

## **DOES EXTENSION HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT?**

Zwane, E. M.<sup>5</sup>

**Key words:** Rural development, Extension.

### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper seeks to justify that extension has a role to play in rural development. The author has adopted a desktop study in which literature was reviewed and synthesized in order to establish facts about rural development and extension. The author discusses the meanings of agricultural extension and rural development. He locates the place of extension in rural development where it can make its contribution. Furthermore he identifies five specific factors that are central to extension in rural development. Some of the factors include: food security, conservation of natural resources, dissemination of useful information, sustainability of projects, and empowerment of farming groups. The paper concludes by suggesting some recommendations on how extension can better be utilized in order to achieve sustained results in rural development. The recommended factors include: establishment of rural development Centres, developing farmer leadership, establishment of agricultural development teams, collaborating with other role players and developing a new extension agenda. The recommendations are broad and further research is recommended to specifically look into other factors that may have a serious impact in farmer's lives such as sustainability, increasing farmer income and positive perceptions.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Studies have shown that throughout human history, civilizations have depended on agriculture for their survival, however as soon as they neglected their land resources - agriculture, industries collapsed and the civilizations also collapsed (Nortjie, 2008:1). The ancient civilizations often cited as the best example include Mesopotamia, Mayan and the Roman Empire. In Africa, the classical examples include Zimbabwe and Guinea. Both countries were exporter of food to other countries in Africa, but when they neglected their agriculture at some point, they were no longer able to produce sufficient food for export. The United States of America (USA) is one of the best known examples of a nation that has in recent times become a world super power on the basis of a strong agriculture, and as a result has developed its strong industrial economic and political development (Nortjie, 2008:1).

### **2. THE PROBLEM**

The problem investigated in this paper is that there is a serious doubt whether agricultural extension has a role to play in Rural Development. Experience in other countries for example some policy makers tend to lose sight and treat extension officers and the community development workers on the same basis in terms of performance of certain tasks such as the distribution of credit and production inputs (Swanson, 1984). If an extension officer resist helping on what he feels 'it is like promoting dependency', the community report the official through the channels available to them. In Limpopo they report such an officer to the

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<sup>5</sup> Private Bag X 28, Chuenespoort, 0745. Tel: 015 632 5529. Fax: 015 632 4590. Cell: 0828087173.  
E-mail: [Zwaneme@gmail.com](mailto:Zwaneme@gmail.com) or [zwaneme@agric.limpopo.gov.za](mailto:zwaneme@agric.limpopo.gov.za)

Member of the Executive Council (MEC) and some political councillors do the same where they tend to expect extension officers to perform odd jobs such as delivering fertilizers and taking part in meetings reflecting towards political tendency.

It can be seen from the cited experiences that unless the tasks are clearly defined, extension officers will not know exactly what to expect in order to achieve. It is argued that since agriculture is one of the “movers” of development, (Bembridge, 1990), agricultural extension is considered as a special branch of rural extension dealing with several economic and social aspects of farming.

The expected objectives of the study are discussed in the next section.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

This paper is guided by the following objectives:

- To make a clear distinction between Extension and Rural development.
- To identify the place of extension within rural development framework.
- To identify critical area of intervention by extension in rural development
- To recommend approaches of joint intervention in rural development.

### 4. METHODOLOGY

Rural Development has been propagated in the world with different forms. According to some authors it emerged in the 1950 ‘s under the banner of community development (Bembridge, 1990) and in the 1970’s it surfaced as “**basic needs**” and in the 1980’s it resurfaced as “**sustainable development**” yet focusing to the people as beneficiaries. In South Africa Rural Development took a positive turn when a new Department of Land Reform and Rural Development was established in 2009. Based on these developments the author has adopted a desktop study in order to establish the facts about rural development. These facts would be synthesized to make broad recommendations that could be followed by a further research to narrow those broad recommendations.

### 5. FINDINGS

Agriculture is one of the interventions which have a potential in improving the standard of living of people, for example, Governments use extension programmes to reach out to farmers (Van den Ban and Hawkins, 1990). Is extension synonymous with rural development? What follows is an attempt to explain the meaning of these two concepts.

#### 5.1. Definition of the concepts

##### 5.1.1 Extension

Scholars have attempted to define the concept of extension (Bembridge, 1990: 11; Röling, 1988: 36; Swanson & Claar, 1984: 1; Oakley & Garforth, 1985: 20; Leagans, 1971: 106), but due to its dynamic character a single definition is not acceptable. There are three dimensions of extension which the researcher presents. The first dimension considers extension in terms of agricultural performance. Extension is

viewed only in terms of improving production and profitability of farmers. The second dimension equates extension to rural community development.

Under this dimension extension is viewed as serving to advance rural communities including the improvement of their agricultural development tasks. The third dimension equates extension to comprehensive non-formal community education. Extension is viewed as a provider of non-formal agriculturally related continued education for multiple audiences such as farmers, spouses, youth rural community and urban horticulturists (Rivera, 1989: 94).

One definition of agricultural extension widely used in the FAO publications sees extension as a service or system which assists farm people, through educational procedures, in improving farming methods and techniques, increasing production efficiency and income, bettering their levels of living and lifting the social and educational standards of rural life (Swanson, 1984). The definition focuses on encouraging and involving rural people's own organizations, enhancing individual and collective self-reliance, and environmental issues. From the analysis it is clear that extension is different from rural development. The question is; what is rural development? The concept is discussed as follows:

### 5.1.2 Rural Development

There are different understandings attached to the concept of rural development. According to (Schutjer, 1991:3) rural development is more than agricultural development. Observations about rural development suggest that it is about enabling rural people to take control of their destiny, thereby dealing effectively with rural poverty through the optimal use and management of natural resources. It is a participatory process through which rural people learn over time, through their own experiences and initiatives, how to adapt their indigenous knowledge to their changing world (Ministry of Rural Development and Land Reform, 2009:5).

Rural development has evolved from being "a statement of framework of development" into becoming "a policy instrument" known as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The newly formed Ministry of Rural Development and Land Reform which is the custodian of rural development has developed a new rural development policy framework known as "the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP)". From the foregoing discussion it is clear that rural development and extension are two different disciplines, what might be common could be the fact that both may need to be driven by people who understand their missions. Therefore the South African context of rural development presents an opportunity to all extension advisors to implement it effectively. The reasons are discussed in the next section.

## 5.2. The place of Extension in Rural Development

Transformation processes in South Africa puts extension in a spot light for service delivery. The recent pronouncement of the new policy on Rural Development and Land Reform namely the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) gives new insight, and clear direction. The CRDP has three major components. The first is Agrarian Transformation which consists of the following: Land, Livestock,

Cropping and Commodity. Extension has a big role to play within this component. The second component is Land Reform, which has the following sub programmes: Land tenure, Redistribution, Restitution and Strategic Land. Various provincial Departments of Agriculture are currently involved through their collaborative efforts with different stake holders. For example Limpopo Department of Agriculture (LDA) had seconded agricultural technicians to Land's Claim Commission for a period of five years in order to assist in the processing of outstanding claims.

The third component of CRDP is rural development whose focus includes: Economic infrastructure, Social Infrastructure, Public amenities & facilities and ICT Infrastructure. Extension will have little direct contribution, but can have an indirect influence for example in economic infrastructure such as markets can serve as a link between the other two components of CRDP when farmers sell their products. It should be understood that the CRDP is a cross-cutting Government's Programme of Action (Ministry of Rural Development and Land Affairs, 2009). Specific areas of intervention by extension are discussed hereunder.

### **5.3. Areas of contribution by Extension**

The perceived major objectives of rural development according to (Schutjer, 1991:1) include the non-economic goals, such as "quality of life," which give primacy to environmental quality. Extension can contribute within the two components of CRDP namely Agrarian Transformation and Land Reform in terms of crop and livestock production. Extensionists can make significant contribution in rural development provided they are guided by specific policy. The study has found five critical areas in which extension can play a role and are discussed next.

#### **5.3.1 Food security**

Food security is often defined in terms of food availability, food access and food utilization (USAID 1995) as cited by Rivera and Qamar (2003). Food availability is achieved when sufficient quantities of food are consistently available to all individuals within a country. Such food can be supplied through household production, other domestic outputs, commercial imports or food assistance. Food access is ensured when households and all individuals within them have adequate resources to obtain appropriate food for a nutritional diet. Access depends upon income available to the household, on the distribution of income within the household and on the price of food. Food utilization is the proper biological use of food, requiring a diet providing sufficient energy and essential nutrients, potable water, and adequate sanitation. Effective food utilization depends on knowledge within the household of food storage and processing techniques.

Successful food security and poverty-oriented programmes do not only assist poor rural populations to produce more and diversified products, but to produce a surplus that can be marketed and thereby generate income for the purposes of improving quality of life through improved diet and nutrition. Extensionists have received training which combines technical knowledge and communication skills. They can apply this knowledge to help in improving farming, farm yields and thereby reduce poverty (Neuchatel Group, 2008).

### 5.3.2 Conservation of Natural resource

Farmers and communities have little urge to conserve resources unless they are forced by legislation. The inception of land care programmes are the best examples. In the past rangers were used to enforce compliance, experience shows that as soon as a gap exist in the implementation of law enforcement people and farmers go back to misuse of the natural resources. An extensionist does not use force but known strategies of persuasion to assist farmers and communities to conserve natural resources. There are different institutions that can be accessed to learn more about best practices in natural resource conservation in Africa and in the world, for example, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) has developed a website of best practices (FAO, 2010).

### 5.3.3. Dissemination of useful Information

Extensionists usually persuade farmers to adopt new practices mainly because they have access to research and its results. They have received proper training that can be executed to benefit the farming communities. Extensionists should access different information needed by farmers in terms of production, cultural practices, markets and marketing. Depending on their tasks they can broaden it if possible to include farmer education and problem solving advices (Rivera, Röling, 1988: 37; Bembridge, Leagans, 1961: 3). Other priority information may have to be identified for dissemination. According to (Arion, Merce, Mihasan & Horvat, 1991: 1) what extension should disseminate to farmers may include: - technology transfer; - offering economical advice (including book-keeping); - developing agricultural markets and informational system; - developing small enterprises and discovering new alternatives for obtaining profits.

### 5.3.4. Sustainability of projects

One of the tasks of extension is the emphasis on developing the human capital, enhancing his or her capacity to make decisions, to learn and manage the communication process with others, to analyze the environment, to be a leader, to stand up to oppression and to organize (Röling, 1988: 37). It is quite a challenge to see many government projects that are not sustainable as soon as the government withdraws its support. They then become “white elephants”. Experience has shown that the problem is linked to ownership and group dynamics. Issues of ownership are best understood once farmer groups are trained. Extensionists are well trained to deal with human behaviour. Once they apply their knowledge, projects will have a better chance of becoming sustainable.

### 5.3.5. Empowerment of the farming groups

The perceived objectives of rural development according to (Schutjer, 1991: 1) include the following: 1) growth in local domestic output-income generation, (2) employment creation, and (3) improvement in income distribution within a limited geographical region. Other proponents of development suggest that the "empowerment" of local citizens is the most appropriate goal for rural development. Extension should strengthen the human resource capacity of poor farmers'

organizations, as well as the self-help group capacities to access useful extension services.

There is often inexperienced governance and leadership in many of the resource- poor farmer groups (William and Qamar, 1991:48).

Extensionists can play a role in empowering poor farmers to gain access to capital either through savings or credit. Since they are well trained in terms of local organizational development, they can build farmer institutions, organizing farmers into associations and commodity groups and other forms or co-operative activities. The success of extension in Taiwan and Korea has been equated to farmer associations which extension has played significant role in promoting institutional technology (Rivera, 1989: 95).

## **6. RECOMMENDED APPROACHES OF EXTENSION**

The role that extension can play in rural development has been highlighted however there are more tasks that can be performed to render extension effective. Some of the suggested recommendations are discussed hereunder. According to (Neuchatel Group, 1995), extension should be able to fulfil this two roles namely, (a) accessible and useful to the poorest, and (b) to contribute towards the development of pro poor policies. The study makes recommendations in five areas and is discussed in the next section.

### **6.1 Establishment of Rural Development Centres**

For extension to play a meaningful role in rural development, it is recommended that rural development centres be established in rural areas. If the centres could be equipped with internet capabilities, they can be used by both farmers and the members of the community to access different types of information.

### **6.2 Establishment of Agricultural Development Teams**

A new kind of teamwork is needed among various rural development organizations, bringing together specialists from across disciplines and from various sectors knowledgeable about the agricultural process. These teams should be able to respond to the farmers and community-expressed needs.

### **6.3 Developing Farmer Leadership**

Extension work with different kinds of leaders such as: innovators, opinion, community, or traditional leaders. Leadership involves all different leaders - not only *executive leaders*, but also *networkers* (frontline workers, in-house consultants, trainers, and professional staff who spread ideas throughout and outside the organization) and *local line leaders* (branch managers, project team leaders, and other frontline performers). All have an essential role in bringing about development. Poor leadership is a serious problem which sometimes is manifested within resource-poor farmer groups. They are led by people who perceive the group as an avenue for accessing financial resources from support organizations, while in some cases it is for political ambitions.

Weak leadership tends to create dependency. Weak or inappropriate leadership in farmer groups also inhibits their capacities to address their needs, for example failing to mobilize their resources to reasonable levels before seeking external support (William and Qamar, 1991:48). The greatest danger for “*carrying*” the farmers is the fact that it perpetuates a dependency syndrome which destroys self-reliance and confidence. Farmers should be assisted to graduate from one level to another and to assume their true leadership role.

#### **6.4 Collaborating with other Role Players**

Experience has shown that extension services are not provided by one source, but a number of organizations such as : - other beneficiaries;- organizations and services financed by state; - private companies that sell inputs for agriculture, that offer agricultural credit or buy the agricultural exploitations products;- diverse governmental organizations: political, social, - beneficiaries organizations;- diverse non-governmental organizations; - general mass-media or with agricultural specifically;- private consultants, veterinaries, advocates (Arion, Merce, Mihasan & Horvat, 1991:1).

Different stakeholders need to be coordinated to avoid duplication of scarce resources. One of the important role players is research. There are no proper working relations between extension and research. According to (Du Toit, 2006: 2), the trend to involve extension in research activities gained strong international focus since the 1980's. In countries such as Zambia and Guatemala it is well known that there was real evidence of successful implementation of research/extension collaboration at National level. The idea of cooperation among stakeholders engaged in extension services should be encouraged

#### **6.5 Developing a new Extension Agenda**

The dynamics of extension is changing and it started in the 1980's, therefore it is recommended that government should develop a new and expanded policy agenda for agricultural extension and communication for rural development. Part of the change should be to focus on food security and income generation of the rural poor.

### **7. CONCLUSION**

Extension has a comparative advantage over other professions of similar weight. This is so because of their unique working relationship which it has with farmer groups. The uniqueness of their situations provides the basis of a strong comparative advantage in rural development. Extensionists have reservoir of knowledge on rural development, because they developed a tradition of working in close collaboration with local traditional leadership to solve community problems and to develop and conduct educational programmes to meet the local needs. Above all, the majority of them are having offices in the wards. Extensionists need to be motivated and encouraged because they don't always have supervisors with them in the wards where they are working.

Based on the findings of the study one can conclude that indeed extension has a role to play in rural development. However, the recommendations are broad, and there is a need for a follow-up study to establish the depth of the contribution of extension in terms of, for example increasing farmer income, advances knowledge on project sustainability and creation of positive perception among the farming community.

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S.Afr. Tydskr. Landbouvoorl./S. Afr. J. Agric. Ext.,  
Vol. 40, 2012: 16 – 24

Zwane,

ISSN 0301-603X

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