

DEVELOPING AN APPROPRIATE EXTENSION APPROACH FOR SOUTH AFRICA: PROCESS AND OUTCOME

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ABSTRACT

This paper, based on a project aimed at developing and implementing a new extension model for South Africa, has a twofold purpose, namely (a) to outline the participatory process that was followed and (b) to describe the outcome or model.

The first phase consisted of a national workshop with delegates from each of the nine provinces, tertiary institutions, NGO's, organized agriculture, etc. A major outcome was a majority decision in favour of guiding principles rather than an inflexible model. In a series of follow-up workshops, these identified principles were conceptualised and alternatives identified within these principles. These were captured in a discussion document and taken to the provinces for their comment. The feedback regarding extension staff's opinions and preferences was obtained by making use of a sequential combination of nominal group and Delphi techniques at regional meetings at strategic venues in the districts of the provinces. The responses were then analysed and tabled in an extensive report, including a list of recommendations, categorized and proposed to be implemented under five programs in every province.

Subsequently the management of every province responded on the implementation proposals under the five programs of planning and project management, monitoring and evaluation, coordination and linkage systems, knowledge support systems, and education and training. Provinces are now expected to appoint working groups on each of these programs with the purpose of specifying and overseeing the implementation. In a final stage the provinces will report about their programs and progress at a national workshop, which will form the basis for the development of a national policy document.

1. INTRODUCTION

The request by any country to have an extension model developed must be welcomed, because invariably it is the expression of awareness that all is not well. If the development of such a model can at the same time be fully participatory in nature, thereby enhancing a sense of ownership and responsibility, the prospects for implementation are promising. If at the same

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time the terms of reference specify a participatory process and include the task of implementation, the table is laid for improvement and positive change.

The ultimate scope and nature of change is dependent on the current effectiveness and efficiency of extension delivery. This paper based on extensive research done for and on the request of the National Department of Agriculture and with its financial support, which is gratefully acknowledged (Düvel, 2002 and Düvel, 2003). The paper gives a glimpse into the current efficiency and then outlines the procedure followed to develop, in a participatory fashion, an approach that is generally acceptable in that it is sufficiently flexible to provide for the needs and situational variations between and within the provinces, which have full jurisdiction over extension matters and cannot be prescribed to. In a final section an overview of the most important findings and the most important recommendations are provided.

2. THE EFFICIENCY OF THE CURRENT EXTENSION SERVICE

During the last 10 years agricultural extension in South Africa has undergone a drastic change from a dualistic service (separate services for the commercial and for small-scale farmers) to a single amalgamated service, now focusing almost completely on previously disadvantaged small-scale farmers. Associated with this was a policy of decentralisation, leading to an autonomy regarding management at provincial level, but no improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of extension delivery; in fact indications are that the impact decreased significantly. This could not be confirmed against accurate baseline data, but certain judgements by extension staff regarding the under-performance due to insufficient competence or support, confirm these conclusions. Respondents were requested to judge the percentage of their time that they would need to make the same extension inputs in circumstances of more resources and if they were more competent. An overview of the findings is presented in Figure 1.

Assuming that a productivity of between 75 to 100 percent of what extension workers regard themselves capable of, would be an acceptable level, these findings indicate that about 70 percent fall below that level and 41.4 percent would not even meet half of those requirements. The real expectations in terms of productivity are only met by 2.8 percent of the respondents, which emphasizes and shows the tremendous improvement potential, or the vast need for improvement in order to be accountable.

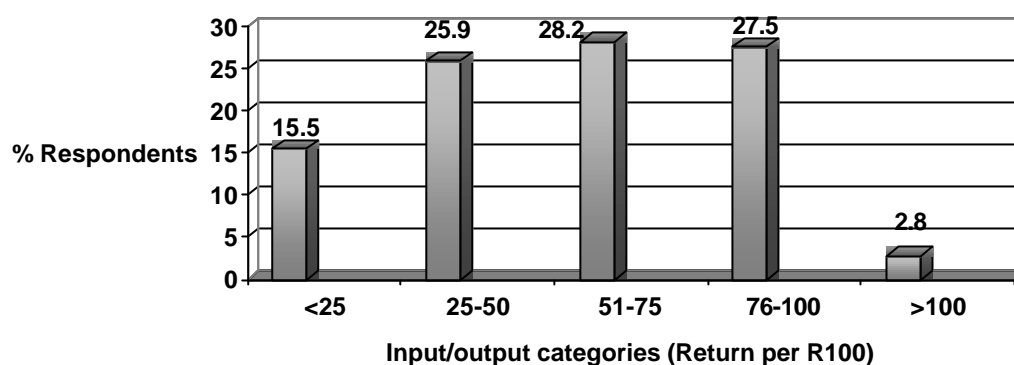


Figure 1: The percentage distribution of respondents according to categories of perceived return per R100 invested in extension (N=992)

3. PARTICIPATORY PROCESS OR METHOD

The search for alternative and more appropriate ways of extension delivery had been initiated by the Dutch Government, which funded projects in all of the nine provinces aimed at finding alternative ways of extension. When evaluated after about two years, the lessons learnt were rather limited because of unconvincing evidence such as insufficient control of variables. Positive results were, for example, found with the outsourcing of management, but it was not possible to conclude with certainty whether results were due to the type and credibility of the contracted organization, the type of management inputs, the intensity and scope or nature of inputs, the methods used or the training or capacity building that was provided.

The second phase consisted of a national workshop attended by about ten delegates from every province and by stakeholders from the national government, tertiary institutions, organized agriculture, non-government and private organizations. At this workshop results from the provincial projects were tabled, alternative models compared and discussed and intensive group discussions held regarding appropriate alternatives. The groups, organized according to provinces, were tasked with giving recommendations regarding the appropriateness of a model and with identifying the most important prevailing problems (and solutions) as well as the principles of an appropriate model. The prescribed methods used in the groups under the leadership of well-oriented group leaders, consisted of a sequential combination of nominal group and Delphi techniques. The main outcome regarding the acceptability of an extension model is shown in Figure 2.

Only 13 percent of workshop participants favoured a model for the whole country while 14 percent were in favour of provincial specific models. However, the large majority, namely 65 percent were in favour of sufficient flexibility within prescribed principles.

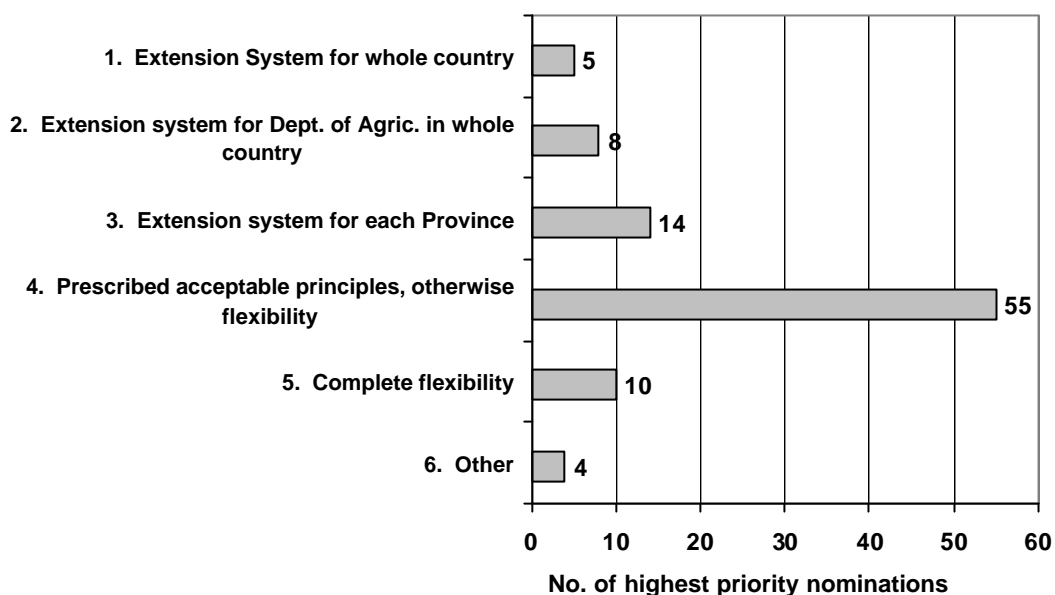


Figure 2: Delegates' acceptability of different alternatives of extension systems implementation according to first positions of rank order

In a third phase a committee consisting of Provincial Program Managers took the issue further in follow-up workshops under the leadership of the author who had been appointed National Program Manager. They conceptualised the identified extension principles, identified the alternatives within the principles and designed discussion documents that captured these alternatives and served as basis for discussions and for recording the feedback and viewpoints from the provinces regarding these issues. Parallel to this a group of provincial researchers was appointed to prepare an evaluation instrument to assess the current status of extension delivery in the various provinces. In extensive daylong discussion sessions held at various venues throughout all the provinces of the country in which about 30 percent of the country's extension personnel participated, viewpoints were exchanged and debated and ultimately captured by every participant in a coded form provided for that purpose. It also included opinions and subjective assessments regarding the efficiency of the current extension service. These records were then analysed together with some evaluation results and tabled in an extensive report, which included, amongst others, a comparison of

provinces regarding the different viewpoints and preferences as well as extensive recommendations and proposals.

Challenges to the National Department of Agriculture and the provinces to respond to the report and the proposals resulted in limited reaction and were, consequently, followed up by a further series of provincial workshops, but this time with the senior management of the provinces. The participation varied, depending largely on the size of the provinces, between 20 and 40 middle or senior managers per province. However, in the majority of cases the Heads of Departments still failed to attend part or the whole of the one-day discussions. In preparation for the workshops every participant was sent a summary of concrete proposals and together with it the views expressed by staff in their own as well as in other provinces. Against that background discussions were held and viewpoints debated in an attempt to attain consensus. Ultimately every participant was again requested to register his final viewpoint after having listened to all the contributions. These data were subsequently analysed and made available to the Provinces.

Provinces are now expected to implement the proposals in a way and to a degree that they deem fit and believe to be compatible with their situations and management in their provinces, districts and wards. These implementations will occur under five medium or long term programs focused on the following: (1) Planning and projects, (2) Linkage and Coordination, (3) Knowledge Support, (4) Education and Training and (5) Monitoring and Evaluation.

Provinces will appoint a provincial coordinator for each of the five programs to lead a working committee consisting of representatives from each of the districts within the provinces. Their responsibility will be to develop, in close interaction with and regular feed back to their provincial management, detailed programs and to manage and monitor their implementation. Provision is made for the National Program Manager to initiate and guide the process in the provinces and for the provincial program coordinators to meet from time to time at National level with those of other provinces, so as to exchange views and experiences and facilitate mutual collaboration and support.

In a final phase the provinces will be invited to present their programs at a national gathering or workshop and, based on these and the ensuing discussions, an adapted and detailed extension policy document, as the outcome of an extensive participatory process, will be formulated.

4. RESULTS AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

Some of the findings and recommendations regarding identified principles, based on majority opinion and categorized under the five major proposed programs, are as follows:

4.1 Extension planning and project management

- Extension will be understood to include both the educational and advisory dimensions, but should be primarily proactive with the time division between proactive and reactive and other ad hoc activities being a ratio of 3:2.
- Human development, is seen as the appropriate means of achieving sustainable development, but is, nevertheless, accepted to be the means rather than the normative goal.
- Not the felt needs but rather a compromise between felt and unmet needs should be decisive regarding development or program priorities.
- The audience focus should be based on priority considerations and, in general, should
 - be commodity focused,
 - pay equal attention to production and equity considerations
 - give preference to common above individual good
- Community participation should be pursued as both a means and a goal.

4.2 Institutional linkage and coordination program

- For the promotion of extension as a partnership between service provider and community and for the community to be empowered and assume ownership, effective linkage structures are essential and should be developed and maintained. To be effective and functional such linkage structures should meet the following minimum requirements:
 - A clear separation between the coordination and operative functions, which should preferably be performed by different institutional bodies, with the operational or program committees being commissioned by and responsible to the overarching coordination body.

- A coordinating linkage structure that is representative of the total target community, is clearly linked to the community structures of local government, and is responsible for all development - and primarily through the initiation, allocation, supervision and coordination of projects and development activities allocated to project committees.
- Project or program committees, again consisting of community members representing their specific communities and appointed and commissioned by the central development or coordinating council (CDC), whose function and responsibility is to develop and implement commodity- or problem-focused projects, with regular report-back and accountability to the CDC.
- Where appropriate, coordination forums representing the service providers for the purpose of coordinating their activities, including also interactions and negotiations with the communities, through the CDC, but without becoming part or members of the local community structures.

4.3 Knowledge support system

In view of the low technical competence and qualification of the majority of extension staff, a strong knowledge support system is proposed. The more specific proposals are the following:

- The function of the Subject Matter Specialist (SMS) is to supplement and not to duplicate or perform the same task as the extension workers.
- The primary target groups of the SMS are not the farmers, but the extensionists serving the farmers.
- Knowledge support will be provided primarily through teams of subject matter specialists, nationally and provincially coordinated.
- The function of the SMS will be primarily pro-active and not only reactive in nature. These will include
 - The systematic knowledge upgrading of field personnel in their respective fields. This implies the compilation of a knowledge profile of every officer for whom a specific field of knowledge is relevant and a subsequent focused upgrading.

- Supporting extensionists with message design, i.e. designing messages that are technically, economically and human behaviour relevant. This will require of the subject matter specialist to
 - Become a specialist regarding own commodity/discipline in relation to current production, prevailing problems/needs of farmers, indigenous knowledge, (including research needs if there is no solution) priorities and solutions to be promoted by extension.
 - Seeking solutions through adapted research/demonstrations (adapting innovations to specific local conditions).
- Serving as linkage or knowledge intermediary between research and extension, particularly also in terms of feedback to research regarding the needs and problems of clients.
- Coordinating the above in commodity focused programs implemented through and by means of frontline extension workers over the total target area (e.g. district municipality).
- For general support regarding extension and extension methodology, the establishment of an Extension Knowledge Information and Research Centre is proposed.

4.4 Monitoring and evaluation program

In view of the tremendous potential of monitoring and evaluation (and the associated accountability) to improve the current and future extension, a national monitoring and evaluation program was proposed to be obligatory and non-negotiable for all provinces. Further more specific proposals regarding the monitoring and evaluation are the following:

- The emphasis should be on a maximum rather than a minimum of evidence, which implies as many criteria and as big a variation as possible. This means that objectives should be chosen and formulated to include the full spectrum of criteria ranging from resource and activity inputs to client's responses and opinions, behaviour determinants, behaviour change (practice adoption) outcome or efficiency aspects and, where possible, the impact in terms of job creation, increase in living standard, etc.
- The purpose in terms of beneficiaries should be focused on management and clients, but also on extensionists directly involved in extension and in

need of evaluation data in order to improve their extension delivery. The latter emphasises the importance of monitoring.

- For monitoring purposes objectives and criteria need to be chosen that are focused on behaviour determinants, viz. needs, perceptions and knowledge. They are the actual focus of extension and their positive change is a precondition for behaviour change (practice adoption) and the consequent change in efficiency and the resulting financial and other outcomes. Behaviour determinants are the focus of every encounter and thus lend themselves to monitoring after every extension delivery. In this way extension can continuously or on a short-term basis (i.e. whenever extension inputs are made) come up with evaluation evidence.

4.5 Education and training

The low level of technical knowledge or skills of a large percentage (74 percent have qualifications lower than a Bachelor's degree) extension staff prompted the need for the already mentioned knowledge support system, but also proposals in regard to the education and training of personnel. These include the following:

- Greater emphasis on professionally qualified extensionists in the recruitment of extension staff.
- Greater selectivity regarding the quality rather than the level of qualification.
- Negotiation with tertiary institutions regarding more appropriate formal education programs and qualifications.
- Strengthening of the agricultural technical content at agricultural colleges by introducing some degree of specialization.
- Challenge tertiary institutions to come up with effective bridging possibilities from diploma to degree programs.
- Improve the quality of training at agricultural colleges through the involvement of subject matter specialists providing more focused and higher standard education.
- Change college course presentation into short and block type modules equally accessible to students, farmers and extension workers.

- Categorising personnel into extension scientists and technicians and developing transition criteria and clear career paths.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND EXTENSION IMPLICATIONS

The project was designed to have a far-reaching impact on extension delivery in South Africa. Whether this will materialise, will depend on the acceptability of the recommendations and their consequent implementation. As far as decision-making in this regard is concerned, the senior managers of the Extension Services in the various provinces are decisive, but, unfortunately, they are in many cases also the Achilles heel of the system.

One of the intentions of the participatory process, which consisted of an involvement of role players at different levels in iterative processes, was to promote consensus, acceptability and ownership. Other outcomes of the study with extension implications are the following:

- Extension models, no matter which, are in general not flexible enough or do not provide enough variation to be the optimum solution in most countrywide situations. Guiding principles appear to be a more appropriate solution.
- As much as solutions are situation specific, they must also be time specific. This means that policy guidelines need to be revised regularly.
- Participatory processes based on maximum interaction between role players have a tremendous ability to bring about consensus and knowledge acquisition.

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