

**PROPOSED FRAMEWORK TO IMPROVE THE COORDINATION OF AND TO STRENGTHEN AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT SERVICES LINKAGES IN THE OSHIKOTO REGION IN NAMIBIA.**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study was part of a broader study that developed a framework for improving coordination in the provision of Agricultural Support Services (ASS) to farmers in the Oshikoto region, Namibia. This part of the study determined coordination linkages among various stakeholders of ASS in the region, and the study revealed weak linkages among ASS providers, although a significant eagerness for them to work together was identified and great emphasis was placed on collaborative work plans and budgeting that needs to be in place for them to work together. The input from the stakeholders on various ASS led to the suggested framework to improve the coordination of and to strengthen ASS linkages in the Oshikoto region. The suggested framework emphasises the importance of a bottom-up approach and that all ASS providers, as well as farmers, must be represented at all decentralised structures. It is essential for Agricultural Extension Specialists (AESs) to be represented at all the levels, as well as for Subject Matter Specialists (SMSs) to give constant advice to the headmen and councillors in the region. For this framework to be successful, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and professional bodies should be in place, as well as financial investment and continuous monitoring and evaluation (M & E).*

**Keywords:** Framework, Collaboration, Coordination, Agricultural Support Services, Linkages.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Because of budget cuts in most agricultural extension service sectors around the world, most extension organisations are disorganised and work in isolation. Namibia is no exception. Düvel (1999) and Okorley, Gray & Reid (2009) observed that collaboration and the coordination of activities reduce the probability of duplication and the wastage of scarce resources. Duplicated efforts can be avoided if organisations working in the same region establish partnership platforms that include farmer groups and agricultural development institutions (Düvel, 2005). It is essential that the platforms be based at the community level for the community to regard them as their own. Establishing the platform at a higher level risks a lack of ownership by the community and may result in only partial participation in its activities (Düvel, 2005). The partnership platforms should coordinate activities and projects that arise from the community level. Unless the communities are closely involved in developing and implementing projects, the platforms will be regarded as instruments of development and not as agents of change.

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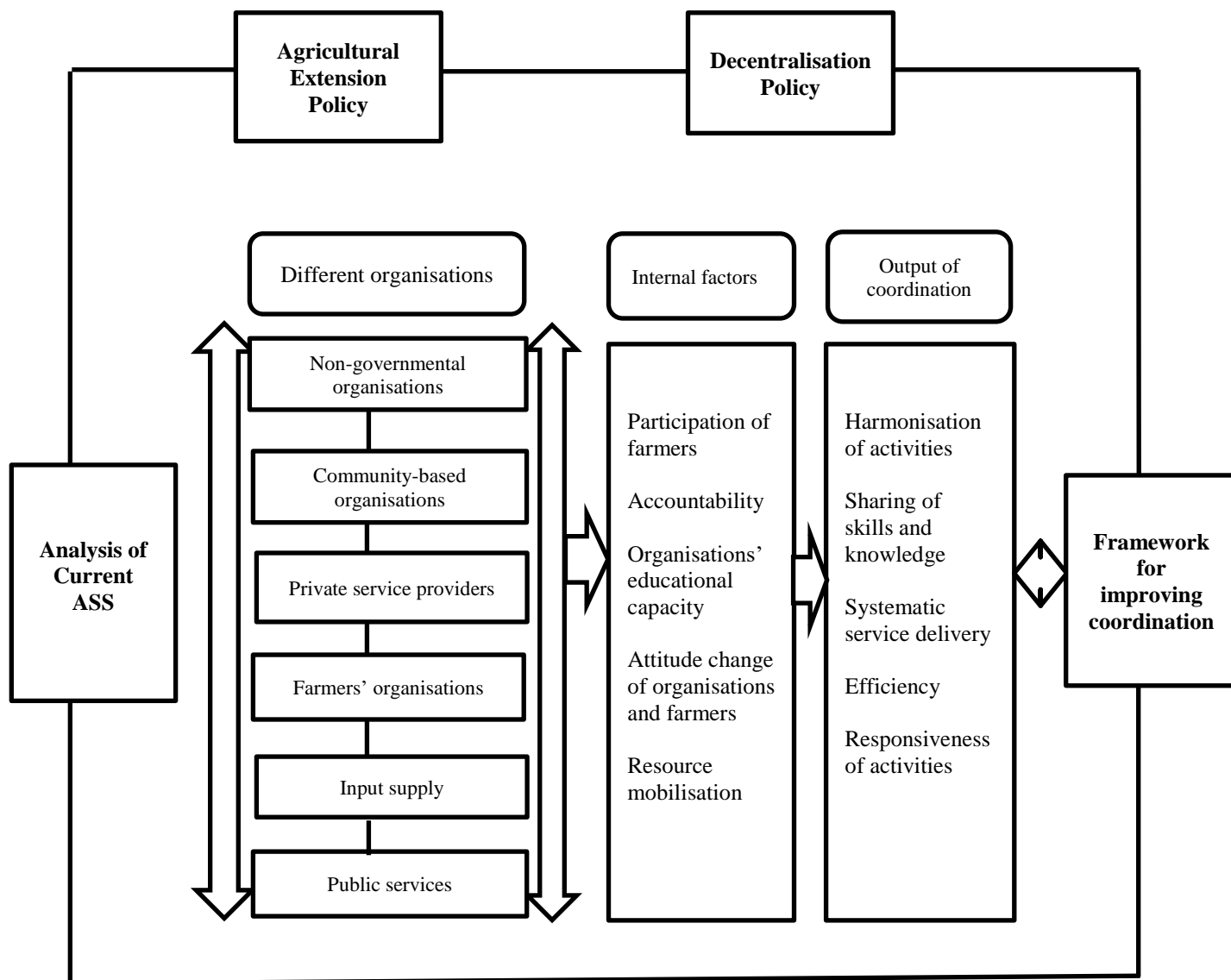
### **1.1. Current decentralisation structures**

The Namibian government developed the Decentralisation Policy in March 1997, with the aim of bringing services closer to the community, improving government capacity, and planning the administration of development in the country (MRLGHRD, 1998:5). Although the Decentralisation Policy seems to have set all the hierarchical elements in place, from the lower community level to the national level, Larsen (2003) observed that the lower levels of the decentralisation structure are weak, particularly on the village and Constituency Development Committees (CDCs) levels (see below). Larsen (2003) further noted that the participation of the community in the development of projects was limited and that most community members were not aware that the Decentralisation Policy enabled them to participate in development activities. In the absence of adequately harmonised policies and strategies, the decentralisation structures in Namibia are likely to remain fragile. The purpose of this paper is therefore to suggest a framework on how best the ASS providers in the Oshikoto region can coordinate and collaborate to avoid the duplication of activities.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1 is enclosed by an agricultural extension policy and a decentralisation policy that needs to be taken care of for effective ASS provider work to take place. The Extension Policy is of paramount importance for the organisations to agree on extension functions, as well as the clients to be served by different organisations (Contado, 1997). The Decentralisation Policy, on the other hand, is to transfer specific decision functions to regional levels. The internal factors are essential elements that will lead to the output of coordination and ultimately to the framework for improving coordination.

The internal factors are the extent to which the farmers participate in agricultural activities, as well as the accountability of both farmers and organisations that are involved in agricultural extension. Qualified extension and other service providers and subject matter specialists (SMSs) must assist the farmers to improve the productivity of their farming activities – their facilitation skills should be sufficient to help the farmers. There should be sufficient funding for extension providers to carry out extension activities affectively. Coordinated organisations will not be able to function properly unless the adequate infrastructure is in place for regular meetings and information sharing. The coordination of organisations leads to harmonised programmes, sharing of skills and knowledge, systematic service delivery by all organisations that avoid duplication, and the efficient use of resources. Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework for coordinated ASS in Namibia.



**Figure 1:** A conceptual framework for coordinated ASS in Namibia.

### 3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Namibian extension service has been highly dependent on public services since Namibian independence in 1990, with very few organisations assisting the government in the improvement of farmers' livelihood. Currently, different organisations such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), public research and education institutions, semi-public organisations, the private sector and firms, farmer-based organisations (FBOs), as well as cooperatives provide ASS to farmers. The many organisations who work with farmers seem to work in an unplanned and uncoordinated manner as three or four organisations could promote similar projects in the same community without being aware of one another (Jona, 2016).

Rivera and Alex (2004) and Qamar (2005) commented that the absence of coordination results in the failure of quality control and ineffective knowledge. It is against this backdrop that this paper aims to:

- determine coordination linkages among various stakeholders of ASS in the region;
- determine the perception and the attitude of ASS providers towards coordinated activities; and
- suggest a framework to improve the coordination of ASS providers, which includes an overview of the challenges and opportunities involved in operationalising an ASS framework and how best to work together to make use of the available resources.

## **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1. Research design**

The study was qualitative in nature, whereby 11 active ASS providers from different organisations who work closely with farmers were interviewed. The ASS providers were selected using the snowball sampling technique. Since very few organisations operate in the region, the ASS providers referred the researcher to other ASS providers.

### **4.2. Procedures for interviews**

Face-to-face interviews were conducted by research assistants who both spoke and read the local language (Oshiwambo) and English. The researcher provided these fieldworkers with background information on the study and trained them in the administration of the questionnaires. The data-collection tools focused on the issues reflected in the research objectives.

### **4.3. Data analysis**

Before the analysis of the data, the responses were checked with the aid of the relevant interviewer to ensure consistency and completeness. The data analysis was conducted manually by reviewing the notes and transcripts to identify appropriate themes. The data extracted from the relevant documents were also presented in tables and discussed in the context of the research objectives.

## **5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The questionnaire was administered to 11 ASS providers to draw out their insight into and understanding of their experiences of the following objectives:

- To determine coordination linkages among various stakeholders of ASS in the region.
- To determine the perception and the attitude of ASS providers towards coordinated activities.

Table 1 shows the names and levels of operations of the service providers that participated in the interviews in the Oshikoto region.

**Table 1:** Names and types of ASS providers included in the study in the Oshikoto region.

ASS Organisation	Type	Level
Directorate of Extension and Engineering Services (DEES)	GRN*	Regional
Agro-marketing and Trade Agency (AMTA)	Parastatal	Regional
Namibian National Farmers' Union (NNFU)	FBO	National
Oshikoto Regional Farmers' Union (ORFU)	FBO	Regional
Directorate of Veterinary Services (DVS)	GRN	Regional
Agricultural Mentors (Farmers' Support Project) (FSP)	NGO	Regional
Okashana Community Outreach Research Station (OCORS)	GRN	Regional
Okashana Research Station (Centre) (ORC)	GRN	Regional
Oshikoto Marketing Cooperative (OMC)	FBO	Regional
Medicine World (Traders) (MW)	Input supply	Regional
Higher Education Institution (UNAM)	Institution	National

\*Government of the Republic of Namibia

According to Table 1, of the 11 organisations interviewed in the region, four were governmental institutions, three were FBOs, one was an Input Supply Trader (Medicine World), and one a Higher Education Institution (University of Namibia [UNAM]). Also present were one Parastatal (AMTA) and one Agricultural Mentor. Most of the ASS providers interviewed were represented at the regional level, although their main branches were based at the national level. Some of the ASS providers, such as UNAM, NNFU, and AMTA, were working across the four northern regions; with Oshikoto region being one of them.

The 11 ASS providers were asked to explain how they developed their agricultural support activities with other ASS providers in the region. Of the 11 organisations interviewed, four organisations mentioned that they had not developed any ASS activities with other organisations and that their activities were authorised at the national level. Only two of the ASS providers mentioned that they conducted their activities together with the farmers to prioritise the farmers' needs.

The ASS providers were requested to mention the organisations that would be useful to cooperate with on a five-point Likert scale (very useful, useful, moderate, weakly useful, or no useful linkages at all). Seventy percent (70%) of the ASS providers found the Oshikoto Regional Council and DEES very useful to work with. The main reason given was that they have offices in all the constituencies, which made it easier for them to access farmers to work with. In addition to the above reason, the Oshikoto Regional Council is where all the councillors of constituencies meet and, being politicians, they were found to be very influential regarding the development activities in their constituencies. Fifty-six percent (56%) of the ASS providers indicated ORFU and the DVS very useful to cooperate with. Forty percent (40%) of the organisation indicated Agricultural Mentors to be very useful. Forty percent (40%) of the organisations indicated the ORC to be very useful to work with, on the condition that more research concerning the region would be conducted and be accessible to the regions.

The ASS organisations were also asked to characterise the strength of organisational linkages with other organisations on a five-point Likert scale (very strong, strong, moderate, weak, or no linkages). Most of the ASS providers were not satisfied with the current strength of the linkages on the ground. Only 40% of the ASS providers indicated having strong linkages with

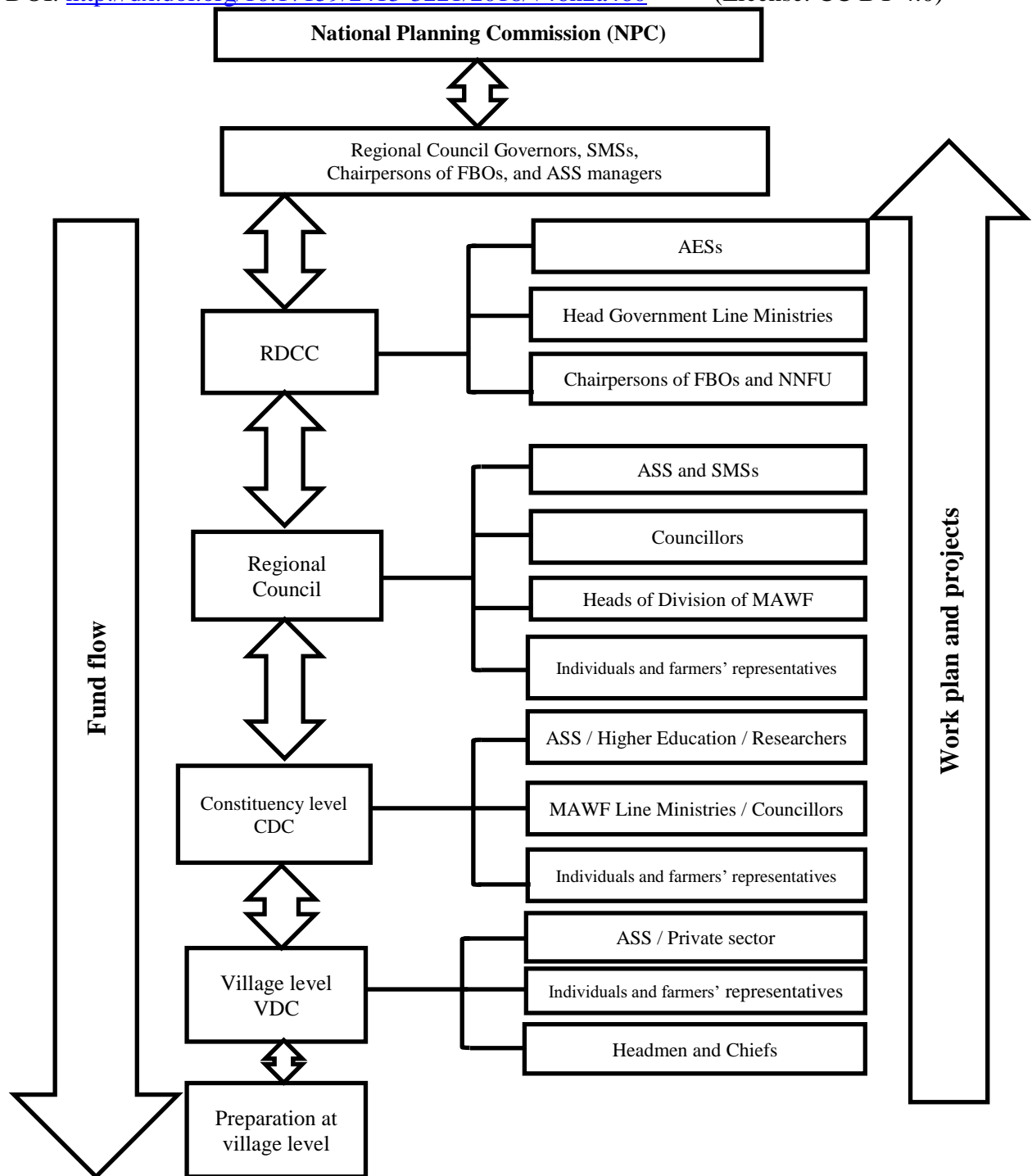
the DEES and Oshikoto Regional Council. The rest of the ASS providers indicated only 10% to 30% strong relationships with other organisations. Some of the organisations seemed not to have any linkages with other organisations at all; this indication is worrisome if Namibia is to achieve Vision 2030 because all the organisations must work together.

Based on the evidence from the 11 ASS providers, it is evident that ASS providers would like to work together, but there is a weak linkage of cooperation between the organisations. Based on the latter, a framework for coordinated ASS was proposed in the Oshikoto region from the preparation at the village level to the National Planning Commission (NPC). Emphasis was placed on collaborative work plans and projects from the village level and how the funds should flow from the national level to the village level.

### **5.1. The proposed framework for coordinated ASS in the Oshikoto region**

The ASS framework (presented in Figure 2) does not aim to change or subvert the Decentralisation Policy of 1997, but rather to complement the policy by improving the coordination of the ASS provided to farmers in the Oshikoto region of Namibia and suggesting how stakeholders can best collaborate on work plans and projects that are based on the farmers' needs.

As noted above, most of the information used in developing this framework was collected from farmers and ASS providers in the Oshikoto region during the author's PhD study. Some of the ideas were based on Düvel's (2005) institutional linkage structure for participatory development, and Swanson, Singh & Reddy's (2008) agriculture technology management agency model.



**Figure 2:** Proposed framework structure for coordination in the Oshikoto region.

Source: Jona (2016)

Legend: AES = Agricultural Extension Specialist; ASS = Agricultural Support Services; FBO = Farmer-based organisation; MAWF = Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry; NNFU = Namibia National Farmers' Union; RDCC = Regional Development Coordinating Committee; VDC = Village Development Committee; SMS = Subject Matter Specialist.

## **5.2. Preparation for agricultural services at village level**

The effectiveness of preparations at village level will determine the quality of the projects carried out by the community and the work plan executed by ASS providers. The ASS providers should work closely with headmen and villagers to categorise local farmers into groups according to their farming interests and needs. Next, the providers should conduct a participatory needs assessment with each group to identify possible community projects for further discussion and deliberation by the VDC. The identified chairpersons or group leaders of each interest group should serve the VDC.

## **5.3. Village Development Committee (VDC)**

After the preparatory process has been completed, the chairs of the interest groups should be included in the VDC. Because 29% of the farmers interviewed indicated that they depended on influential local farmers for information, it was felt that village headmen should lead the VDC. Most of the farmers and service providers were divided on the question of who should assist the headmen in leading the committee. Some felt that the headmen should be assisted by experienced farmers; others felt that this role should be played by the service providers and the private sector. The VDC meetings should be open to all community members and officials who want to attend. Under the current Decentralisation Policy, the functions of the VDC are to identify and evaluate local challenges and to devise different development projects.

The proposed framework suggests that the VDC should prioritise the activities in the work plans and the possible projects to be funded by the government. The work plans should be approved by the farmers before forwarding them to the next level, which is the CDC.

## **5.4. Constituency Development Committee (CDC)**

Under the Decentralisation Policy of 1997, the CDC is chaired by a nominated councillor. An administrator from the councillor's office writes proposals. The CDC has similar functions to the VDC but operates at a higher level. The CDC identifies and evaluates local needs/problems and monitors the projects that originated from the VDC. The CDC consists of selected members from different government ministries, which are based at the constituency level. The CDC reports to the Regional Council (MRLGHRD, 1998; Larsen, 2003). The majority of farmers and ASS providers interviewed agreed that the CDC should be chaired by a councillor from the region and assisted by an ASS provider or fellow farmer. The CDC should work closely with service providers to develop a regional work plan, with assistance from agricultural SMSs. The CDC should include representation from an institution of higher education to assist with the identification and fulfilment of training needs. All work plan activities should be prioritised, costed activities that need further research identified, and work plans approved by farmers or their representatives. Larger projects that need funding should be prioritised and forwarded to the regional government for consideration. The chair of the CDC, the SMS, all service providers, and researchers should represent the CDC at the regional council. The other farmers and service provider representatives should give feedback at the VDC level.

## **5.5. Regional Council Committee (RCC)**

Under the Decentralisation Policy of 1997, the Regional Council consists of elected councillors from different constituencies in the region. The potential projects that were identified at the CDC level are forwarded to the Regional Council for further scrutiny based on the availability



of financial resources. The secretary, nominated by a Regional Management Committee (RMC), writes the proposals on this level. The Regional Council approves or rejects plans according to the priorities of the region. Approved projects are forwarded for further consideration to the Regional Development Coordinating Committee (RDCC) for funding based on the availability of resources (MRLGHRD, 1998).

The proposed changes in the current framework suggest that regional councillors, agricultural services providers, SMSs, farmers, farmer representatives, and heads of divisions of the MAWF should be part of the RCC. The SMS will advise on agricultural technical aspects to the councillors, the heads of divisions of the MAWF, and the farmers to support their work plans and projects. All work plans and projects will be finalised and approved by the RCC. The service providers with responsibility for the different project activities shall be identified based on their experience and qualifications. All activities that need further research will also be prioritised and finalised. The projects will be further scrutinised and reprioritised – with support from the SMS – based on funding availability. RCC representatives who serve in the CDC should give feedback to the CDC members on the selected projects.

### **5.6. Regional Development Coordinating Committee (RDCC)**

The RDCC is chaired by the Regional Governor and consists of the constituency's councillors and senior administrative staff of ministry departments in the region. The RDCC prioritises proposed development projects and forwards them to the Regional Councillors and Governors Committee for approval (MRLGHRD, 1998).

In addition to councillors and representatives of the different ministries in the region, SMSs, individual farmers, and farmers' representatives should be included in the RDCC. The SMS will give advice on technical agricultural matters, and the farmers will witness the transparency of the RDCC and understand why certain projects are prioritised above others. The SMSs and farmers that will represent the group at the Regional Council and the Governor's Committee should be chosen at this point. The representatives who are not selected to serve on the next committee should give feedback on the selected projects at the regional level.

### **5.7. Regional Councillors and Governor's Committee**

Under the Decentralisation Policy of 1997, this committee is chaired by the Regional Governor. The chief regional officer ensures that the proposal is written according to their standard. The Regional Councillors and the Governor approve priority projects from the RDCC and forward them to the relevant ministries for consideration. The line ministries prepare the budgets for possible funding and send them to the Ministry of Finance for consideration. Once the project is approved and budgeted for, the Regional Council conducts a feasibility study on the project. This is followed by the advertisement of a tender, which is mostly awarded to local companies before considering outsiders. Once the tender is awarded, the Regional Council (Development Planner) monitors and evaluates the progress of the project (MRLGHRD, 1998).

The author is of the opinion that the work of this committee seems to be the same as that of the RDCC. This committee may include SMSs and farmer representatives. The SMS will advise the councillors and governors on technical agricultural aspects because most of them are politicians and may lack an understanding of agricultural technicalities. The farmers' representative in this committee will be responsible for giving feedback to fellow farmers in the VDCs and the CDCs.

## **5.8. National Planning Commission (NPC)**

Under the current Decentralisation Policy, the NPC determines the priorities of all 14 regions of Namibia. The NPC also coordinates and implements the National Development Plan (NDP), which is part of the implementation of Vision 2030. This body only attends regional meetings on invitation or when monitoring projects for planning purposes. The potential projects identified through the framework process are only funded in the following financial year once priorities have been set (MRLGHRD, 2011).

The NPC sets national priorities, together with the Ministry of Finance, and considers projects from the regions. It will, however, be important for the NPC to grant the regions the power to administer their own finances. As the framework suggests, the work plan will originate from the village level and end up at the national level, and the budget should flow from the regional level to the community level.

## **5.9. Challenges**

Fieldworkers should have at least a BSc degree in agriculture and strong interpersonal and facilitation skills with the ability to talk to different groups and strong motivation and commitment to deliver results.

If all of the above conditions are satisfied, the proposed framework will lead to:

- harmonisation of activities among stakeholders in the region;
- skills and knowledge sharing among all stakeholders;
- efficient service delivery by all stakeholders; and
- responsive delivery of agricultural activities.

## **5.10. Operationalisation of the framework**

The successful implementation of this framework requires an ASS policy that includes the following elements, as stipulated by Jona (2016:164).

### **5.10.1. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**

All ASS providers should sign an MoU on cooperation to demonstrate that the extension framework is approved by all. The providers should also agree on the responsibilities they are going to assume. There should furthermore be an MoU that details the partnership links among providers.

The MoU should ensure that the service providers have at least a bachelor's degree in agriculture. Service providers with lesser qualifications should upgrade their skills and knowledge by obtaining higher qualifications and attending short courses for career development.

### **5.10.2. Professional bodies**

ASS providers should be registered with a professional body and be known in the region for the agricultural activities and projects they carry out. In South Africa, for example, all

agricultural extension advisers must be registered with the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP), a regulatory body that holds natural scientists to a code of conduct. A similar body is needed for ASS in Namibia. Such a body should have the authority to deregister and take action against service providers who default on their activities.

### 5.10.3. Participation

All ASS providers must take part in a participatory needs assessment of the farming community, as well as involve themselves in activities they have agreed to implement. The work plans of service providers will not be approved if they do not participate in the needs assessment.

### 5.10.4. Financial investment

Despite the decentralisation of ASS, the budget is still administered at the national level. This delays activities as it involves a great deal of bureaucracy. The ASS policy should require that providers develop a business plan that clearly states what they will contribute to projects and how they plan to use the funds provided by the government. A time limit should govern the release of funds so that activities can be executed on a timely basis.

### 5.10.5. Monitoring and evaluation (M & E)

M & E should be undertaken by communities and public and private organisations at all levels. The ASS providers at the regional level need to properly devise how best to monitor and evaluate activities at the village and constituency levels. Once the key variables to be monitored at each level have been agreed upon, an integrated M & E system, which incorporates all actors, can be developed and applied in the region. The regional level should occasionally conduct validation studies – possibly monthly, quarterly, or biannually – depending on financial availability and practicability. The M & E must respond to challenges and the success of the framework and should evolve, adapt, or change to ensure the success of the framework and the delivery of professional ASS to farmers in the Oshikoto region of Namibia.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The successful application of the framework requires that the following conditions be in place. An agricultural extension policy is needed that protects all stakeholders involved in ASS. The Decentralisation Policy must be fully operational (inclusive of financial administration powers given to the regions). Transparency and accountability should exist among all stakeholders. All the ASS providers must belong to a professional body and at least have a degree in an agricultural-related field. The participatory bottom-up approach should be utilised and farmers should be supported to make their own decisions. Continuous M & E of activities should be routine.

This study was conducted in a single region of Namibia. Similar studies can be conducted by different ministries and countries if they are faced with ASS that work in isolation with a limited budget. Planning and coordinating agricultural activities will allow ASS practitioners to know what other organisations are doing and avoid duplication of activities and the wastage of scarce resources.

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