

TOWARDS AN IMPROVED AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE AS A KEY ROLE PLAYER IN THE SETTLEMENT OF NEW FARMERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

South Africa (SA) finds itself in a region where the rich countries perceive it as a sustainable and viable proposition for investment. The prospects for the future are bright but a warning light is burning: high food prices; shortage of essential food and the import of it; 50% of land reform projects have failed. Can the SA Agricultural Extension service play a role to address these issues?

Research in SA clearly indicates a new concept of Extension and identifies 13 essential principles underlying any Extension approach, ranging from an educational and pro-active approach to an advisory and reactive approach. By means of consultation, discussion and dialogue extension practitioners and trainers developed an Agricultural Landscape for Extension, identifying specific concepts, study fields and essential knowledge/skills areas that form the "playing field" for the extension agent. An effective extension service is based on certain fixed principles namely:

- *The interrelationship between agricultural development and human development;*
- *Development being needs based;*
- *Participation being essential for all role players; and*
- *Any intervention program being focused on behaviour change.*

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The Landscape highlights the following concepts as being necessary to improve Agricultural Extension:

- *Technical competency (the extension agent must be an expert in at least one field of agriculture);*
- *Communication skills (verbal; non verbal; written and mass communication);*
- *Group facilitation skills (group dynamics and leadership); and*
- *Extension management (program planning, management functions, ethics. monitoring and evaluation and leadership development).*

Land reform in SA is a priority program with efficient productivity as its ultimate outcome. The settlement of new farmers and specifically post settlement support become decisive. Guidelines to support the extension agent are:

- *The selection of new farmers by means of an effective screening instrument;*
- *The farmer, or group of beneficiaries, need to work cohesively. The new farmer must have a clear understanding of the farm as a business;*
- *Where possible the new farmer should be linked to a mentor;*
- *The farm needs a viable and sustainable business plan;*
- *The farm and farmer need financial support as prescribed in the business plan; and*
- *The production of produce needs to be market driven.*

To-day's clients demand a professional service. The professional registration of extension agents should in own interest and in the interest of the industry be implemented as a matter of urgency. Extension in SA needs a vision that is focused on the future.

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains an important sector in the South African economy. It includes all economic activities from provisioning of farming inputs to farming and value adding. Primary agriculture, although declining in economic significance still accounts for 3.9% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) , while the larger agro-food complexes account for

another 9%. Because of globalization SA is effected by whatever is happening elsewhere in the world, whether it is drought, floods, wars, the oil price, subsidies to farmers, etc. Each happening sends a ripple effect into the total environment.

South Africa as an influential member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is being perceived as a sustainable and viable proposition by the outside world and in particular the more affluent countries. High income countries looking for investment propositions are specifically looking at the 25 countries of the world, classified as developing or emerging market economies. SA is one of the 25 lying in the 11th position as the only country within SADC (Botha, 2006). SA finds itself on the same playing field as China, South Korea, India, Russia, Brazil and Mexico. The African Development Bank has introduced a new acronym to the world namely SANE which stands for South Africa, Algeria, Nigeria and Egypt i.e. the continental heavyweights (Wolters, 2007). Together the SANE countries represent the strongest economies on the continent, and account just for more than half of Africa's total GDP. It is astonishing however that small countries such as Taiwan, Turkey, Poland and Indonesia lie ahead of us.

Although we can view the future optimistically there is a warning light namely SA's dependence on imported food namely maize, wheat, oilseeds, meat and milk products (Willemse, 2007). Can Agricultural Extension address the challenges and play a significant role in agricultural development and specifically with regard to the settlement of new farmers? How can the Extension service and its agents ensure that new farmers in the Land Reform Program are settled effectively, poverty is alleviated, the production of food and fibre are secured, the export of agricultural products is enhanced and the economy of South Africa is strengthened? (Department of Agriculture, 2005a). These questions lead to the topic of this paper namely:

“Towards an improved Agricultural Extension service as a key role player in the settlement of new farmers in South Africa”.

During the 1940's and 1950's it took 14 years for farmers to fully adopt the innovation of hybrid seed. During the 1960's and 1970's it took 7 years and in the 1980's and 1990's it took approximately 3 years. Today in 2008 a farmer needs to make a decision with regard to a new

innovation within 72 hours. Is Agricultural Extension prepared and ready to support farmers in their decision-making process?

The objectives of this presentation are to:

- Present a new concept of Extension, based on the principles underlying an Extension approach;
- Develop and present a Landscape for Agricultural Extension;
- Identify and discuss the concepts that could possibly improve Extension;
- Provide guidelines for the settlement of new farmers and suggest the role of the extension worker; and
- Present a philosophical and spiritual approach towards a vision for the extension worker that is future focused.

2. WHAT IS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION?

The development and changes that have taken place over the years are as follows:

2.1 The traditional view

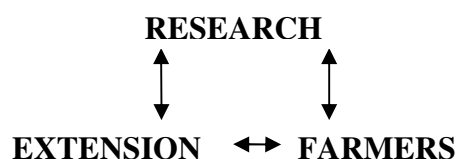
Traditionally, extension got its name from the process of “extending” agricultural knowledge. The agricultural knowledge was assumed to stem from the results of agricultural research and the clients were the farmers viz:

RESEARCH → EXTENSION → FARMERS

Many people and organizations still see Agricultural Extension in this role namely the system of Transfer of Technology (ToT). In this approach the extension agent has the power and as indicated above, the process takes place in a one way direction. A later interpretation that was built onto ToT is the following i.e.:

RESEARCH ↔ EXTENSION ↔ FARMERS

In this case a slight shift in power has taken place in favour of the farmer. During the late 1980's the approach changed again with the important aspects of counselling and deliberation being included. This has led to a more liberal relationship between agricultural research, the extension agent and the farmers, and can be expressed as follows:



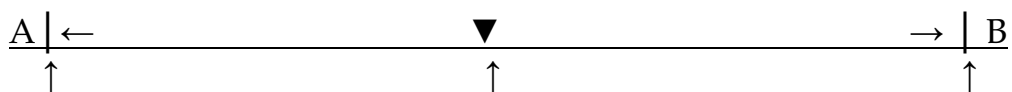
This reflects an improvement with three role players who have become partners (Botha, undated).

2.2 A new concept of extension

Over the years it has become clear that there are a number of extension principles that underline an extension approach. During 2000/2001 (Düvel, 2002; and Department of Agriculture, 2005b), extension officials in South Africa identified and prioritized the following principles underlying an effective extension approach namely:

- Participation (empowerment, ownership, inclusivity);
- Needs based (balance between felt and unmet needs);
- Evaluation/accountability;
- Programmed (goal driven);
- Institutional mobilization and organization;
- Sustainability;
- Behaviour change focus;
- Priority approach;
- Coordination/constructive involvement of all role player (forming of linkages);
- Technical support; and
- Equity.

These principles paved the way for an alternative understanding of extension or development as is illustrated by means of a continuum illustrated in the following presentation:



Point A	Middle point	Point B
Approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational • Provides insight and understanding • Pro-active • Focus on future problems • Promotes independency (Bottom up approach) 	Approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reacts to requests • Focus on current needs • Uses opportunity to provide knowledge/understanding • Increase skills of and independency in decision making (Bottom up approach) Priority Approach 	Approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory • Provides recipe/instructions • Reactive • Focus on present problems • Maintains dependency (Top down approach)
The result: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A ripple effect • Nobody in danger • Every one is a member of the rescue team 	The result: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A ripple effect • Sometimes bigger waves but • Safety jackets are available 	The result: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tsunami • Huge waves • People drowning • Chaos
What is needed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is already there: Participation and coordination 	What is needed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A cooperative action • Extension must know how to use the safety jackets • Extension must know how to ride the waves 	What is needed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rescue team • Call 911 • Call the extension worker: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To ensure participation – Form linkages – Give agricultural support – Facilitate human development.

Figure 1: A new concept of extension

To summarize the above:

- Point A: Is an approach that is pro-active and focuses on preparing the client for dealing with future problem situations thus being more of an educative (capacity building) or empowerment nature (bottom up approach).
- Point B: Is a strictly advisory and reactive approach (based on request and restricted to advice or provision of a recipe, regarding the requested issue or a political decision) i.e. the top down approach.
- Middle point: Between the two extremes, where current felt problems are addressed, not only to answer the specific request but also to provide insight and understanding of underlying principles so that the client can become more skillful and independent in future decision-making situations (Düvel, 2002 adapted by Terblanché, 2007).

What became clear over many years of Extension is that the farmer is the focus point, remaining the extension agent's object of concern leading to the philosophy of Extension namely:

“Helping farmers to help themselves”.

The next important concept is the Agricultural Extension Landscape.

2.3 The Agricultural Extension Landscape: Relevant concepts

During 2005 the Standard Generating Body (SGB) for Agricultural Extension, through a process of consultation and workshops, developed an Agricultural Extension Landscape. The Landscape indicated specific extension concepts, study fields and essential skills and knowledge areas that every extension worker needs, to successfully fulfill his/her task in a professional manner. The Landscape is presented in the Table 1.

2.4 Fixed principles of extension

The above concept of Extension allows for any type of intervention/extension program/project to be linked to Extension and

Table1: The Agricultural Extension Landscape

CONCEPT	STUDY FIELD	ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE/ SKILLS AREAS
A. Communication and interaction (the vehicle through which extension takes place)	a) Communication	i. Fundamentals of communication ii. Communication strategies iii. Individual/group/mass communication iv. Communication aids v. Managing the communication process vi. Mentoring (the protégé and mentor) vii. Individual facilitation process viii. Consultation dialogue
	b) Group facilitation	i. Group dynamics and theories ii. Group forming and utilization iii. Facilitation methods and techniques iv. Leadership development v. Adult education
B) Extension methodology (Implementing and managing the extension process)	a) Approaches to Extension	i. Different implementation approaches and structures ii. Philosophy of change and development iii. Extension systems iv. History and development of agricultural Extension v. Action research and action learning
	b) Management in Extension	i. Strategic planning and management ii. Corporate policy and capacity building iii. Organizational and systems theory iv. Functions of

CONCEPT	STUDY FIELD	ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE/ SKILLS AREAS
		management v. Motivational theory vi. Networking, linkages and co-ordination vii. Program development and planning viii. Program implementation and management ix. Evaluation of extension inputs and outputs efficiency x. Extension practice quality management systems – accountability xi. Extension profession quality management systems xii. Ethics (motivation and commitment, code of conduct, credibility, continuous professional development, work management)
B) Extension philosophy and practice (The science of Extension)	a) Behavioural change	i. Agricultural production as forms of behaviour (influencing factors) ii. Behaviour fundamentals and theories iii. Behavioural change processes and intervention iv. Adoption and diffusion processes
	b) Decision-making	i. Basis to behavioral change ii. The decision making process iii. Influence and function of mediating variables iv. Individual decision

CONCEPT	STUDY FIELD	ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE/ SKILLS AREAS
		making v. Group decision making vi. Risk, uncertainty and risk perception vii. Information and knowledge management in judgment and decision making
D) Contextual Extension (The context or environment of extension practice)	a) Community development	i. Rural sociology, structures and leadership ii. Dynamics of social change iii. Organizational and institutional structures iv. Participation and empowerment v. Facilitation, negotiation and conflict resolution vi. Community developing roles vii. Social networking and co-ordination
	b) Extension policymaking	i. Natural resource utilization and protection ii. The policy making process iii. Policy analysis and evaluation iv. Technology transfer and skills development v. The agricultural/legal environment vi. Commercial agricultural production environment vii. Small-scale agricultural production environment
UPSTREAM	a) Agricultural Extension Research	i. New innovations (5 – 10 years in advance) ii. Adaptation and transformation of technology to be

CONCEPT	STUDY FIELD	ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE/ SKILLS AREAS
		applicable to the specific farm and farmer situation (sustainability.)
	b) Technical skills & knowledge in Agriculture	i. NQF Level 5 Qualification in Agriculture (Nat. Diploma) ii. NQF Level 6 Qualification in Agriculture (Degree) and further degrees NQF Level 7/8 iii. Specific agric. skills programs (short courses) Certificates SAQA accredited
	c) Knowledge Support Service (SMS)	i. Subject matter specialists to support extensionists.
	d) Entrepreneurial skills	i. Entrepreneurial skills training (management training - to manage any enterprise)
	e) Quality control	i. Monitoring and Evaluation of extension (accountability)
	f) Finance (budget)	i. Salary ii. Working capital iii. Equipment
DOWNSTREAM	a) Agricultural Management b) Land Care c) Land reform e) Agricultural and marketing policy e) Political expectations	i. Farm management (economical, and sustainable) ii. Conservation of the environment/conservation farming iii. Priority program iv. Global competitiveness/ green labelling v. Restructuring/strategic planning

this in itself could easily become a “tsunami” for the extension agent and the farmers.

If the extension service and therefore their extension agents want to be successful in Extension and therefore in agricultural development, there are a number of fixed extension principles that should become part of the agricultural extension service’s program. These principles are:

2.4.1 The interrelationship between agricultural development and human development

There exists an important relationship between agricultural development and human development. Projects such as failed land reform clearly indicate that development will not take place if both aspects are not addressed with similar significance. Capacity building (empowerment) does not mean the promotion of human development outside the field of agricultural development. A mix is required that meets situation specific needs and circumstances. It is imperative that specific clear and measurable goals (objectives) be formalised and account given of their achievements through regular evaluation.

If a farmer or community is being provided with on- or off-farm infrastructure and/or equipment and/or starter packs, they need to be empowered to manage these inputs and to take the responsibility to utilize, care and maintain i.e. to take ownership. Should this not happen development will fail. The challenge for extension will be to change the attitude of the farmer/community and we know the golden rule to bring about change namely:

“Change the people. If you cannot change the people – change the people”

Generally speaking people love change but hate to be changed. The challenge is not to change people, but to equip people also to handle change. With change comes accountability and with accountability, responsibility of decision-making.

2.4.2 Needs based development

A development focus based only on the felt needs of the clients is discouraged i.e. there should be a reconciliation between felt and unfelt needs (again one of the biggest challenges for extension agents). The conceptualization (breakdown into causes and effects) of the felt needs to reconcile with the unfelt needs is an essential skill needed by every extension agent to undertake and facilitate the process.

It was recently announced that farmers indicated (to their provincial government) that they needed quality bulls in an attempt to help with livestock improvement. The farmers said that they received less economic returns from their livestock and bulls with “good” genetic make-up would rectify the problem. A further investigation of the farming situation in the region indicated that there was no acceptable veldt management system (i.e. the natural veldt was totally over-grazed), no fodder flow program and no herd management program of significance with regard to breeding seasons and animal health. It would be the task of the extension agent to reconcile the felt need of the farmers (good bulls), with the unfelt needs of ranch management (e.g. decrease in cattle numbers etc.). The ranch management practices need to be in place in order of priority to farm successfully with cattle and by doing so to realize an increase in financial income. It is without doubt the most difficult part of extension to change people’s attitude and beliefs as in this case to convince a farmer to decrease his cattle numbers because of his over grazing practices. What really is a worrying factor is that (in this case) the bulls were bought and given to the farmers. The first animals to die on the farm will probably be the bull because of the poor quality of the veldt, insufficient fodder supplements and all the other management practices that are not in place (Maqhina, 2006).

2.4.3 Community participation (and involvement in the forming of linkages and structures)

What is needed is a secure linkage structure for purposeful participation and coordination at all levels starting at community/client level.

The frontline extension agent is in an ideal position to form linkages with the farming community. The farmer is the extension agents "object of concern". The extension agent cannot give the technical message to the animals (cattle, sheep, goats etc.). He/she can only talk to the farmers' and only on the clear understanding that he/she has a quality message to communicate.

The extension agent and his/her organization must identify and recognise local structures for participation and the forming of linkages. It is the extension agents' responsibility to open up the channels of communication and negotiation within and between structures to improve participation. If there is no development structure the establishment of such an agricultural development structure is essential (Düvel, 2005). This is only possible if the extension agent has become part of the community (Terblanché, 2005).

How does he/she become part of the community?

The following guidelines are considered essential:

- Be there when they need you;
- Listen carefully to what they say;
- Be prepared to dirty your hands in the soil (let's get rid of the "me", "myself" and the "I" syndrome);
- Take off the white laboratory jacket and tie and put on the working overall;
- Be on time (rather early than late);
- Be honest (if you do not know say it); and
- Became a technical expert in at least one agricultural field. To communicate to farmers the extension agent must understand agriculture (i.e. must be able to talk agriculture).

These characteristics build credibility and credibility will pave the way for the extension agent to receive "*citizenship*" from the community, the starting point to affective participation. It can be summarized as follows:

- Never attack the fundamental beliefs directly;

- If fundamental beliefs are wrong and incompatible with reality the beliefs will themselves dissolve in the course of time, but nothing gives them life like a direct attack upon them;
- The untruth of the beliefs has to be discovered slowly by the people, and at the rate or pace at which the people are finding new sources of security; and
- A belief upon which a person's security depends cannot simply be wiped out.

Therefore apply the principles of community development and these principles are:

- Show respect for human dignity;
- Accept self-determination as a reality;
- Recognizes the uniqueness of individuality;
- Encourage self help;
- Address the needs of the community;
- Form partnerships;
- Give recognition to indigenous plans; and
- Have an understanding of behavioural change (Lombard, 2003).

The extension agent can only receive "*citizenship*" and a "licence to talk" from the farming community itself. It is given voluntarily and cannot be bought or forced.

The application of these principles of community development is essential for success (Terblanché, 2005).

2.4.4 Change

The philosophy of Extension – "*to help people to help themselves*" includes the principle of change and more specifically behavioural change. According to Hugo (1971:14) the potential of the human race is fundamental to this principle. Extension work (community development) implies change and where will and desire are present change can be facilitated. Will and desire comes from the recognition of respect for human dignity such as self-determination, individuality and self-help i.e. the principles of community development. It is all about an understanding of human behaviour.

Any intervention program/extension program (CASP, LRAD, LARP, Food Security, etc.) should take the following into consideration:

- The program should focus on the adoption behaviour regarding recommended practices. The mediating variables, knowledge, needs and perception (beliefs) will play a key role;
- The program vision must be clear, namely to change the face of the problem, to make people aware of the problem and to persuade them to adopt the recommendations. People need to be empowered to manage the problem;
- Ensure participation by all community members and all stakeholders;
- Identify and train community members as peer educators to strengthen the team and to build trust and honesty (farmers listen more readily to other farmers than to an agriculturist – accept it as a challenge to overcome);
- Determine beforehand the knowledge, attitude and beliefs of the farmers about the problem before addressing the problem (start where the people are and take indigenous knowledge and plans seriously);
- An intervention program must consist of an intensive and well designed communication/training program (clear, specific and with measurable objectives);
- A networking system and clear linkages that include all stakeholders need to be in place, including support structures for an after-care service. If there are no formal structures, the establishment of agricultural development committees at different levels, need to be investigated and initiated. The success of any program depends heavily on good communication structures;
- Give special attention to community members who participate but for whom it is not always possible to attend all activities of the program;

- Qualified and specialized extension agents must oversee the whole program; and
- Monitoring and evaluation of the program as an ongoing process and not a once off activity. This is only possible if the objectives are clear, specific and measurable (including human development objectives) (Jona & Terblanché, 2006:85–88).

3. CONCEPTS THAT COULD POSSIBLY IMPROVE EXTENSION

Taking the above discussion into consideration the following concepts could play a role to improve Agricultural Extension.

3.1 Technical competency

Technical support (and therefore technical knowledge and skills) is an important extension principle that underlies an effective extension approach.

According to the Agricultural Extension Landscape and the Upstream concept, knowledge (agricultural subject matter) is a prerequisite and therefore a qualification in at least one field of technical agriculture is a necessity for the Extensionist. If the Extensionist wants to be successful he/she must be able to communicate in agriculture (i.e. a technical agricultural message is essential). What is expected today is that every extension agent must be an expert in at least one field of technical agriculture. To be successful the extension agent must be technically empowered in agriculture to deliver a service of excellence. The extension agent must have the knowledge and skills to plan a farm physically, biologically and economically, as well as the skills to adapt and transform the technical message to be applicable (and sustainable) to the specific farm and farmer.

3.2 Communication skills

According to the Agricultural Extension Landscape, communication and therefore the interaction with the farmer (or group of farmers) (verbal, non-verbal, written and mass communication) is the vehicle through which Extension takes place. The extension agent must be able and confident to exchange information and ideas in a clear and concise

manner appropriate to the audience in order to explain, persuade, convince and influence others to achieve the desired outcomes. The principles as set out in paragraph 2.2 above are of direct relevance in this respect.

3.3 Group facilitation

According to Stevens and Terblanché (2006:10-11) effective farmer groups are a prerequisite for accelerated agricultural development. Effective farmer groups are the “vehicle” working collectively towards change at farm level and can help with the empowerment of farmers. This suggests that the quality of facilitation and the attention required to the social processes of group development are crucial for sustainable agricultural development. Group facilitation in the Extension Landscape includes the following:

- Group dynamics and theories;
- Group forming and utilization;
- Facilitation methods and techniques;
- Leadership and leadership development; and
- Adult education.

Effective negotiation and conflict resolution skills are often decisive to ensure successful group functioning.

Although facilitation plays an important role in effective group functioning success cannot be guaranteed by good facilitation alone. The full range of extension principles are relevant (ref. paragraph 2.2 above).

3.4 Extension management

The question that needs to be answered is: “Can someone who is not Agriculturally and Extension qualified (and competent), manage Extension programs/projects?” The essential knowledge areas for Extension management have been identified in Table 1 with the relevant extension principles listed in paragraph 2.2 above. The challenge lies with the simultaneous application of these principles within the practical field situation – each situation being unique and different.

4. GUIDELINES FOR FARMER SETTLEMENT AND THE ROLE OF AN IMPROVED EXTENSION SERVICE

Considering farmer settlement it is necessary to define (determine) what the ultimate outcome of the settlement program needs to be. What does the government want to achieve with farmer settlement?

According to the Strategic Plan for the South African Agriculture (Department of Agriculture, 2001) the vision for the agricultural sector is:

“A united and prosperous sector”

The vision implies sustained profitable participation and the core focuses on the following strategic goal:

“To generate equitable access and participation in a globally competitive, profitable and sustainable agricultural sector contributing to a better life for all”.

Within the same document (p15 -16) the following aspects are clearly stated with regard to farmer settlement and Land reform:

- Promoting new entrants into the sector, the focus will be on economic empowerment initiatives;
- Land should be used productively which will only be achieved once support services as well as training programs are provided;
- Pre-settlement support including:
 - The identification of new farmers,
 - Needs assessments among new entrants,
 - Improved market access and the removal of market barriers,
 - Enhanced transfer of technology,
 - Implementation of a human resource development plan, entrepreneurial development and mentorship programs,
 - Access to financial services,
 - Improved ability and efficiency of extension personnel,
 - Assistance to new farmers with on-farm infrastructure, and
 - Sustainable management of natural resources;

- Post settlement support services to farmers should include the following:
 - Research, extension, finance, market access, development, training and skills development.

The above settlement support aspects are very broad but clearly suggest the importance of effective support to farmers. The challenge is to address the 50% (2,3 million hectares) of transferred agricultural land which is currently unproductive because of insufficient support services to new farmers.

4.1 Proposed guidelines to settle farmers

After visiting several land reform projects (Terblanché, 2008) during the past two years the following guidelines are proposed as a starting point:

a) Introductory remarks

“A farm does not make anyone a farmer”

The buzz word today is empowerment which can be formulated as:

Willingness + Ability = Empowerment.

Willingness is a personal characteristic within the human being. A willing person can be capacitated (amongst others) by means of training programmes to fulfil a task successfully (by gaining knowledge and/or skills).

The aim/goal of empowerment is to achieve interdependence which requires hard work, effort, patience, trust and faith.

It is therefore important to also address the ability part of empowerment (i.e. a person's willingness). The question is how? Training appears to offer the obvious situations but do not start with training.

Get the people to work together, then start training.....do not begin with training. Learn to ride the bicycle first, and then we will teach you the road signs”

b) The farmer

The following points are considered opportune:

- Convince farmers to work as a team i.e. to participate, to be committed, to co-operate and to accept responsibility for decisions and activities;
- The selection of new farmers by means of the implementation of a screening instrument is crucial. Appropriate screening instruments will enable government to select the best candidates. The screening instrument should also enable government to determine specific managerial and other limitations in the personal profile of the candidates that should be addressed by specific skills programs and/or learnerships (hands on training). Specific human development programmes can be developed and implemented for new as well as settled farmers;
- Farmers need to understand that farming is a business;
- Capacity building programmes should lead to a “Farming Certificate” (in China it is called the Green Certificate). This Certificate should become the “key” to open the doors (for the farmer) to finance, markets, contracts and land ownership;
- The implementation of a mentorship or coaching program for the farmer should be provided by the Extension Service, in co-operation with Organized Agriculture and;
- It is essential to develop and implement a Work Place Skills Plan for farm personnel.

c) The farm

The following points deserve consideration:

- Every farm should have an effective farm or business plan. This plan must include the physical, biological and economical plans of the farm. Once this business plan is in place the CASP program (Department of Agriculture, 2004) can play not only a vital role in

the provision of effective infrastructure but also supporting the human capacity building program for the farmer and farm workers. (Failing to plan often means planning to fail);

- The farm plan should include financial support i.e. access to financial institutions;
- The production of produce needs to be market driven i.e. the farmer needs a market and or contract for his/her farm produce; and
- Management should be structured according to the unique needs (situation) of the farm concerned.

5. CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE EXTENSION WORKER

Internationally a growing number of organizations/institutions delivering a service to clients call their service a “professional” service executed by “professionals”. An important aspect of professional organizations and their registered professionals is the so-called Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of their members as a prerequisite for continued registration with the organization. Although the South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE) has, since its establishment, promoted Extension as a profession it never received recognition as a professional organization.

The concept of CPD is a key element of professional recognition and should be supported and developed in such a way that it will promote the process of professional registration of extension agents in South Africa. The CPD will ensure that registered persons can continuously develop their skills and knowledge.

It will enable them (the extension agents) to:

- Keep abreast of current know how namely:
 - The technical agricultural skills and knowledge; and
 - The extension skills and knowledge.

The importance of professionalism in Extension is becoming a reality. The new Natural Scientific Professions Act, 2003 (Act 27 of 2003) came into effect in February 2004 and brought about changes directed at regulating the natural sciences. The SASAE has been invited to affiliate with the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNSP) to facilitate the process on behalf of extension agents. Following this the next step will be to develop a career path for extension agents (Terblanché, 2007).

6. THE EXTENSION AGENT MUST HAVE A VISION THAT IS FUTURE FOCUSED AND HE/SHE MUST BELIEVE IN IT.

Do extension agents and their organizations really understand what is being expected from them and what the outcome of their endeavours should be (or are they merely doing what they are being told to do)?

What is needed is a vision that is future focused.

In a more narrative tone one could ask:

- “Are you laying bricks or are you building a cathedral?” (i.e. are you motivated and enthusiastic about what you are doing?)
- “Do you avoid stumbling blocks or are you using them as stepping stones?” (i.e. use life’s stumbling blocks as opportunities and make features out of eyesores).

7. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

South Africa is often perceived as a country with a viable economy that warrants investment. The prospects for the future are bright but warning lights are flickering namely shortages and high prices of foodstuffs. What can the agricultural extension service do to address the issue?

Through consultation, discussion dialogue extension practitioners and trainers developed an Agricultural Landscape for Extension, identifying specific concepts, study fields and essential knowledge/skills areas that form the “playing field” for the extension agent. The fixed principles are as follows, namely the recognition that:

- There exists an interrelationship between agricultural development and human development;
- Development should be needs based;
- Participation is essential in respect of all role players; and
- Any intervention program must be behavioural change focused.

The Landscape indicted the following concepts as necessary to improve Agricultural Extension namely:

- Technical competency (i.e. the extension agent must be an expert in at least one field of agriculture);
- Communication skills (i.e. verbal, non-verbal, written and mass communication);
- Group facilitation skills (i.e. group dynamics and leadership); and
- Extension management (i.e. program planning, management functions, ethics, monitoring, evaluation and leadership development).

Land reform in SA is a priority program with the ultimate goal that agricultural land should be used productively. The successful settlement of new farmers requires pre- and post-settlement support with the extension agent playing a significant role. The following guidelines are considered appropriate:

- The selection of new farmers (by means of a reliable screening instrument) is essential. Owning a farm does not make one a farmer. The farmers' willingness and ability to learn and to adopt are of critical importance;
- Beneficiaries need to work together and participate (co-operate) fully. They should be committed and should accept responsibility for their actions and decisions;

- New farmers must have a clear understanding of their farms as businesses;
- Where possible new farmers should be linked to capable mentors;
- Farms need viable and sustainable business plans (including physical, biological and economic plans);
- Farms and farmers need financial support as prescribed in their business plans; and
- The production of produce needs to be market driven.

Today's clients demand professional services. The extension agent is not excluded and therefore, the professional registration of extension agents of today is non-negotiable and should be implemented as a matter of urgency.

It would appear that extension services lack vision that is future focused. The service should clearly visualize the outcomes of their service and work with determination to achieve it's goals.

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