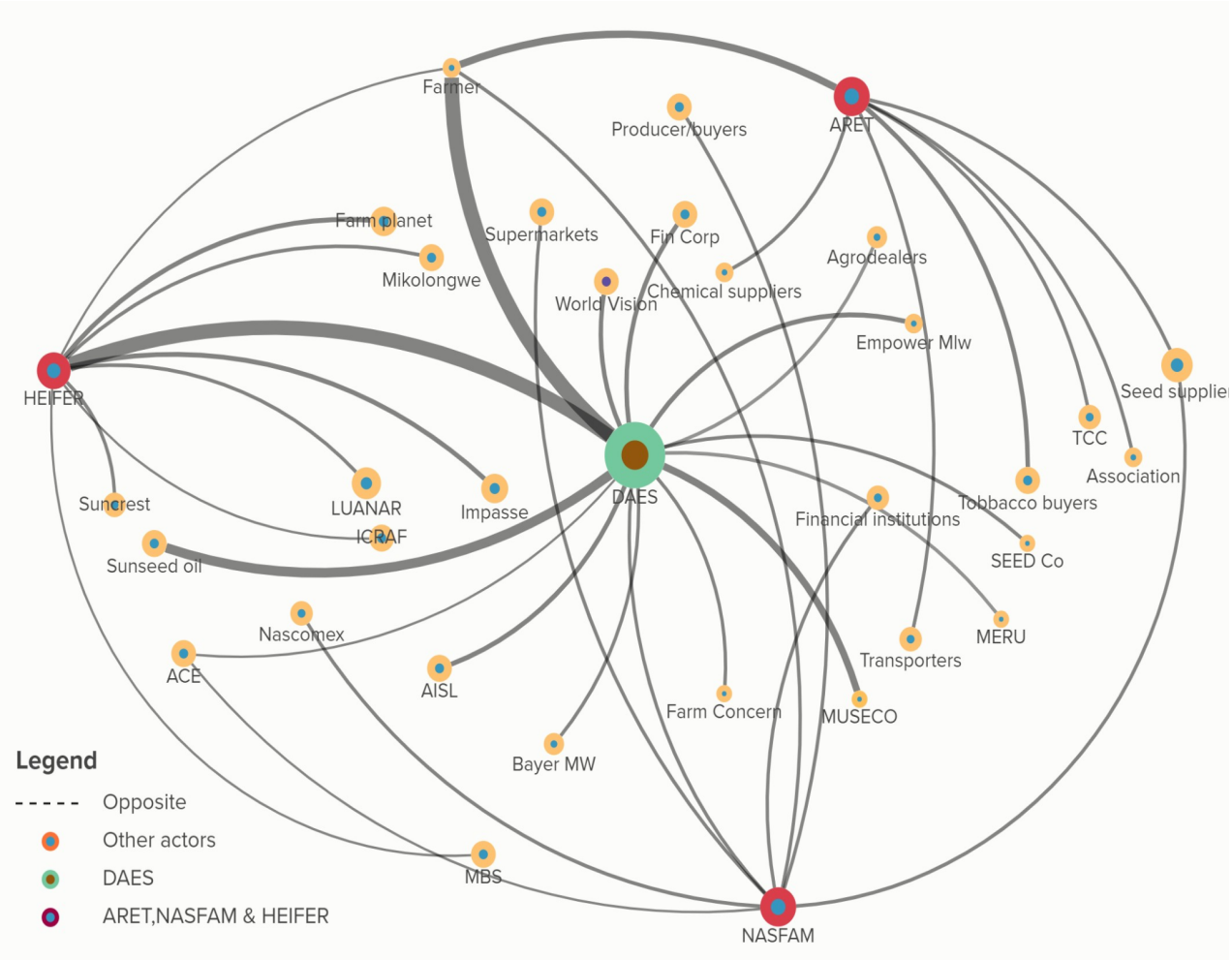

FIGURE 1: Actors Networks in the Provision of Market-Oriented Extension and Advisory Services

3.4. Extension Service Providers' Perceptions of Their Capacities

We asked extension providers to rate their capacity in the identified 14 areas (See Figure 2). The themes were determined based on FAO's guidelines for assessing organisation's capacities (FAO, 2022). We identified common and divergent views from the responses based on content analysis. Figure 2 the perceptions of capacity gaps in each of the organisations engaged. This study has determined that the four organisations perceived capacity gaps in five aspects required for supporting market-oriented extension and advisory services. The gaps identified were related to networking, resource mobilisation, knowledge management and communication, governance, monitoring, evaluation and learning systems.

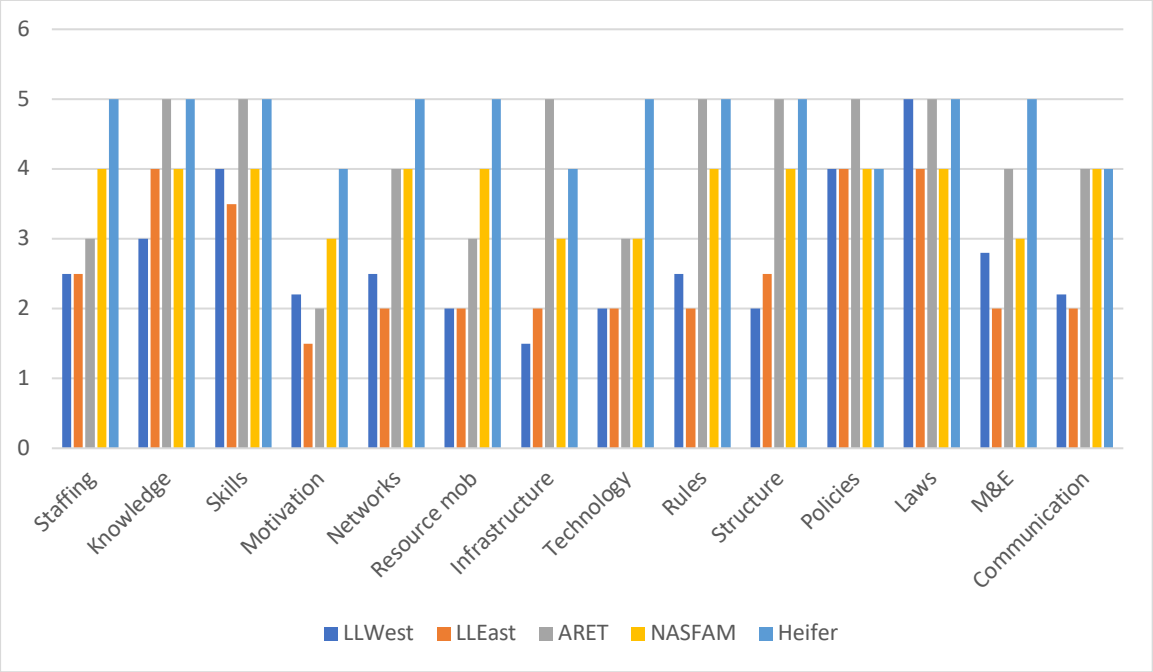

FIGURE 2: Perceptions on the Capacity of Service Providers in Supporting MOEAS

Notes: Scores from a scale of 1 to 5 (0= no capacity, 1= very low, 2= low, 3=medium, 4=high, 5=very high).

The analysis is clear that DAES perceived capacity gaps in all the areas, and Heifer perceived the least capacity gaps. This means that the delivery of AEAS is more challenging for DAES than for other providers. The implication is that since DAES has the largest coverage, many farmers receive poor and inadequate AEAS because of its capacity gaps. This could also impact farmers' benefits from extension and their participation in farming and the market. Others have reported capacity challenges in public extension, including Belay & Abebaw (2004) in Ethiopia and Adejo, Okwu & Ibrahim (2012) in Nigeria.

3.5. Challenges in the Implementation of MOEAS

The study analysed the challenges that AEAS providers face in implementing MOEAS. Table 4 presents the challenges that extension service providers mentioned.

TABLE 4: Challenges in the Provision of MOEAS

Challenges	Explanation/quotes
Lack of availability of policy documents and weak legal	*"The government departments sometimes they are a bit slow, we work at a different pace. It's a challenge when we align to what we want to achieve and the*

frameworks to guide implementation of MOEAS	*support that we get from the government is poor. For example, the review of Milk Act and the review of the board has taken two years for the government to set up the board after the recommendations were made."* KII with Director of Programs Heifer International.
Poor information sharing among stakeholders	*"…there are forums at district level where actors share ideas and issues…. So somehow, it is working, but it needs improvement.* KII with Business and Market Development Manager, NASFAM. *"The dairy processors keep information, they do not share the information easily to protect their data. The information is there but it's not released."* KII with Director of Programs Heifer International.
Poor access to inputs among farmers in rural areas	*"Fertilizer and other inputs are very expensive for us to manage."* FGD with tobacco farmers in Nsalu, Lilongwe.
Low production levels among farmers which affect their market participation and bargaining power	*"…last season, a good number of farmers had their tobacco affected by heavy rains which made the production to be very low. We were supposed to produce about 140 million tonnes, but we had around 70 million. This is happening frequently because of the impacts of climate change… the rains may be heavy or scanty". KII with Extension agent, ARET, Nsalu, Lilongwe.* *"Malawi Dairy Industries started buying from us in 2015 when the cows started producing milk. Then Lilongwe Dairy came, but because our milk production went down due to cattle diseases…, we were not supplying enough, both companies stopped buying from us….they required 800 litres/day but we could only supply 300 litres/day".* FGD with

	farmers-milk bulking group, Mchinji dairy cooperative, Chiosya EPA.
Poor mobility among frontline extension workers	*"Another challenge is the issue of mobility. Many extension workers use bicycles which makes it difficult to reach out to many farmers as bicycles easily get broken down. The extension workers would love to have motorbikes to ease the mobility problem. This mobility problem is at both EPA and district levels. For instance, we only have one vehicle to cater for different departments in terms of supervision, follow-ups and trainings which makes it a challenge for us to reach out to many farmers."* KII with field officer ARET.
Inadequate funding to implement activities	*"Mostly we don't have enough money for farming so we look for crops that will not require a lot of inputs, such crops are groundnuts, soybeans, sweet potatoes. These are the crops that do not require a lot of inputs as compared to maize, tobacco, and Irish potatoes."* Male participant, Kabambe village, Mitundu EPA, DAES.
High illiteracy levels among farmers	*"The challenge that we face with farmers is that it is difficult for them to understand the extension approaches we teach them. Maybe it is due to levels of literacy of the farmers. This makes the level of adoption of the extension approaches to be very slow. For instance, you find that something that we taught the farmers several years ago, it is taking a long time for them to understand it. Maybe it may also not only be an issue of the problem of literacy but also their beliefs which makes farmers results in slow adoption of the extension approaches we teach*

	them." KII with Trade officer, NASFAM country office.
Reluctance to change mindset towards farming for business among farmers.	*"Most of the farmers do not want to bulk their produce to sell as a group, they are afraid of the unknown. So, by training them, we would like to change their mindset to produce for the market in addition to producing for consumption…*" KII with Agricultural Extension Development Officer (AEDO), DAES, Mitundu EPA. *"Farmers lack the patience for them to remain in the group until a market is identified. They rush to sell to other unprofitable markets to get quick cash. This could be because farming is their only source of income".* KII with AEDO, DAES UKWE EPA, Lilongwe. *"…they (farmers) have their own way of doing farm activities and when you try to help them, there is that kind of resistance to implement new ideas.* KII with Extension agent, ARET, Nsalu, Lilongwe
Lack of trust among farmers hinders collective marketing	*"The other problem is that, though we have a warehouse where farmers can group and store together their groundnuts and soyabeans, they still don't trust anybody, to look after the commodity before selling it and later on when the weights differ due to moisture loss, they think something fishy happened to their produce."* KII with Association Field Officer, NASFAM, UKWE EPA, Lilongwe.
Political influence on marketing of produce	*"Government sets a minimum price but you will find that some buyers will still be buying produce from farmers below the minimum price. But there are no enforcement measures. At district level there is nothing we can do to do the enforcement of such*

	much as we try our best to talk to buyers to honour their promises to farmers. For example, we may talk to buyers pertaining to these issues, they make their own promises, but they end up not fulfilling those promises. Farmers are made to wait for payment as time elapses until the next production season". KII with Agribusiness officer, DAES Lilongwe West.
High extension worker-to-farmer ratio	*"The first challenge we have is the poor extension worker to farmer ratio. There are few agricultural extension workers against a large number of farmers as a result not every farmer is reached out to. That is, there is low coverage"* KII with Agribusiness Officer, DAES, Lilongwe East.
Poor coordination among actors	*"The major challenge is poor coordination. There is a lack of coordination whereby sometimes we don't know how some actors are implementing their extension concepts which bring about other challenges. For instance, this lack of coordination may result in the farmers getting contradictory messages from the actors and us, thereby confusing farmers."* KII with Agribusiness Officer, Lilongwe West. *"…we need to harmonise extension approaches that are used by different players so that we can speak the same language not to confuse an ordinary farmer."* KII with Farm Services Coordinator, NASFAM.

Some of the challenges include: lack of availability of policy documents and weak legal frameworks to guide the implementation MOEAS; lack of information sharing among stakeholders which affects feedback to farmers for them to make informed decisions; trustto inputs in rural areas; low production levels among farmers affecting their market participation and bargaining power; poor mobility in terms of transport infrastructure (vehicles) and resources (fuel) among frontline extension workers affecting their work; inadequate funding to

implement activities; high illiteracy levels among farmers hindering their understanding and interpretation of extension messages and technologies; some farmers are reluctant to change their mind set towards farming as a business of risk aversion; it is difficult to promote collective marketing among farmers because of lack of trust; it is difficult to control the political influence on marketing of produce, hence the marketing environment is not conducive to benefit farmers. There is a huge extension worker-to-farmer ratio, which affects the effective implementation of activities. Some of these challenges have also been observed by other authors (Lukhalo & Zwane, 2022) in South Africa, who observed that the budgetary allocation and public expenditure to farmer programmes was insufficient. In Pakistan, Yaseen, Shiwei, Wen and Hassan (2015) identified adequate funding, poor transportation and large jurisdiction areas as challenges extension workers faced.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the extent to which agricultural extension approaches are market-oriented. Other studies have also argued that AEAS has limited contributions towards agricultural productivity and commercialisation. AEAS in Malawi are necessary but not enough to enable enhanced productivity and drive commercialisation among smallholder farmers because of other factors beyond the control of agricultural extension. The extension approaches exhibit different levels of market orientation. Most of them lack complete market orientation, impacting targeted farmers' benefits and impeding providers' efforts to advance the commercialisation agenda. AEAS providers have inadequate and weak networks, which affects knowledge and capacities to support MOEAS and the delivery of coordinated efforts, thereby limiting the effectiveness of MOEAS. Different providers have varying gaps in capacities to promote MOEAS. Of concern is the government (DAES), which has huge capacity gaps and is the leading service provider. The implication is that most smallholder farmers accessing extension services from DAES are less likely to benefit from MOEAS.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Service providers of AEAS should design and implement tailored MOEAS for farmers who are commercialising at different levels. The government, through DAES, should champion coordination and collaboration of MOEAS providers if their efforts to improve farmers' business capacity are to be fruitful. Further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding

of the interests and needs of farmers regarding commercialisation so that extension services can be tailored to farmers' needs.

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