

Research Findings & Potential Policy Implications:

Government and Small-scale Agriculture – Understanding the Successes and Failures in Respect of Learning, Planning and Implementation

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Research team

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- Team:
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Overview of the research

Significance of the study

- Despite its huge potential and much money spent, small-scale farming sector seems static: Why? Plenty of reasons; one possible factor is that it's how gov't and farmers interact
- In rural/agric development practice, there is a long-standing debate about 'blueprint'/'top-down' versus 'process'/'bottom-up' approaches
- Perception in SA at present –
 - attempts to promote small-scale farming sector are too far towards the 'blueprint' end of the spectrum
 - Encourages 'dependency syndrome', ie lack of 'Agency'



Overview of the research cont.

Research objective – To examine how government and small-scale farmers interact, and to break this down according to different functions

Research questions

1. How do farmers *and* government *LEARN, PLAN, IMPLEMENT, and COMMUNICATE*?
2. What is the role of farmers' associations in improving 'LPIC capacities/functions', and in conditioning the relationship between farmers and government?
3. Are government, and farmers' associations, 'learning organisations'?



Methodology

Outline of methodology

- Focused on 4 local municipalities in Eastern Cape – Amahlathi, Nkonkobe, and Mbhashe/KSD
- Conducted a baseline survey to get a profile of the small-scale farming sector, current efforts to support it, and issues related to LPIC (n = 660)
- Conducted interviews with farmers, farmers' associations, extension officers, and other officials in government in order to ascertain current practices inre LPIC
- All the while, partnered with some farmers' associations in various activities, observed interactions



Methodology cont.

Limitations of research

- Didn't manage to 'follow extension officers around' as per original proposal
- Not enough engagement with government *other* than provincial agriculture department



Key research findings

Farmers

- Those small-scale farmers who receive support from government are grateful for it, but relatively few do – only 15% received extension support in previous 12 months; of these, most received 1 to 3 visits
- About 18% are involved in some kind of government ‘project’, and two-thirds of these are ‘satisfied’ with it
- About half of those who do receive extension support are members of ‘projects’ – being a member of a project increases your chances of getting support
- Farmers mainly learn from family members and from one another, but not structured, and certainly not enough
- Farmers have little awareness of agricultural policies and programmes, even less involvement in their development or evaluation

Key research findings cont.

Farmers' associations

- Farmers' associations (FAs) feel they have a vital role as representatives of farmers, as well as assisting farmers to access services – “We are leading a struggle”; “We are fighting for farmers' rights”
- But FAs are badly under-resourced, struggle with basics such as transport, telephone, etc.; active membership is low, paying membership lower
- Relations w/ gov't are sometimes good, but often fraught – made worse by semi-dependency on government to carry out minor functions
- FAs feel they are not recognised by government – they are consulted, but views not really taken into account: “They don't hear what you're saying, they are arrogant”
- Surprisingly common theme – ‘divide and rule’: “They say you should get yourself organised, but when you do, they make it a point that they are dividing you. They will try to bribe some of the people with inputs, that is what we experience”

Key research findings cont.

Government (EC Dept Rural Dev't and Agrarian Reform)

- Well organised, good systems (eg reporting, policy development), high (increasing?) level of professionalism; complex but functional organogram
- High level of stability and institutional memory; energetic senior management
- Planning process is dominated by procurement cycle; extension officers burdened by having to 'implement projects'
- Reasonably well resourced, eg at extension officer level
- But some staff perceive management style as top-down, also unhappiness that some key posts filled by 'political appointments'
- On paper, innovation regarded as a core value; but mixed evidence, difficult to find good examples
- Huge emphasis on performance/compliance monitoring, little real evaluation
- Want to believe can rely on FAs as conduits of communication
- But ambivalent as to who their clients are ('real farmers' versus the rest)



Conclusions & Policy implications

Main conclusions of the study

1. LPIC functions are under-developed and/or inappropriate; farmers largely on their own for learning, gov't planning and implementation is top-down, and communication systems barely exist
2. There is a significant gulf between farmers and government, and FAs are not able to bridge this gulf
3. Government and FAs are *not* learning organisations – for gov't, emphasis on compliance and 'delivery' comes at the expense of innovation and self-improvement; for FAs, too weak and poor



Conclusions & Policy implications

Policy relevance

- Strong case for farmer-to-farmer extension, ie build upon what's happening already
- Strong case for finding a way to strengthen farmers associations
- Strong case for re-examining how government works with small farmers, need to encourage new culture of learning, adapting, and interacting



Recommendations

- Must find a way to support farmers' associations, both material support and capacity development – the tricky issue is, who should do it?
- Require provincial agric departments to be more transparent, eg
 - Reveal their budget (esp at DM and LM level!), and how are they spent
 - Must know how many farmers they are really supporting
 - Must make a genuine effort to know how much this support is really helping
- Must acknowledge significant limitations of current extension system, move towards genuine farmer-to-farmer approach



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- Farmers

Thank You

