

Identification of farmers problems for development intervention programme: a case study facilitated by the political head of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), North West Province

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ABSTRACT

The study intended to identify the problems of the farmers and prioritise them for extension intervention. The study was facilitated by the political head of the department within a hundred days of the resumption of duty. Meetings were facilitated through district offices of both the department and municipalities. The identification of farmers' problems focused mainly on production, financial and infrastructural projects.

Data was collected through a participatory rural appraisal approach. Farmers were allowed to express problems affecting them in a meeting setup. The extension officers (E.O) captured problems expressed by farmers and classify them according to the questionnaire template developed.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to capture and analyse data. The data was presented to extension officers and management of DARD. The major findings of the study revealed that :(1) Water supply, (2) Availability of land, (3) Livestock theft, (4) production inputs, (5) Machinery, and (6) fencing were major problems of the farmers. The recommendation of the study was that: (a) Problems be resolved according to their importance and (b) preference for implementation of extension intervention programmes to be a bottom-up than a top-down approach.

Keywords: Problem identification, Facilitation, Intervention programme

1. INTRODUCTION

In many developing countries farmers account for the larger part of the population in terms of food production, but according to Meitei & Devi (2009), farmers do not get information on time to allow them to do proper planning and this in most cases affect viable agricultural development. The agricultural productivity of the country according to Apantaku, Oloruntoba & Fakoya (2003) citing Alao & Aare (1991) is a major concern to political administrators, educators and the general public at large. The concern of the political head upon resumption of

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duty in December 2018 was to understand the whole complex of farmers' constraints, and put in place an implementation plan to resolve them because farmers were calling and visiting the office complaining about production problems. Facilitation of series of farmers' meetings from political office was triggered by the high volume of calls of farmers seeking help and frequenting the office. The office responded in line with what was stated by Obedike (2011) that when a problem is triggered by an external influence, ultimately forces the responsible person to recognise and make plans to resolve it. The department embarked on a problem identification mission which Lunneryd & Ohlmer (2006) defined as a process of specifying, identification, and choosing the appropriate options for in-depth planning and scrutiny. They further defined a problem as a difference between a perceived and a desired situation, which Düvel (2002) citing his work done in (1980) equated the difference with an awareness of a problem or need. He further indicated that a problem and a need are closely related. Meeting facilitated to identify problems of the farmers presented a legitimate platform on which problems were identified, differences discussed and settled, and plans were put in place to resolve them instead of farmers' lodging complaints and awaiting their resolution from the department. Facilitation was in the form of a participatory approach that was used 20-30 years according to Swanson & Rajalahti (2010), which its focal point was to get farmers with common objectives to work together to achieve common individual or group objectives. Facilitation is an important process that involves discussion among parties, moderating, and guiding the overall understanding. Stoffer (2017) states that it should be done correctly of it to be effective, it should not be equated to information delivery, he maintains it can build a relationship because it has an element of engagement. During engagement according to Klein Pliske, Crandall, & Woods (2005) some problems may be subtle and context-dependent, the stance and the interpretation of the situation depend on the experience of the decision-maker, and if the whole complex of farmers constraints is presented and not understood may create new problems. Engagement with farmers on priority problems, their circumstances, preference for a type of intervention must be a priority, and farmers must be consulted regularly (Bekele, 2004). The study provides a deep understanding of farmers' problems in the North West Province. A proactive approach of identifying problems of the farmers is key to creating a conducive environment for farming and the use of practices such as planning, monitoring, and evaluation can be used. The government has a major responsibility for ensuring that there is agricultural development in various communities. During the four sessions in different districts, farmer problems such as profitability and production were identified. This study therefore, focused on the problems of the farmers and prioritises them for extension intervention.

2. THE OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study was to identify farmers' problems.

Specific objectives were:

- (1) To identify the main agricultural problems as perceived by the farmers.
- (2) To identify and prioritise farmers problems for extension intervention.

- (3) To understand and rank problems in relation to farmer's needs.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Orientation and planning

The process of facilitating farmers' meetings for problem identification started from the office of the political head who involved the executive management of the department and the message was communicated to farmers through (a) District offices, (b) local offices of both municipality and the department. Dates and venues of the meetings were communicated through the same channels.

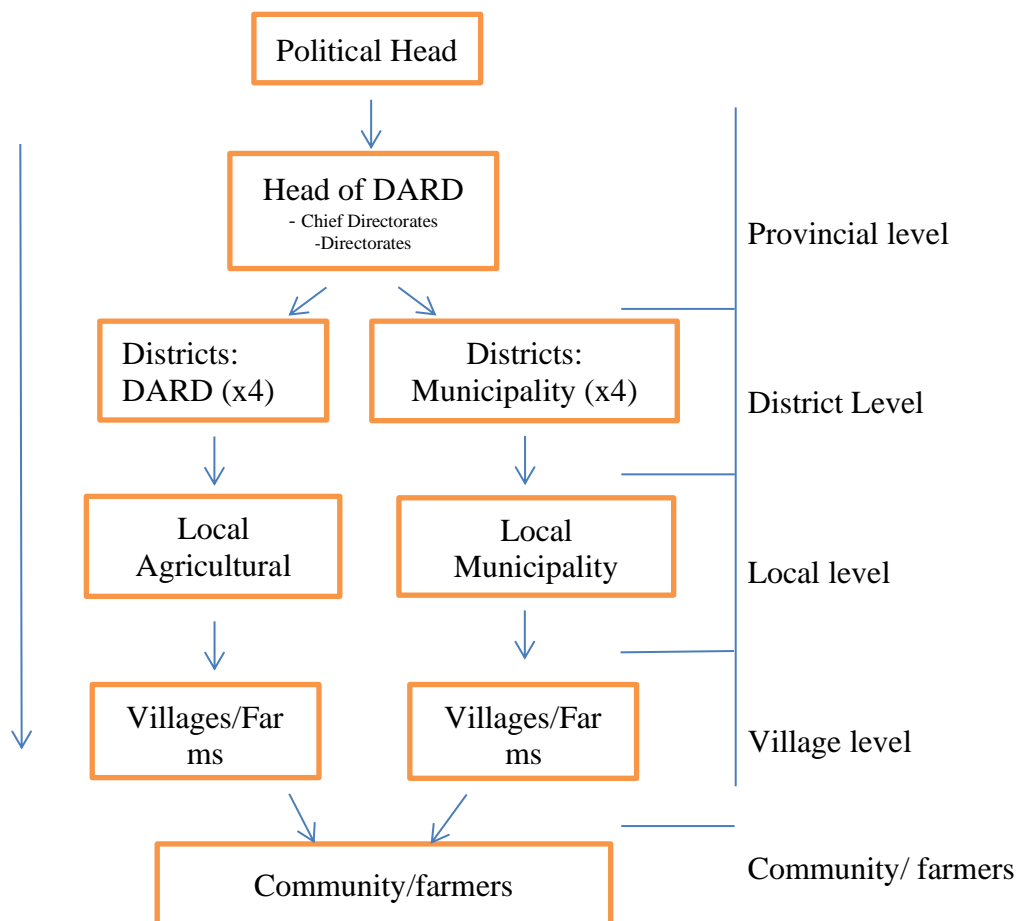


Figure 1 Facilitation flow chart of farmers' problem identification meetings

Consultation at the local level to invite farmers was done with the assistance of councillors. Dates were set for all four districts namely: (a) Bojanala, (b) Dr. Kenneth Kaunda (DRKK), (c) Dr. Ruth Segomotsi Mompati (DRSM) and (d) Ngaka Modiri Molema (NMM). Invitations to the meetings were extended to municipalities at the district and local levels. Farmer formations and other opinion leaders were identified and invited to the meeting. Municipal halls were used

as venues for the meetings. The agenda for the meetings were arranged as follows: (a) introduction of dignitaries, and farmers according to local municipalities, (b) address by the political head, (c) questions and comments by farmers, (d) response by political head and closure. All farmers were given an equal opportunity to ask questions/ or express issues/or problems, all issues were recorded on a template designed for this study. Farmers were requested to raise hands, their details were taken and handed over to the programme director who announced the names and directed the sequence of question session. The political head responded to all questions, comments, problems/issues expressed by farmers.

3.2 Population and sampling procedure:

The population consisted of all three categories of farmers such as subsistence, smallholder and commercial in the four districts of the Province. Each district organised farmers for engagement with the political head. The status of farmer register as of 19 January 2019 was as follows: Bojanala= 7 877, DR KK=1 464, NMM =10 154 and DRSM = 8 043, total 27538 farmers were registered by the department (DARD, 2019). Stratified random sampling was used for this engagement. A total of 2277 farmers attended the meetings. All different categories of farmers were represented in all local municipalities of the districts. Transport was mostly sought through local municipalities to the venue of the meetings. All Four (4) Districts and Eighteen (18) local municipalities were represented at the meeting as follows: (a) Bojanala=5, (b) NMM=5, (c) DR KK=3, and (d) DRSM=5

3.3 Instrumentation and data capturing

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was the only flexible approach that was used during question/answer sessions. The questionnaire template was designed to record questions expressed by farmers during the meetings. Questions and comments were classified and rated for purposes of ranking them according to their importance. The only means of collecting information from the farmers was through raising of hands and posing of questions. For those who were unable to pose questions because of the time were requested to go to the secretariat and record their details and issues they want to express.

In each district, there was a team that was responsible for data capturing. Some extension officers were managing the recording of questions and the submission to the programme director

3.4 Data analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to capture and analyse data. Data were entered into the SPSS version 19.0 and frequencies were run for each survey item. Tables and bar graphs were used to describe and to compare the results between districts and the needs of

the farmers. An in-depth comparison of problems expressed by farmers in districts was done through figures.

3.5 Limitations

The urgency needed to meet the farmers by the political head as a result of the high volume of calls regarding their problems, the only option available was to confine the study to the identification of farmers' problems and prioritise them for extension intervention. The study did not cover nor address policy instruments preferred to assist them nor what causes these problems.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

During meetings, farmers used the word problem and need interchangeably. This was evidenced by Duvel (2002) when conducting a study on needs assessment in extension in the North West Province at Ganyesa village where farmers were using the two words interchangeably. The study gave insights into farmers' problems and what needs to be considered at the local, district and Provincial level. This study provided a base for priority planning intervention programmes.

4.2 Number of farmers who attended the meetings across the districts.

According to (Bekele, 2004), farmers' meetings are organised as a process of consultation to identify their problems, DARD as well organised meetings across the province and a total number of 2 277 farmers attended in four different districts. This number had farmer representative, cooperatives, small scale, smallholder and commercial farmers. The district with the highest number was DRSM followed by NMM; DR KK had a low number of farmers as compared to the three districts (Table 1).

Table 1 The number of farmers who attended the meetings across the districts (N = 2 277)

Description	Districts				
	Bojanala	DR KK	NMM	DRSM	Total
Number of farmers who attended the meetings	(n) 378	(n) 357	(n) 715	(n) 827	(N) 2277
	(%) 16.6	(%) 15.7	(%) 31.4	(%) 36.3	(%) 100

Participation is not always the same, but it has some of the benefits which according to Renfro (2004:1-5) include increased output, minimises conflicts, and improved involvement. Farmers' participation and other role players are important to the sustainability of programmes. Figure

2 shows low participation of farmers in meetings across the districts. The possibility could be the representation of leadership of the groups, projects or associations to these meetings.

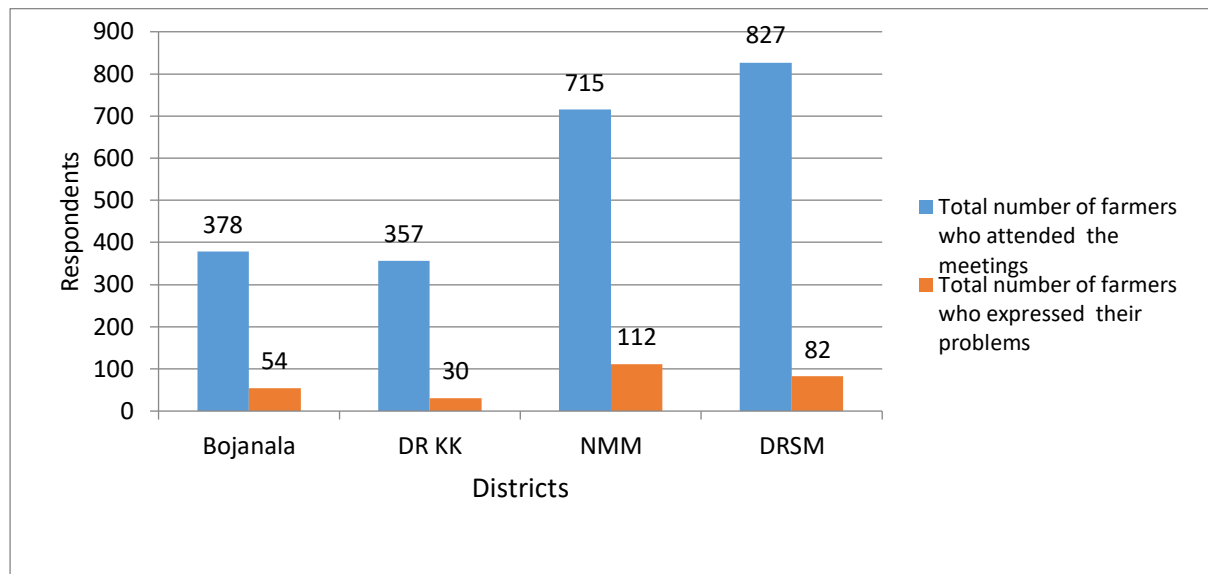


Figure 2 Number of respondents who attended versus those who expressed their needs and problems

When there is a clear partnership between the government and the stakeholders, Renfro (2004:1-5) alluded that there is a possibility of more effective participation. However, it could be better if routine relationships could be identified and operationalised between people or institutions this could change the pattern of interactions and enhanced programme outcome (Cleaver, 2005 and Dasgupta & Beard, 2007) cited by Heinrich & Lopez, 2009:1554-1586). During the question and answer session commercial farmers in three districts namely, DR KK, NMM, and DRSM committed to assist the smallholder farmers. Commercial farmers in Bojanala did not commit to assisting smallholder farmers as shown in Figure 3. When farmers engage in a developmental project and identify a need to help others, it is an initiative towards their own development, a concept incorporated in the World Bank discussion paper (Paul, 2006).

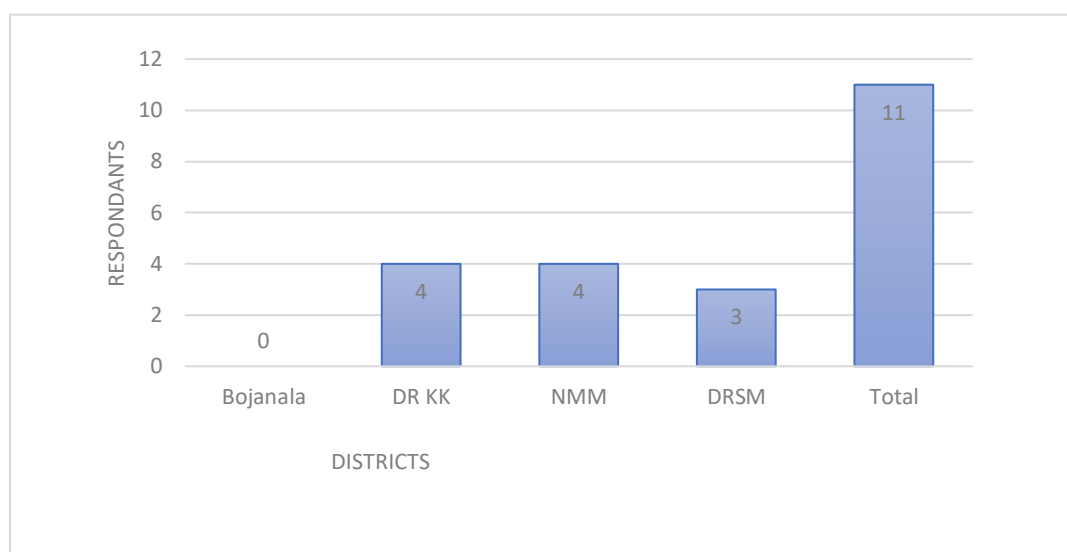


Figure 3 Number of commercial farmers who volunteered to assist in resolving needs and problems as expressed by respondents

4.3 A comparison of the rank order of farmers' problems expressed during meetings across the four districts.

The submission of various authors in development efforts shows that the development agents usually bring a finished package to the rural farmers without giving them an opportunity of being involved in either the diagnostic design or implementation stage (Apantaku, Fakoya, 2003). In this study, farmers were involved in problem identification, Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7 presents a comparison of problems expressed by farmers in districts. According to these findings, water is the highest priority in the three districts. Machinery emerged as the most similar in all four districts, livestock theft in three districts (Figures 5, 6 and 7). Another finding is that most projects are most similar in three districts (Figures 4, 6, 7). Dissimilarities such as poultry, aquaculture, handling facilities of Bojanala; sewage, finance, electricity bills, recycling of DRKK; incomplete projects, poor service delivery, theft and fraud of NMM and visibility of extension officers, vandalism of DRSM are conspicuous. Figures 1 and 2 priorities one (1) to five (5) are related to crop production and Figures 6 and 7 are related to livestock. Needs of livestock as compared to crop from highest to the lowest according to the rank order areal most similar. The only unique problem presented by farmers is from DR KK such as sewage, recycling and conflict management. The kind of request suggests that its geographic location is not the same as the other three districts. According to Matiwane & Terblanche (2012), each location beneficiaries and projects are bound to differ. The whole complex of farmers' constraints in the Province gives a clear picture of what farmers go through before they can get production from their produce and this is exacerbated by poor extension service and fraud by staff as shown in figures 6 and 7.

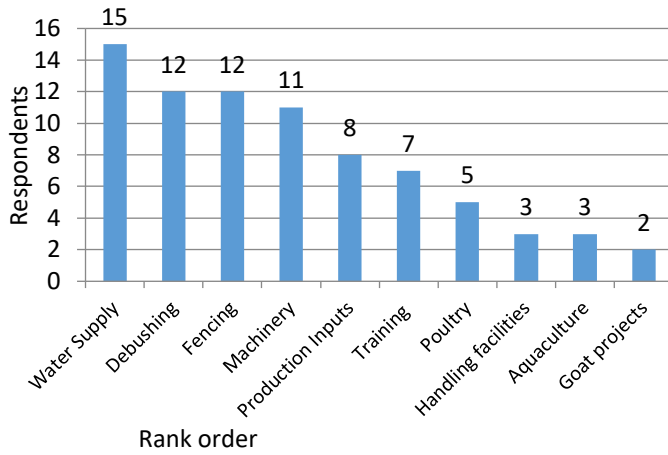


Figure 4 Rank order according to Bojanala District

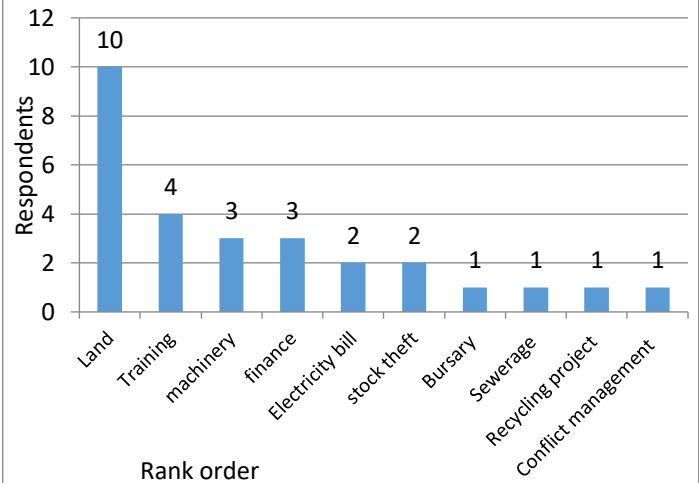


Figure 5 Rank order according to DR KK district

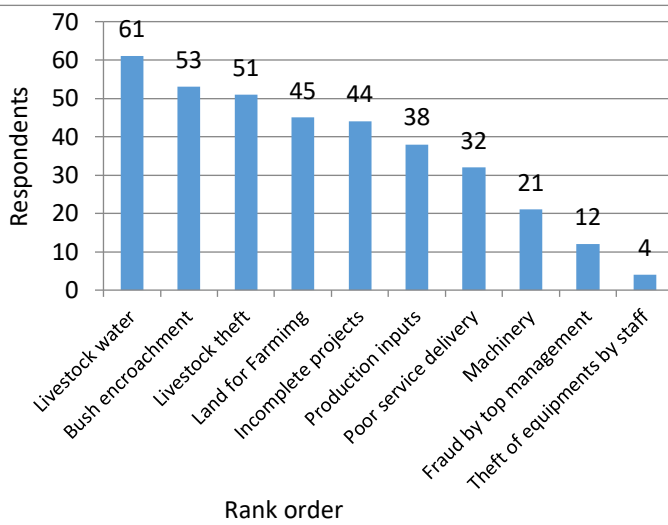


Figure 6 Rank order according NMM district

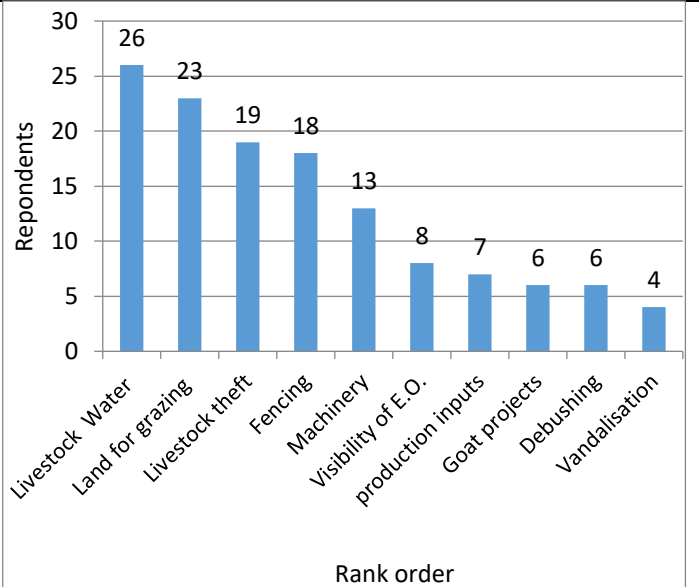
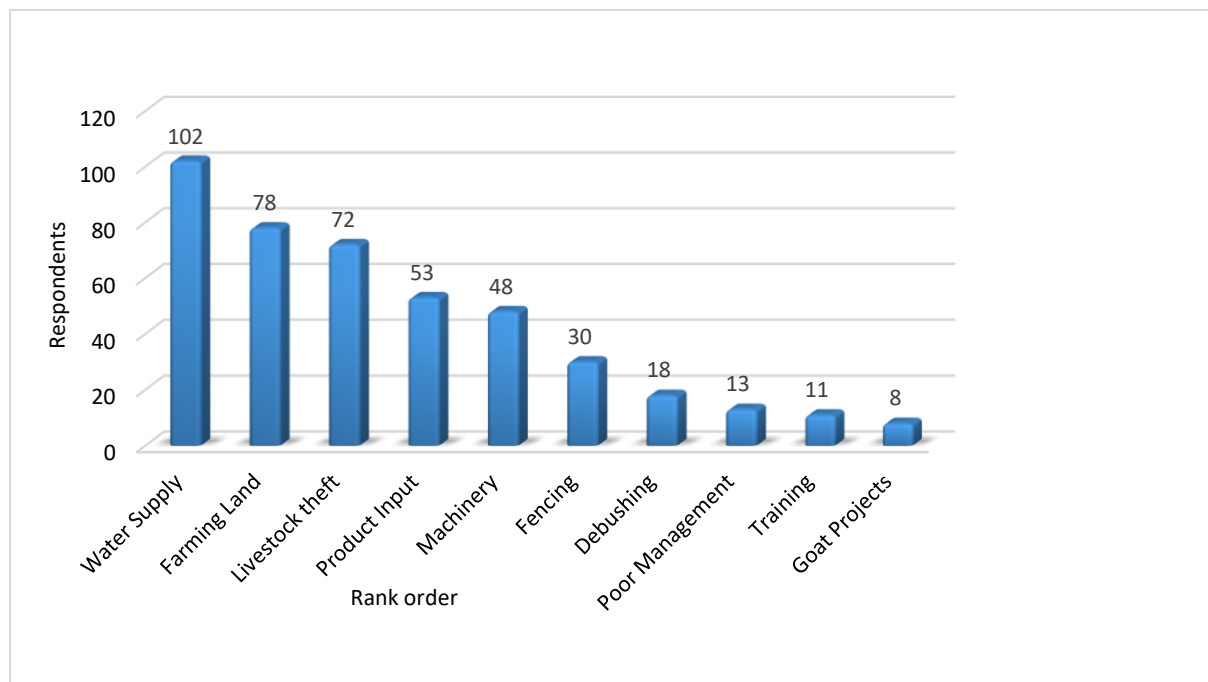


Figure 7 Rank order according to DRSM district

4.4 A Provincial rank order of farmers' problems expressed during meetings across four districts

The government establishes projects in rural areas to benefit rural people and to contribute towards the development of their areas and the country (Wood, 1981) cited by (Matiwane & Terblanche, 2012). Projects earmarked to assist rural people are often designed taking into consideration, technical, microeconomic, and political factors, and the process mostly starts at the national level (Matiwane & Terblanche, 2012). DARD wanted to know problems; farmers affected and implement projects desired by them. This is an approach supported Regenesys School of Public Management (2002:38-39) that project meant to assist rural people before they are implemented beneficiaries must have been identified. Clear criteria regarding the selection of project beneficiaries must be outlined before the commencement of the selection process. Project management is essential to plan, manage, and report the progress of the project to funders. A decision about the project according to Burke (2003) is based on informative data for the selection of the project for future investment. At the provincial level when planning an intervention, water supply, land, stock theft, and production inputs should be at the top of the list whilst training and goats should be at the bottom of the top ten projects (Figure 8).



5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Summary

Agricultural problems as expressed by farmers were highlighted during meetings. It became evident that farmers from different districts had varied problems affecting them even though there were areas of overlap.

The key main question was: (a) what are the main problems of the farmers? The study did not pursue: (i) The type of development assistance or policy interventions preferred by farmers to solve their problems, and (ii) The factors that determine these preferences. This question is very important before an intervention is planned to assist them. Farmers' problems were identified as shown and prioritised in Figure 4,5,6,7 and 8.

The problems ranged from infrastructural such as water supply, fencing etc.to non-infrastructural such as production inputs, livestock projects, etc. As indicated in Figure 8, water is the main farmers' problems and the need for land. Livestock theft is also a major problem in the Province and it must be prioritised.

5.2 Conclusion

Problems identified during the survey should form part of the intervention programme of the department to address the problems and needs of the farmers. The ranking order of agricultural priority problems should give an indication of farmers' preference or need for development. A top priority of the department in developing an intervention programme is to design an extension package that will take into consideration all production factors that might exist within the different districts, a programme that will be in line with the strength of each district. In planning intervention according to Bekele (2004), consideration is needed for programmes that will complement one another to ensure a high return on investment. Figure 8 showed a high need for water supply and land for cultivation, but whilst providing that livestock theft should be on the top of DARD's plan. At local, district, and Provincial level the ranking order of farmers' problems or needs for intervention should be a starting point for planning the departmental intervention programmes. Identified farmers' problems can be weighed and evaluated against socio-economic and political feasibility. Programme development takes the form of a bottom-up approach so that problems of farmers are addresses (Apantaku, S.O.; Oloruntoba & Fakoya. 2003). The problems of farmers must on a continuous basis be assessed and addressed as and when detected.

5.3 Recommended

The following should be considered:

- The extension intervention programmes should be according to the rank order of farmers' problems.
- Extension developmental programmes should be implemented in a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down.
- More innovative approaches are needed to promote greater farmer participation in development programmes.

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