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THE INFLUENCE OF BENEFICIARIES NEEDS ON PROJECT SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The starting point of any project is a need and a need is much more concrete and more definable: otherwise a project can never be well planned For a project to be successful, the needs of the beneficiaries has to be clearly analysed and understood for appropriate planning to take place (Swanepoel & de Beer 2006: 172). The main objective of this study is to determine the influence that the beneficiaries needs had on the project success or failure as perceived by both the beneficiaries (project participants) and the serving extension officers. The study revealed that 20.8% of the project participants and 30.2% of the extension officers indicated that the farmer's needs were only mostly met.

Secondly, significantly more project participants (26.4%) than extension officers (13.6%) indicated that the choice of project content was based on calculated impact.

A total of 56% extension officers and only 20% project participants indicated "other content of choice" as their most important option. The majority (52.4%) of both respondent categories indicated that the training received was very relevant. Project participants indicated a need for 25.25 mean days of training while extension officers indicated a need for 26.71 mean days of training. The majority (52.4%) of both respondent categories indicated that the training was very much relevant and at least 48% of both respondent categories indicated that the need assessment was done on continuous bases. A negative aspect is that 31% of all the respondents indicated that needs assessment was only done once a year while 12% indicated that there was no assessment done. The majority of project participants (73%) reported that they were consulted before the project started and only 7.1% reported that they were not consulted, while 38.3 % of both respondent categories indicated that the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) method was used to assess their needs. The findings clearly indicate a significant association between farmer's needs and project failure or success.

1. INTRODUCTION

The goals of most government rural development projects are to: (a) Benefit the people in the rural areas and (b) Contribute to the overall development of a country (Wood, 1981). Very often projects are designed at national level, based on considerations such as political priorities, technical concerns, and macroeconomic targets.

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These national level considerations by project designers can actually be in conflict with the factors effecting change behaviour of villagers which in turn affect the overall success of rural development projects (Wood, 1981).The Independent Development Trust (IDT) defined a project as a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service. Projects are discrete activities, aimed at specific objectives with earmarked budgets and limited time frames (Honadle & Rosengard, 1983). They further state that projects are for specific geographic areas and aimed at particular beneficiary group. Within a project, participation should be encouraged to all role players to ensure its success. According to Bruce & Langdon (2007) the essential ingredients for success using project management principles include; defined and agreed goals, a committed team, and a viable and flexible plan of action. One concise literature study by Jiang, Klein and Balloun (1996) indicated the importance of client consultation and that project team members share solicited input from all potential clients of the project. The project team members must understand the needs and systems presently used by the beneficiaries while also ensuring that they will be in a position to adopt any newly introduced system should there be a need therefore. Field (1997) reported that projects fail too often because either the project scope was not fully appreciated and/or the user needs not fully understood. Leicht (1999) indicated that high user expectations can actually be the cause of project failure. All community development projects should be built around community needs rather than political, departmental or individual needs. According to Swanepoel and de Beer (2006:172) the starting point of any project should be a need and this need should be more concrete by definition and therefore, more definable; otherwise the project can never be well planned. People know their needs, but a project cannot address all or many of the people's needs at the same time. A project can only tackle one need at a time. The study done by Düvel (2002:47) on comparative evaluation of some participatory needs assessment methods in extension revealed that:

- Need appraisals, particularly with wide participation, do not provide a broad basis of consensus and are, consequently, not always a sound basis of departure for development programs; and
- Needs are time-specific, which emphasizes the importance of remaining sensitive to changing needs as situations change.
- Needs can be changed, perhaps manipulated, making it a potentially valuable tool in the creation of consensus, which is often the precondition for successful community programs and projects.

According to Swanepoel & de Beer (2006:37), in the past projects were built around interests or hobbies but a large number of these never came to fruition. People are not going to rally together around needs that have been identified by some expert and that do not match or support their own needs. Therefore, needs identification is a prerequisite before any action; it should be the first undertaking before a project commences. The needs identification exercise should be a participatory process because it is the beneficiaries who must identify their needs before they organize themselves to do something about their situation. People must be the owners of their situation. They must realise that they have a certain need and they are the only people that can do something about it. They must take ownership of their actions as well as their needs. It is important to realise that needs identification can lead to expectations (Swanepoel & de Beer, 2006).

It is always important that people forming an action group should feel the identified need to be their own (Swanepoel & de Beer 2006:174-175). The extension officer, government agent or community development worker should be careful not to impose needs on people or to organize people for what they regards as a good cause. People will not easily be moved to action if they do not feel a need, irrespective of the reality and urgency of that need. For this reason the felt need must receive preference even if the community development worker feels otherwise about their identified felt needs. It is necessary for the community development worker to work through the groups felt needs in order to bring the action group to identify their real need. Felt and unfelt needs refers, according to Düvel (1994), to the needs perceived by the community (beneficiaries) and the extension officer respectively.

Different groups of people may be concerned about different needs or that may have different perceptions about the same needs (Swanepoel & de Beer 2006:173). If different people have different needs, grouping becomes necessary so that they address different needs. The only limitation is the capacity of the community development worker to facilitate appropriate projects according to specific needs. It is always important that a project focus on a single priority need, especially if the action group and the community development worker are unsure of needs identification process, or have a base of skills or other capacities and capabilities. There is nothing wrong with admitting that there are several needs and to identify them accordingly. They however should be ranked in order of priority according to urgency or do-ability or alternative agreed criteria (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006:173).

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to determine the influence of beneficiaries needs on project success or failure with reference to the following aspects:

- If the project meet the beneficiary needs;
- The influence of the "other" project meeting the beneficiary needs;
- The content of choice of extension programs/projects to assist farmers;
- Training needs of project participants:
    - i) The number of days of formal training received by project beneficiaries since the initial phase of the project;
    - ii) Number of days of formal training needed to assist participants to produce optimally at the initial phase of the project; and
    - iii) Relevance of training in terms of what was produced.
- Need assessment:
    - i) Frequency of need assessment;
    - ii) Consultation during need assessment; and
    - iii) The need assessment process.

3. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was used to collect data by means of personal interviews from 126 project participants (beneficiaries) and by means of group interviews from 73 extension officers involved in project activities in the North West Province of South Africa. Data was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and analysed by the Department of Statistics at the University of Pretoria using Pearson Chi-Square test and a T-test for Equality of Means.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 The project meeting the farmers needs

Any project established in the North West Province by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, main aim is to meet the felt and the unfelt needs of the farmers and also to contribute to improving their standard of living. According to Terblanche (2008:70) any development that focuses only on felt needs should be discouraged, there should be some reconciliation between felt needs and unfelt needs. It is important to determine if the project was need-based and to what extend did it met their needs.

According to Table 1 below only 20.8% of the project participants and 30.2% of the extension officers indicated that the felt needs of the project participants were only mostly met. The fact that, 41% of project participants and 35% of extension officer respondents indicated that the needs were only slightly and even not met at all is an alarming finding that needs to be addressed. Even more alarming is the fact that only 6% of all the respondents indicated that all their needs have been met. The Chi-Square test (Value= 3.339; p= 0.414) indicated that there was no significant difference between the two respondent categories. There is therefore room for improvement to ensure that a project will meet at least the farmer's felt needs as well as the needs (unfelt farmer needs) of extension officers.

Table 1: The extent to which the project meets the farmers needs according to both respondent categories

Categories: The extent to which the project meets farmer's needs	**Respondents categories**				**Total**	
	Project participants		**Extension officers**			
	(n)	***(%)***	***(n)***	***(%)***	***(n)***	***(%)***
1. Needs not met at all	9	7.5%	2	3.2%	11	6.0%
2. Needs slightly met	40	33.3%	20	31.7%	60	32.8%
3. Needs were met	40	33.3%	17	27.0%	57	31.1%
4. Needs were mostly met	25	20.8%	19	30.2%	44	24.0%
5. All needs were met	6	5.0%	5	7.9%	11	6.0%
Total N	120		63		183	
%	100.0%		100.0%		100.0%	

$$x^2 = 3.939; p = 0.414$$

4.2 The influence of the "other" project meeting the farmers needs

A number of "other" projects were listed by all respondents. The highest percentage across both respondent categories indicated the following sequence according to preference: horticulture (34%), livestock (24%), poultry (20%) and field crops (6%). The Pearson Chi-Square test revealed that there was no statistical difference (x^2=30.868; p=0.196) between the two respondent categories. Both respondent categories indicating that there are other projects that will better meet the farmer's needs.

This is an indication that project participants felt needs were not effectively determined.

4.3 The content of choice of extension programmes/projects to assist farmers

Needs assessments and the choice of projects according to content are or should be closely related or intertwined (Düvel, 2010). The content of choice to select an extension programme or project was based on calculated impact; comparative impact; political need; extension officers and departmental needs. The findings are presented in Table 2 below. According to the Pearson Chi-Square test (x^2=25.246; p=0.000) there is a statistical significant difference between both respondent categories whereby significantly more project participants (26.4%) than extension officers (13.6%) indicated that the choice of content was based on calculated impact. A significant difference also occurs based on departmental needs again in favour of the project participants (26.4%) versus 11.9% of the extension officers. Significantly more extension officers (55.9%), than project participants (20.0%), indicated "other content of choice" as their most important option. Unfortunately the option "other content of choice" was not further described as to what it really means. Important however is that there is an association between project success or failure and choice of content of the extension program/project.

Table 2: The importance of content of choice of extension programmes/projects as perceived by project participants and extension officers

The content of choice of extension program/project categories	Respondents categories				Total	
	Project participants		Extension officers			
	(n)	*(%)*	*(n)*	*(%)*	*(n)*	*(%)*
1. Calculated impact	33	26.4%	8	13.6%	41	22.3%
2. Comparative impact	23	18.4%	8	13.6%	31	16.8%
3. Extension officer's needs	7	5.6%	1	1.7%	8	4.3%
4. Departmental needs	33	26.4%	7	11.9%	40	41.7%
5. Political need	4	3.2%	2	3.4%	6	3.3%
6. Other content of choice of extension programme	25	20.0%	33	55.9%	58	31.5%
Total N	125		59		184	
%	100.0%		100.0%		100.0%	

$x^2 = 25.246; p = 0.000$

4.4 Training needs of project participants

The ideal in the North West Province is to train beneficiaries whose grants are approved before they commence production. This is done to improve their knowledge and skills with regard to what they intend producing. Normally 10% of the total CASP budget, approved for the project, is used for training project participants. The training division in the province in cooperation with the Extension officers are responsible to determine the training needs to ensure that project participants receive relevant training. When dealing with issues of training it is proper to ask the same questions raised by Terblanche (2006:134-151) namely: "Is the education and training situation sufficient to address the needs of a new generation of farmers and agriculturists?" He further said, empower the extension workers by means of in-service training program to improve their agricultural and extension knowledge and skills. The farmer is central to all extension strategies, which concentrate on adult education, rural and community development and participation (Hayward & Botha, 1995). Training needs during the survey was assessed in terms of the number of days project participants were exposed to training; number of formal training days needed to assist project participants to produce optimally and the relevance of training in terms of what was produced.

i) **Number of days of formal training received by project participants since the initial phase of the project**

Formal education in the developing areas is often inadequate (Hayward & Botha, 1995). According to Mmbengwa, Gudidza, Groenewald, van Schalkwyk (2009) investment in human capital educational and vocational training provided by the

extension services on low external inputs technologies may have a greater social return. They further said agricultural education and training influences agricultural productivity through enhancing farmers' ability to choose the optimum combination of farm inputs and farm outputs by uplifting the farmers' ability to acquire and adapt to new technologies. Table 3 reveals that there is no significant difference (T=0.360; p=0.720) in the mean number of days training was received according to project participants (14.30) and extension officers (12.94).

Table 3: The mean number of days of formal training received since the initial phase of the project according to project participants and extension officers

Respondent categories		Statistic	Std. Error
Project participants	Mean	14.30	1.894
	Median	5.00	
	Std. Deviation	19.958	
	Minimum	0	
	Maximum	90	
	Range	90	
Extension officers	Mean	12.94	2.269
	Median	10.00	
	Std. Deviation	12.630	
	Minimum	0	
	Maximum	48	
	Range	48	

T = 0.360; p = 0.720

ii) **Number of days of formal training needed to assist project participants to produce optimally at the initial phase of the project**

Table 4 reveals that there is no significant difference (T=-0.288; p=0.772) in the mean number of days needed according to project participants (25.25) and extension officers (26.71). Both respondent categories indicated a clearly larger number of mean training days needed than what was received namely:

a) Project participants indicated an increase of 10.95 mean days needed for training; and

b) Extension officers indicated an increase of 13.77 mean days needed for training.

This is a clear indication of the importance of training in the success or failure of projects.

Table 4: Respondent's mean days needed for formal training to produce optimally at the initial phase of the project

Respondent categories		Statistic	Std. Error
Project participants	Mean	25.25	2.233
	Median	20.00	
	Std. Deviation	23.946	
	Minimum	0	
	Maximum	90	
	Range	90	
Extension officers	Mean	26.71	4.661
	Median	20.00	
	Std. Deviation	24.663	
	Minimum	0	
	Maximum	90	
	Range	90	

T = -0.288; p = 0.772

iii) **Relevance of training in terms of what was produced**

A strong in-service training section with the necessary subject matter specialist support is vital for creating a dynamic service (Hayward & Botha, 1995). According to Gebeda (1996) technical training should be in line with business activities including financial management. In the North West Province training is done before commencement of any project, organised by the training division for all approved projects to be financed for a particular financial year. It is always in line with the training needs of the farmers, because assessment of training needs is done by the same division before the actual training. Extension officers always help and support the community to conceptualize and prioritize their problem/needs. According to Terblanche (2005), the identified needs of the community should be addressed and not imposed on them. The findings are presented in the next table.

Table 5: The relevance of training in terms of what was produced according to both respondent categories

The relevance of training categories	Respondents categories				Total	
	Project participants		Extension officers			
	(n)	*(%)*	*(n)*	*(%)*	*(n)*	*(%)*
1. Very much irrelevant	3	2.5%	1	3.7%	4	2.8%
2. Irrelevant	6	5.1%	1	3.7%	7	4.8%
3. Relevant	18	15.3%	4	14.8%	22	15.2%
4. More relevant	27	22.9%	9	33.3%	36	24.8%
5. Very much relevant	64	54.2%	12	44.4%	76	52.4%
Total N	118		27		145	
%	100.0%		100.0%		100.0%	

$x^2 = 1.733; p = 0.876$

The majority (52.4%) of both respondent categories indicated that the training was very much relevant. Only 3% of both respondent categories indicted that the training was very much irrelevant. The Chi–Square test performed revealed that there is no statistical difference at 5% significant level across both categories of respondents. It is clear from the table that only 7.6% of respondents indicated that the training was irrelevant and even very mush irrelevant.

4.5 Needs assessment

Good assessment practice is about having enough relevant information on which to base sound analysis and judgments about responses. What constitutes 'enough' may depend on the context and the level of risk that people face (Darcy & Hofmann, 2003). According to Düvel (2010) extension needs are important in two aspects; firstly their relationship with the beneficiaries, and secondly the issue of priority choice. One of the major purposes of need assessments is to allow for effective behaviour intervention.

i) Frequency of need assessment

Assessment appears to inform decision-making in relation to four main aspects: whether to intervene; the nature and scale of the intervention; prioritization and allocation of resources; and program design and planning (Darcy & Hofmann, 2003). The frequency of need assessment is presented in Table 6 below.

The highest total percentage (48%) of both respondent categories reported that the assessment was done on a continuous bases, and the second highest percentage (31%), indicated that it was that it was done once a year. There is an indication of a difference ($\chi^2 = 7.927$; $p = 0.092$) between project participants (53%) and extension officers (39%) opinion regarding the frequency of need assessment on continuous bases in favour of the project participants. Importantly however is the fact

that both respondent categories indicated the necessity for a continuous process of need assessment. A negative aspect is that 31% of all the respondents indicated that needs assessment was only done once a year while 12% indicated that there was no assessment done.

Table 6: The frequency of need assessment executed at project level as perceived by project participants and extension officers

The frequency of needs assessment	Respondents categories				Total	
	Project participants		Extension officers			
	(n)	*(%)*	*(n)*	*(%)*	*(n)*	*(%)*
1. No assessment	13	10.4%	10	14.5%	23	11.9%
2. Once a year	36	28.8%	24	34.8%	60	30.9%
3. Once in 2 years	4	3.2%	0	.0%	4	2.1%
4. Continuously	66	52.8%	27	39.1%	93	47.9%
5. Other categories of need assessment	6	4.8%	8	11.6%	14	7.2%
Total N	125		69		194	
Total %	100.0%		100.0%		100.0%	

$x^2 = 7.927; p = 0.092$

ii) Consultation during need assessment process

The success of participation in Uganda depended on "starting where people are and learning from their ways and working with them" (Terblanche, 2005:175) citing Semana (1999:109-108). He further said that consultation during needs assessment helps to establish where people are and what they are doing. Darcy & Hofmann (2003) highlighted the fact that consultation with and the involvement of potential beneficiaries in the assessment process is inconsistent and sometimes absent altogether.

The question raised during the survey intended to find out if extension officers consulted project participants during the process of need assessment. The findings are presented in Table 7.

The majority of project participants (73%) reported that they were consulted and only 7.1% reported that they were not consulted. However 63% of the extension officers did not confirm the views of the project participants (73%) instead they reported that "other" methods were used. The above association is confirmed by the Chi-Square test (χ^2 = 74.051; p= 0.000) across the two respondent categories. The most positive finding is the fact that only 7.6% of all respondents indicated that there was no consultation.

Table 7: The consultation process followed during needs assessment as perceived by both respondent categories

The consultation categories during need assessment process	Respondents categories				Total	
	Project participants		Extension officers			
	(n)	*(%)*	*(n)*	*(%)*	*(n)*	*(%)*
1. Not consulted	9	7.1%	5	8.5%	14	7.6%
2. Consulted	92	73.0%	13	22.0%	105	56.8%
3. Some farmers were consulted	6	4.8%	3	5.1%	9	4.9%
4. Community formally consulted	11	8.7%	1	1.7%	12	6.5%
5. Other forms of consultation	8	6.3%	37	62.7%	45	24.3%
Total N	126		59		185	
Total %	100.0%		100.0%		100.0%	

χ^2= 74.051; p= 0.000

iii) The needs assessment methods

The respondents were requested to indicate the method used to determine the needs of the project participants. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: The methods used to assess the needs of project participants as perceived by both respondent categories

The content of choice of extension program/project categories	Respondents categories				Total	
	Project participants		Extension officers			
	(n)	*(%)*	*(n)*	*(%)*	*(n)*	*(%)*
1. Participatory Rural Appraisal	49	39.5%	25	36.2%	74	38.3%
2. Questionnaire	27	21.8%	18	26.1%	45	23.3%
3. Other means of need assessment	48	38.7%	26	37.7%	74	38.3%
Total N	124		69		193	
Total %	100.0%		100.0%		100.0%	

$x^2 = 0.491;\ p = 0.825$

The Pearson Chi-Square test revealed that there is no statistical significant difference at 5% significant level across all categories of respondents (χ^2 = 0.491; p= 0.825). A total of 38.3 % of both respondent categories indicated that the PRA method was used while 38.3% indicated that other methods were used and 23% indicated that a questionnaire was used. Most important however is the fact that methods were used to assess project participant's needs.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

According to Field (1997) projects fail too often because the project scope was not fully appreciated and/or user needs not fully understood. The starting point of any project is according to Swanepoel & de Beer (2006:173) a need and people must be the owners of their situation. They must realise that they have a certain need and they must decide that they are going to do something about it. They must take ownership of the action as well as the need.
The main objective of the study was to determine the influence of beneficiaries felt needs on project success or failure and the findings are summarized below.

a) The project meeting the farmers needs

- Only 6% of all the respondents indicated that all their needs were met;
- 41% of project participants and 35% of extension officer respondents indicated that the needs were only slightly and even not met at all.

Conclusion: The above results is an alarming finding that needs to be addressed and every effort possible need to be made to ensure that the project will address the farmers needs to ensure project success.

b) The influence of the "other" project meeting the farmers needs

A number of projects were listed as "other" projects by all respondents according to preference: Horticulture (34%); livestock (24%); poultry (20%) and field crops (6%). Both respondent categories indicated that the other "projects" will better meet the farmer's needs.

Conclusion: The following questions arise:

- Were projects forced onto beneficiaries?
- Was spending the budget more important than production?

c) The content of choice of extension programs/projects to assist farmers

A statistical significant difference (p= 0.000) occurs between both respondent categories namely:

- Significantly more project participants (26.4%) than extension officers (13.6%) indicated that the choice of content was based on calculated impact; and
- Significantly more extension officers (55.9%), than project participants (20.0%), indicated "other content of choice" as their most important option.

Conclusion: The above finding is again a clear indication to make sure that there is agreement on the content of choice of an extension program/project to ensure project success.

d) Training needs of project participants

Training needs during the survey was assessed in terms of the number of days project participants were exposed to training; number of formal training days needed to assist project participants to produce optimally and the relevance of training in terms of what was produced.

i) The number of days of formal training received by project beneficiaries since the initial phase of the project

- Project participants: 14.30 mean days training received; and
- Extension officers: 12.94 mean days training received

ii) Number of days of formal training needed to assist participants to produce optimally at the initial phase of the project

- Project participants: 25.25 mean days needed for training; and
- Extension officers: 26.71 mean days needed for training.

Both respondent categories indicated a clearly larger number of mean training days needed than what was received namely:

- Project participants: increase of 10.95 mean days needed for training; and
- Extension officers: increase of 13.77 mean days needed for training.

Conclusion: This is a clear indication of the importance of training in the success or failure of projects.

iii) Relevance of training in terms of what was produced

- The majority (52.4%) of both respondent categories indicated that the training was very much relevant; and
- Only 3% of both respondent categories indicted that the training was very much irrelevant.

Conclusion: Training of project beneficiaries is an essential element for project success.

e) Needs assessment

Good assessment practice is about having enough relevant information on which to base sound analysis and judgments about responses.

i) Frequency of need assessment

- 48% of both respondent categories reported that it was done on a continuous bases;
- There is an indication of a difference ($\chi^2 = 7.927$; $p = 0.092$) between project participants (53%) and extension officers (39%) opinion regarding the frequency of need assessment on continuous bases in favour of the project participants; and

- A negative aspect is that 31% of all the respondents indicated that needs assessment was only done once a year while 12% indicated that there was no assessment done.

Conclusion: Important is the fact that both respondent categories indicated the necessity for a continuous process of need assessment.

ii) Consultation during need assessment

The process of consultation during needs assessment helps to establish where people are and what they are doing.

- The majority of project participants (73%) reported that they were consulted;
- Only 7.1% reported that they were not consulted; and
- 63% of the extension officers did not confirm the views of the project participants (73%) instead they reported that "other" methods were used.

iii) The need assessment process

- A total of 38.3 % of both respondent categories indicated that the PRA method was used;
- 38.3% indicated that other methods were used; and
- 23% indicated that a questionnaire was used.

Conclusion: Most important however is the fact that methods were used to assess project participant's needs.

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