

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **PRIVATISATION AND OUTSOURCING**

#### **11.1 INTRODUCTION**

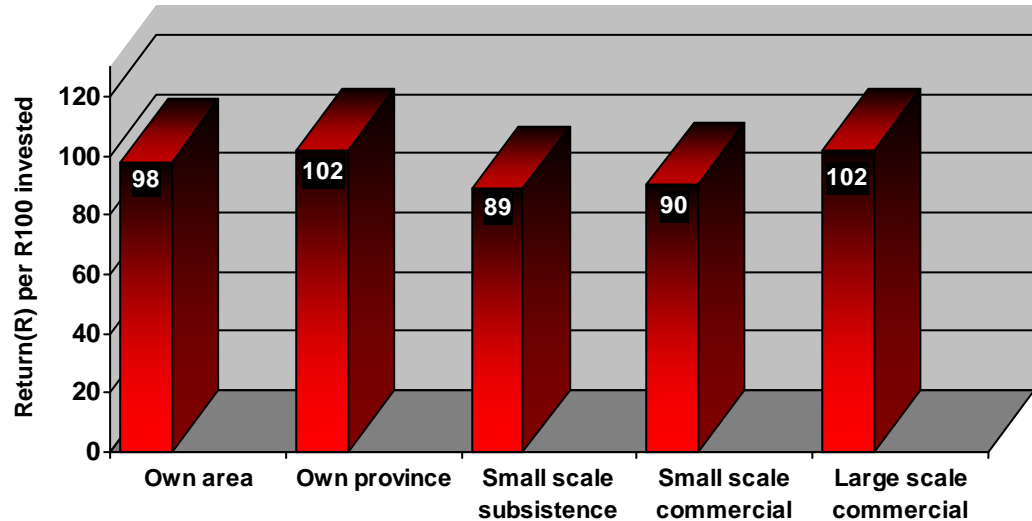
Privatisation means different things to different people. According to Düvel (2002:161), privatisation implies full transfer of ownership from government to a private entity, with that entity meeting all costs and receiving all profits. In most cases governments have not privatised their extension services in this sense. Some of the reasons for privatisation include budgetary cut backs and the general pressure to reduce state spending.

Extension is faced with challenges such as lack of competence in certain specialized fields by extensionists, and this suggests that alternative ways of providing and funding the extension services need to be investigated. This chapter focuses on privatization, its relevancy and the benefits associated with it. It also discusses its implication for the Limpopo Province in case it is adopted as an alternative strategy of extension delivery.

#### **11.2 THE RELEVANCY AND IMPORTANCE OF PRIVATISATION IN LIMPOPO**

Affordability and efficiency of delivery are the main considerations that independently of each other can compel the Department of Agriculture to privatize its extension service. No matter how efficient the service is, if it can no longer be afforded i.e. if funds are not available, it will have to be partially or fully privatized (Düvel, 2002:160).

Respondents were requested to judge the efficiency of the Department of Agriculture’s extension in Limpopo compared to an assumed average international efficiency of 130 percent, i.e. a R130 return per R100 invested in extension. The responses are presented in Figure 11.1.



**Figure 11. 1: The mean efficiency assessments of the department of agriculture’s extension service in different situations expressed as an output per R100 input**

The perception of the respondents as reflected in Figure 11.1 suggest that the efficiency of extension, measured in terms of an input/output ratio, falls well below international standards, which is assumed to be an input/output ratio of 100/130. There is a perceived increase in extension efficiency from small-scale subsistence, to small scale commercial and to large-scale commercial farming, but the difference is marginal (i.e between 10 and 20 percent).

These figures are mere judgements and are not based on empirical data, but the fact that the efficiency in the own area was rated lower than that of the rest of the province, does give an indication of a certain degree of rationalism, albeit a form of frustration with the current situation. Further evidence of the low efficiency of the public extension service is provided in Table 11.1, which reflects respondents’ response to a question as to how much more efficient the extension service would have to become over the short and long term in order to escape the “ threat” of privatisation.

**Table 11. 1: Respondents’ assessment of the mean percentage efficiency increase that is essential over the short and long-term to avoid privatisation in the different provinces**

Districts	Required mean % increase in efficiency	
	Short term	Long term
Sekhukhune	120.10	113.36
Mopani	140.26	139.10
Vembe	142.64	137.07
Bohlabela	128.43	122.66
Capricorn	123.49	136.74
Waterberg	166.07	146.07
<b>Total (Limpopo)</b>	<b>131.04</b>	<b>131.42</b>
<b>Total (South Africa)</b>	<b>134.21</b>	<b>139.00</b>

The average opinion in Limpopo is that the efficiency will have to increase by about 31 percent over the short and long term, which is very similar to the mean applicable to the whole of South Africa. However the differences between the districts in Limpopo are very significant and vary by up to 40 percent. The biggest concern is in Waterberg District where it is believed that the efficiency of extension delivery needs to improve by about 46 percent. This concern can be interpreted as reflecting a certain need and thus representing a precondition for change.

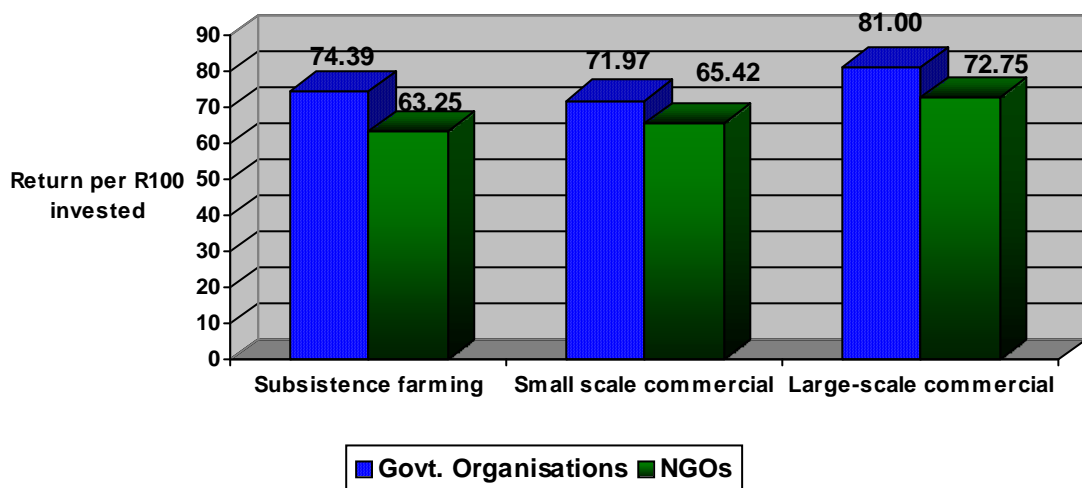
To some degree qualification appears to play a role in the sense that respondents with a degree or advanced diploma (in extension) tend to be more critical of the current extension performance, while the district variation could be an indication of the critical influence of management. In view of a performance assessed by several categories of respondents to have to improve by 40 to 60 percent, the question of privatisation is justified. However, it is unlikely to be a general solution. Scholars like Botha & Stilwell even warn that privatisation of extension services in South Africa may not be a good option.

### 11.2.1 Extension efficiency

Privatisation of extension is a justifiable and even essential option if private or non-government services are more effective and efficient of if, due to budgetary cut-backs or other priorities, no longer affordable. Several authors like Ehret (1997:227), Gregoire (1995:63) and Brown (1990:6) maintain that Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have enjoyed considerable success over the past decades, especially in the 1980s.

NGO's see themselves mainly in contrast to governments and their institutional partners on the premise that they are not bureaucratic, not rigid, not directive and not stultifying of local initiatives. Ehret (1997:226) citing Brown (1990: 5) maintains that NGOs like to see themselves being associated with issues like reaching out for the poor, participation, process versus outcome, contrast with the public sector, people-centred development, flexibility and experimentation, institution-building and cost effectiveness,

Respondents were asked to assess the efficiency of the Department of Agriculture and the NGO's. A comparison of efficiency between government and non-government organizations is summarized in Figure 11.2.



**Figure 11. 2: A comparative efficiency assessment by respondents of the extension of government and non-government organizations in different farming situations**

The findings in Figure 11.2 show that the efficiency of NGOs is assessed to be lower in all categories of farming (than the state) with the biggest difference occurring in the small-scale subsistence situation. On average the efficiency of NGOs is assessed to be 11.7 percent lower than that of the public service (Department of Agriculture). This discrepancy is appreciable, but significantly less than the 17.3 made by a countrywide assessment (Düvel, 2002:161).

The reason for this difference lies primarily in the tremendous variations among the districts in Limpopo. In half of the districts the efficiency of NGOs is assessed to be higher than that of the Department of Agriculture and can be attributed to the positive impact of the activities of the GTZ and the BASED programme focused on small communities. The main differences, however, stem from the drastic differences in levels of efficiency.

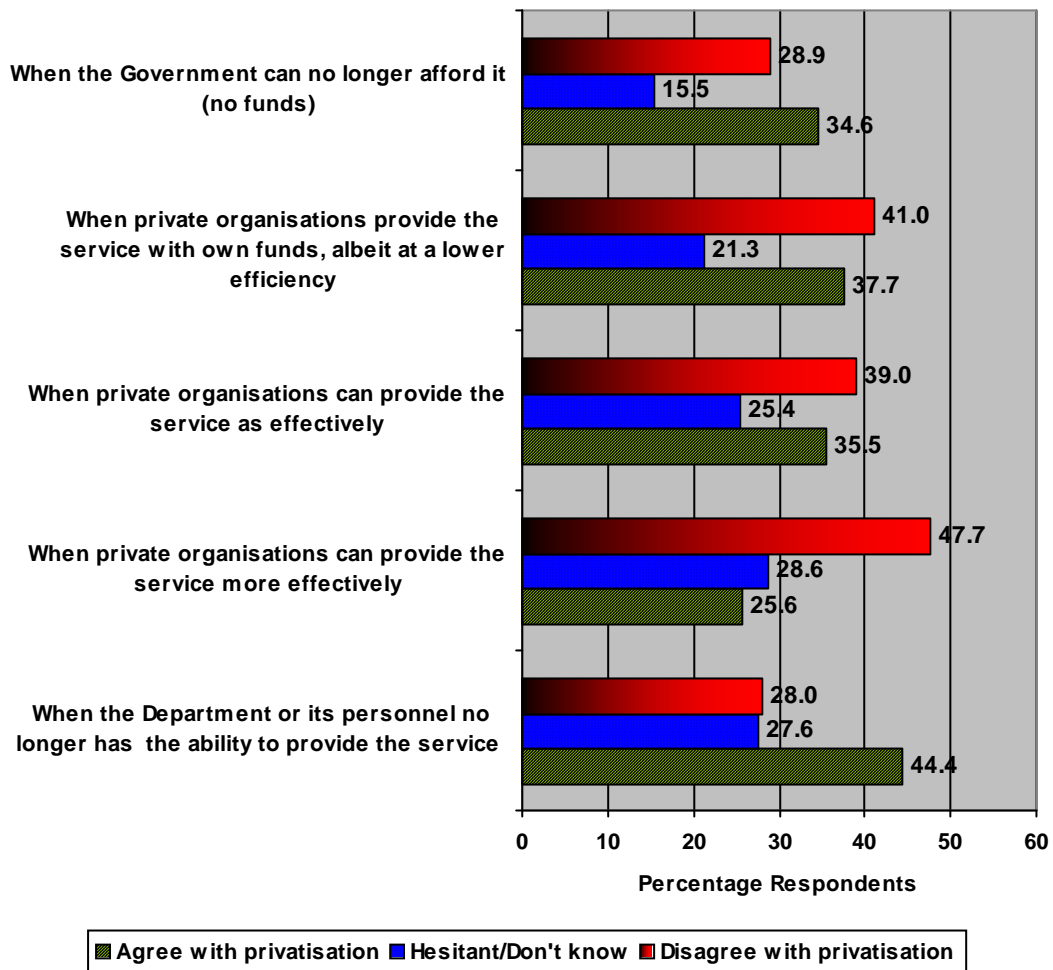
In Sekhukhune District the return per R100 invested in extension was assessed to be R45 and R43 for the Government service (Department of Agriculture) and NGOs respectively, while the assessments in Bohlabela were R123 and R122 respectively for the two types of services. Because of possible bias on the side of the respondents, this need not necessarily correspond with reality.

### **11.2.2 Opinions on privatization**

According to Kidd, Lamers, Ficarreli and Hoffmann (1998:3) experiences related to privatization in the world vary from a complete withdrawal of state interventions, to a commercialization, and cost recovery approach. In some instances it also means an increased involvement of the public services in income generating activities, which include the sale of seeds, surplus land and produce as well as the sale of publications and other materials. There are, therefore, alternatives within privatization which could be pursued.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed with the privatization of extension services in the Department of Agriculture. Figure 11.3 summarizes

respondents' opinions regarding their agreement with privatization under various circumstances.



**Figure 11. 3: Percentage distributions of respondents according to their agreement with privatization under different circumstances**

The general opinion is that there is overwhelming resistance against privatisation. Only in circumstances where the Department of Agriculture or its personnel no longer have the ability to provide the service, do the majority (44.4 percent) agree to privatisation. Even where private organisations can provide the service more effectively, only 25.6 percent of the respondents were in favour of privatisation. Even non-affordability is not accepted by the majority (namely more than 70 percent) as a sufficient argument in favour of privatisation. This leads to the conclusion that privatisation is an emotional issue that does not even allow a rational debate and behind it possibly the fear of not meeting the challenge or unemployment.

The findings in Fig 11.3 relate to respondents' perception about the appropriateness of privatisation in certain hypothetical situations. Respondents were also asked to what degree the various circumstances do in fact apply in their situation. Table 11.2 summarizes the results.

**Table 11. 2: The mean relevancy assessment by respondents of different circumstances in the different districts of Limpopo, based on a 10-point scale\*\***

District	The DOA* or its personnel no longer have the competence or ability to provide the service	Private organisations can provide the service more effectively (better input-output ratio)	Private organizations can provide service as effectively	Private organisations provide the service with own funds, albeit at a lower efficiency	Government can no longer afford it (no funds)
Sekhukhune	4.90	5.44	5.34	4.74	5.38
Mopani	5.31	6.39	5.71	5.51	5.17
Vembe	4.08	3.63	4.11	4.06	4.26
Bohlabela	4.09	4.07	4.53	4.38	5.10
Capricorn	4.83	4.87	4.99	5.11	4.85
Waterberg	4.27	4.36	4.23	4.85	5.79
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.65</b>	<b>4.84</b>	<b>4.92</b>	<b>4.81</b>	<b>5.02</b>

\*\* 10 -Point scale with 1 = irrelevant and 10 = highly relevant

\* Department of Agriculture

The relatively low assessments in the large majority of cases less than half on a 10-point scale indicate that the circumstances that normally justify privatisation are not perceived to really apply to the respondents' districts. These findings are further evidence of the lacking of support for privatisation in the Limpopo Province. This is not an isolated case. According to Düvel (2002) similar perceptions apply to the rest of South Africa.

### 11.3 BENEFITS OF PRIVATISATION

Many scholars (Rivera and Carry 1997:205; Umali, 1996; Kidd, Lamers, Hoffman, Ficarelli, 1998:8 and Düvel, 2002: 168) report that privatization has positive impacts on extension delivery, and more specifically in regard to accountability (usually expressed in client orientation and satisfaction) improved efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and reduced public sector costs. Some countries in the world, have commercialized government owned extension systems, (for example Venezuela, Netherland and New Zealand) or by introducing user charges and cost recovery strategies (for example Chile, Venezuela and Colombia) (Kraft, 1997). The primary reason for the commercialisation of extension is the improvement of efficiency in delivery and unaffordability due to budgetary cut-backs.

The Dutch extension service experienced a number of problems before commercialization. Tacken (1996:2) lists the following:

- High costs and low impact of extension programmes;
- Increasing staff numbers, whereas the number of farmers was declining;
- Growing conflicts between farmer's interests and policy goals such as raising production versus environmental problems and high cost of subsidies;
- Loss of some qualified staff (many of whom started working as consultants);
- Service was not needs driven i.e. advice was general not problem –oriented;
- Policy goals were given priority over farmer goals;
- No financial incentives to reward good performance; and
- Lack of job satisfaction.

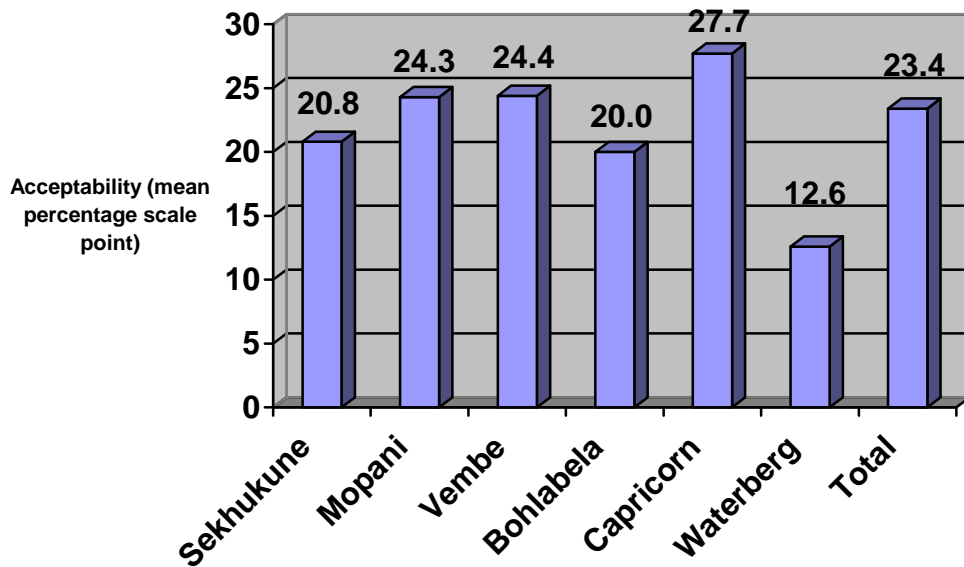
According to Tacken (1996:2) the situation has changed with commercialization and benefits like increased efficiency, increased quality and client orientation, increased job satisfaction, more interaction between client and advisor, more effective and needs-driven extension. Respondents were requested to respond to a list of benefits claimed to be associated with privatisation and to assess their validity. Their views are summarized in Table 11.3.



**Table 11.3: Respondents’ perception (expressed as a mean scale point assessment) of the validity of different aspects claimed to be benefits of privatisation**

<b>Benefits of Privatization</b>	<b>Mean Scale point</b>
1) Greater operational efficiency and cost effectiveness	5.6
2) Greater accountability of extensionists to perform and produce results.	6.7
3) Contractor (government) can demand a service standard from the agent that government cannot deliver by itself.	5.4
4) Contractor (government) can specify clients to be served (small, poor and marginal farmers).	5.3
5) Reduces permanent staff requirements and allows redeployment of resources to higher-priority or sensitive areas.	4.5
6) Enhances extension impact by accessing providers with special skills or comparative advantages in providing specific services.	6.0
7) Creates partnerships and working relationships with other providers.	6.2
8) Enhances flexibility and credibility in responding to special needs of diverse clientele.	5.5
9) Is useful for testing innovative and higher risk “new” systems.	5.4
10) Increases provider accountability.	6.2

The overall impression gained from the respondents’ viewpoint summarised in Table 11.3, is that even the undeniable benefits are not strongly supported. Perhaps the strongest agreement is the greater accountability of extensionists and the pressure to perform and produce results (mean assessment of 6.7 scale points). The agreement, however, does not yet reflect enthusiasm and support. In fact, the mean acceptability assessments are very low supported by the data of Figure 11.4



**Figure 11. 4: Assessments of the acceptability of privatization (expressed as a mean percentage scale point)<sup>22</sup> by respondents in the different Districts**

The overall impression of the findings in Figure 11.4 is that there is an extremely low assessment of the acceptability of privatisation in the Limpopo Province. Admittedly, there are differences between the districts, varying from a percentage scale point assessment of 12.6 in Waterberg to 27.7 in Capricorn.

The possible reason for this low assessment could be related to a fear or insecurity of employment by the extensionists. Düvel (2002:167) finds that the lack of support or the opposition to privatisation is not necessarily an issue of ignorance, because higher qualified respondents (measured in terms of total years of formal education) appeared to be more opposed to privatisation. The most outspoken category of extensionists are the younger and lower ranks as opposed to the managers.

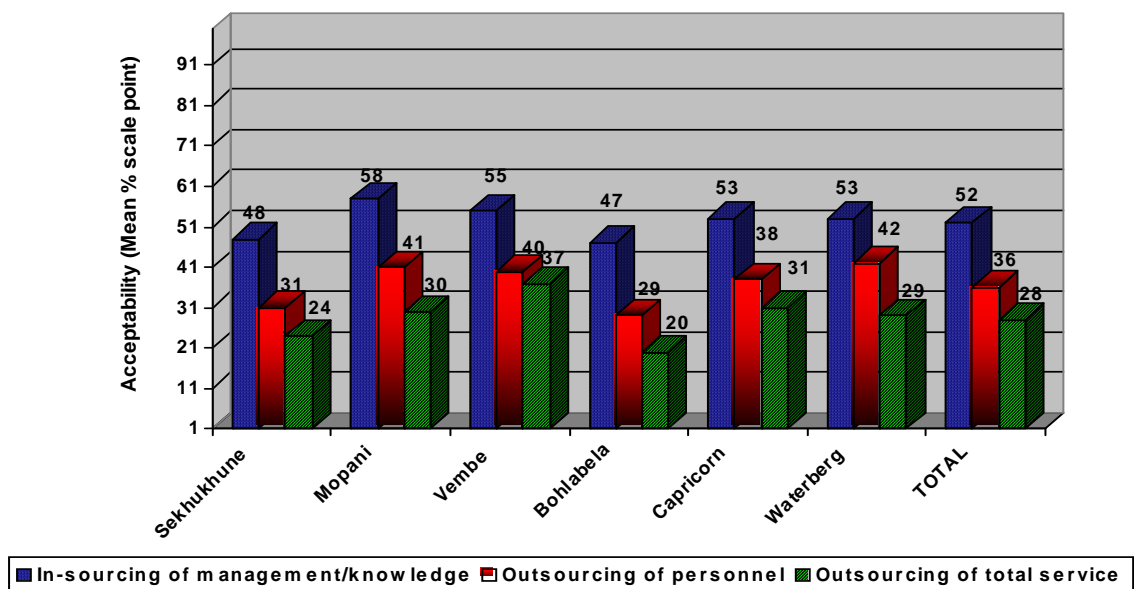
#### 11.4 OUTSOURCING AND CO-FINANCING

<sup>22</sup> *Acceptability was assessed using a scale with 1 = absolutely unacceptable and 10 = highly acceptable.*

According to Stillwell & Botha (1997:7) a complete privatization of agricultural extension services is often not feasible. Düvel (2002) observes that an alternative solution to the problems of fiscal sustainability and poor client orientation is the integration of the private sector into extension systems. This can take the form of sub-contracting (out-sourcing) or co-financing.

These are forms of institutional pluralism and can result in a complementation, but require of the central government to adjust to a position of reduced direct control over either programming or staffing. This can imply one or more of the following namely unlinking public funding from public delivery, changes in governance and investing more broadly in the whole agricultural knowledge and information system (Düvel, 2002).

Respondents were asked to compare the acceptability of three alternatives namely in-sourcing of management /knowledge, outsourcing of personnel and outsourcing of total service. The findings are summarized in Figure 11.5.



**Figure 11. 5: Assessments by respondents in the different provinces of the acceptability of in-sourcing of management/expertise, outsourcing of personnel and outsourcing of total service, expressed as mean percentage scale points**

The general picture of Figure 11.5 is that there is a very significant difference in the outcome of the three alternatives. The in-sourcing of management or expertise is the most favoured form of all the alternatives tested. This applies without exception to all the districts. The possible reason is the reasoning that this alternative does not threaten the job security of the respondents in the sense that it strengthens the organisation and its potential sustainability.

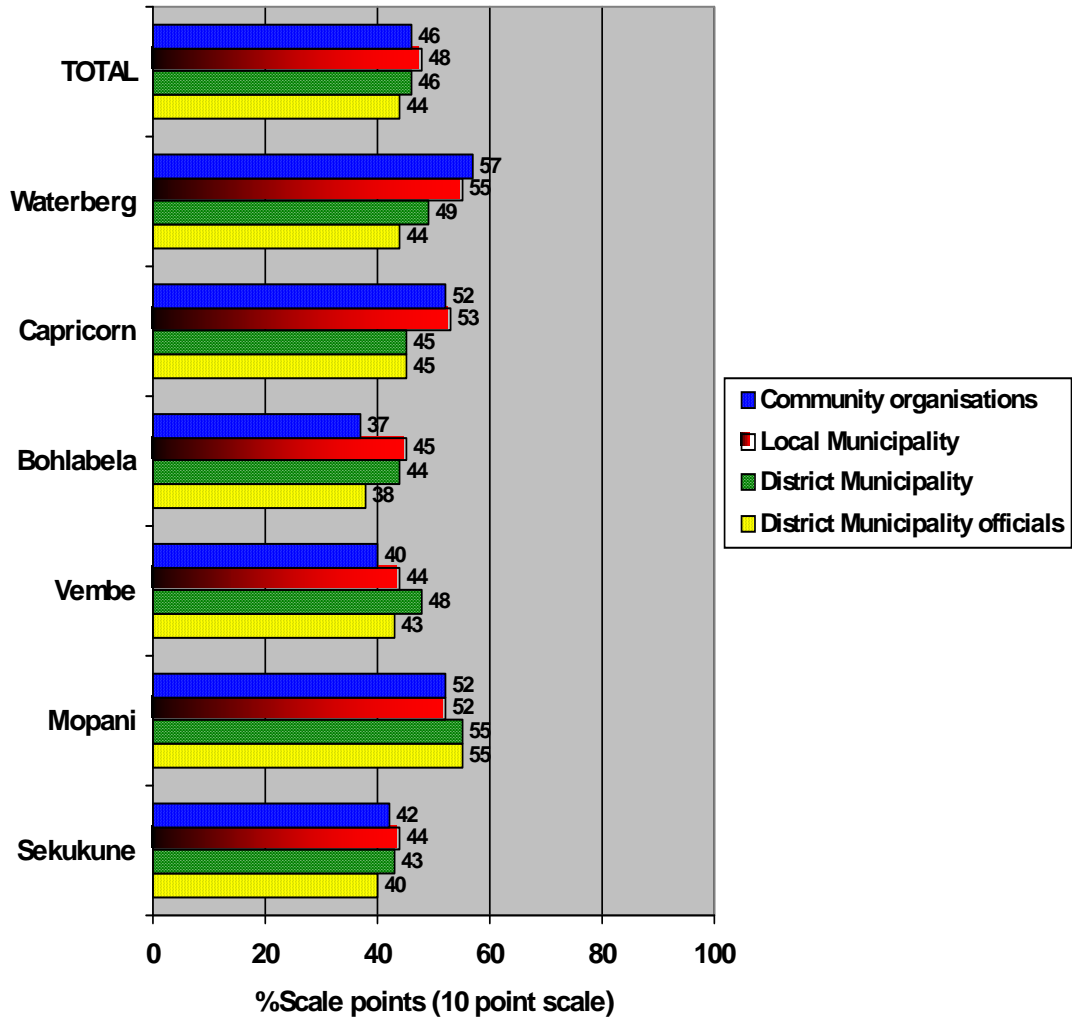
The other two alternatives are not supported. The outsourcing of personnel varies from 29 to 42 mean percentages, while the outsourcing of total services falls below 38 percent in all districts. Both these alternatives have the potential of creating redundancy among respondents. This view is consistent with previous findings which clearly demonstrated the resistance to privatization.

## **11.5 OUTSOURCING TO BENEFICIARIES**

Farmer Associations in many parts of the world have taken on the responsibility for providing agricultural extension services to their members. The extension services offered by these associations cover a wide range of commodity specific topics. Such countries include Zimbabwe (crocodile producers), Bolivia (Integrated Farmers Cooperative), India (Operation Food: Dairy), Thailand (Eastern Poultry Raisers Group), Uganda (Vegetable cooperative) and Turkey (Umali, 1996).

A specific form of outsourcing to beneficiaries, implies that the ownership of extension is transferred to the communities or clients, which is often seen as one of the ultimate goals of development (i.e. help towards self-help) but not only as far as individuals are concerned, but within the context of the total community. This alternative can vary from ownership restricted to a section of the total client community or to the total client community (Düvel, 2002:171).

Respondents were asked to indicate their preferences regarding alternative outsourcing beneficiaries such as the local community organization, Local municipality, and District Municipality and district municipality officials. The views are summarized in Figure 11.6.



**Figure 11. 6: The acceptability of different variations of community owned extension as assessed by respondents in the different Districts of Limpopo Province and expressed as mean percentage scale points**

These findings do not reveal that the outsourcing to communities is, in general, not very popular, nor is there a clear preference regarding any of the alternatives. This could reflect confusion among the respondents regarding the principles involved, but could also be attributed to a resistance based on a general lack of confidence in communities since the beneficiaries are not believed to be ready to be empowered.

The varying choices could therefore be attributed to different judgements of competence of the alternative community structures. This could also be the explanation why what would normally have been judged as the worst scenario,

namely that officials of Local Government take over the responsibility for extension and development, hardly receives less support than the other alternatives.

## 11.6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings regarding privatisation of extension lead to the following conclusions and recommendations:

- The path of privatisation should be treated with care. The reluctance or lacking enthusiasm is as such sufficient reason. The topic of privatization appears to be an emotional issue, and seems to evoke affective responses, probably stemming from feelings of insecurity or fear of ultimately losing employment and the fear and tends to cloud rational deliberations. Respondents disagreed about its relevance and significance even where circumstances would normally justify it. Results about privatization in developing countries are not convincing and Limpopo should not succumb to international pressure and be forced into large-scale privatization of the state extension service.
- The current South African policy of restoring equity and the consequent focus on the large numbers of marginalized small-scale farmers make privatization in general less relevant, as it is with the promotion of all “common good” issues. In such cases there is no financial output that justifies the inputs. Unless a big premium is placed or a high price tag is attached to changes in any form of capacity building or human development, it has no commercial attraction for most NGO’s. Whenever or wherever commercial interests are pursued, the results are bound to be of a gap-widening nature, unless affirmative measures are introduced as precondition for financing by the government.
- In general a cautious, evolutionary approach towards privatization is recommended for the Limpopo Department of Agriculture. Concrete steps should, nevertheless, be taken towards privatisation,

- Bring the topic of privatisation into open debate to rid it of emotional ties and to enable rational debate. This includes the realisation that there are many forms and degrees of privatisation, of which some are likely to be very appropriate under the current South African situation. The principles of effectiveness and efficiency should apply and the Government has the responsibility to step back and make space if there are non-governmental organisations capable of providing an equally good or better service, and that a stage may be reached where, however desirable a service is, considerations of affordability can enforce the acceptance of alternatives.
- Introduce partial privatisation or forms of privatisation selectively and where appropriate. This could include certain “packages of services” within certain communities or the “in-sourcing” of knowledgeable experts or managers. In all cases the introductions should be accompanied with systematic evaluations.

***Promote and sponsor research in the field of privatisation***

Increase efforts to promote the form of privatisation encompassing the empowerment of communities to increasingly take ownership of extension and development. However, it has to be realised that this is not a short-term goal, but that communities have to be guided and developed through the various stages of participation until ready for full ownership. Currently the partnership model still seems to be the most appropriate and should be purposefully pursued.

## CHAPTER 12

### KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCE SUPPORT

#### 12.1 INTRODUCTION

Extension is a line function of the Department of Agriculture. One of its main purposes is to provide appropriate agricultural information and knowledge to enable and capacitate land users and farmers towards improved, sustainable and economic development. Seen in this light, all the other services of the Department of Agriculture could and should contribute towards this purpose thereby making extension more effective (Düvel, 2002:127). This applies in particular to research where information and knowledge is generated. Every effort should be made that findings and recommendations are continuously made available to extension and thus become available to the farming community (Arnon, 1989; Bunting, 1986 and Van den Ban & Hawkins, 1990: 293).

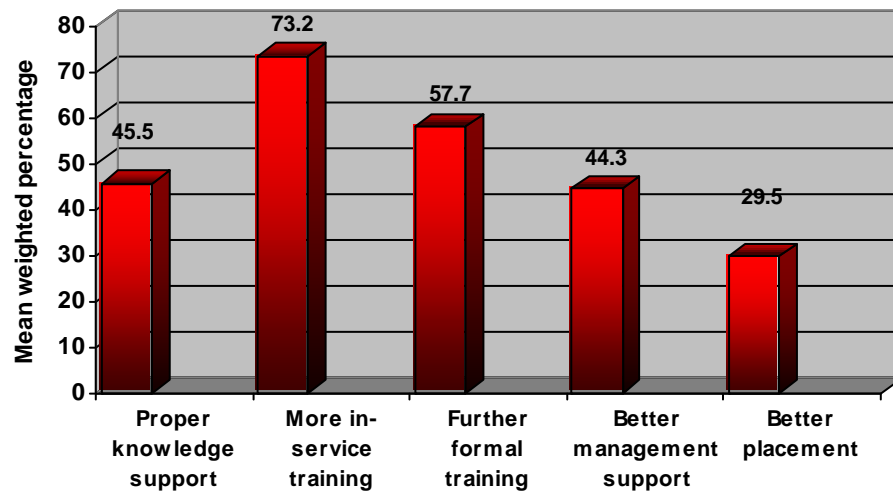
The development and flow of information and knowledge is however subject to a large number of constraints and has been the focus of many debates. Frequent organisational restructuring and policy formulations remain a challenge for most agricultural research and development organizations (Düvel, 2002:130). The need for knowledge support arises out of the fact that the extension situation, usually characterized by a large variety of enterprises, demands of the extensionist to deal with the variety at hand, but also to be a specialist in the commodity or area on which his programmes or projects are focused.

With ongoing research and the continuous generation of new information and insights, extension workers require constant upgrading of their agricultural-technical knowledge. Of paramount importance is that extension resources and support systems are such that these objectives can be accomplished. This chapter focuses on the importance of knowledge support, the providers and sources of such support and the perceived sufficiency.



## 12.2 PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE SUPPORT

Proper knowledge support is ultimately intended to improve extension delivery. How important it is perceived can best be judged by comparing it with other measures that could be taken to attain better extension delivery. Respondents were asked to give their views regarding the most appropriate means of better extension delivery by placing different alternatives in rank order. The findings are presented in Figure 12.1.



**Figure 12. 1: Mean rank order positions (expressed as weighted percentages) of different delivery options**

In view of the mentioned necessity for frontline extensionists to keep abreast of new information and development in a variety of commodities and disciplines which is exacerbated by their overall low qualifications respondents were requested to evaluate different options in terms of contribution towards the improvement of extension efficiency. Among the alternatives knowledge support takes in a middle position with a mean rank order percentage of 45.5. It is surpassed by more in-service training (73.2 percent) and by further formal training (57.7 percent).

The role of training is, no doubt, appreciated and it could be argued that knowledge support is a form of in-service training. If this is appreciated (including the notion that it can be a much more systematic and complete form of in-service training) knowledge support could get the necessary support and its rightful place as an

important means of ensuring that extensionists have the appropriate level of knowledge and are kept abreast of the latest innovations.

### 12.3 SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE SUPPORT

There can be various sources of knowledge support (Düvel, 2002, 33). According to Arnon (1989) research institutes are important sources of knowledge that can be used. Chambers (1983) recommends farming communities for the same purpose.

An assessment of the knowledge support situation was made by requesting respondents to judge the contribution of different sources of knowledge in terms of the knowledge support that they currently provide. The mean ratings of these sources, using a 10-point scale, are summarised in Table 12.1.

**Table 12. 1: The perceived knowledge support provided by different sources and expressed as mean scale point on a 10-point scale with ‘10’ being the most desirable**

Districts	ARC <sup>(1)</sup> Researcher	Researcher of Dept. of Agriculture.	Subject Matter Specialist	Extension Supervisor	NGO's
Sekhukhune	4.5	3.8	3.6	5.9	4.4
Mopani	5.1	5.9	3.7	5.7	4.3
Vembe	4.0	4.1	3.3	6.5	4.3
Bohlabela	3.5	4.8	4.0	6.4	4.6
Capricorn	5.0	5.5	4.3	6.3	4.7
Waterberg	3.9	4.9	4.5	6.3	5.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>4.6</b>

<sup>(1)</sup> Agricultural Research Council

The results in Table 12.1 confirm that the general knowledge support service is on a low level. Evidence shows that extensionists in the four districts currently rely primarily on their supervisors for such support while the Mopani, district mostly relies on the researcher of the department of Agriculture. The likely reason could be the fact that extension workers perceive the extension supervisors as the most important

source of knowledge support. When considering the perceived low level of qualification of extension supervisors (as indicated in chapter 6, Table 6.5) and the lack of professional training, one doubts the accuracy of this assessment. The extension workers might have been influenced by the frequent contacts they have with their supervisors when in reality they seem not to get useful backstopping knowledge.

The researcher of the Department of Agriculture is perceived by the extensionists as the second most important source of knowledge. The Department of Agriculture uses the services of agricultural researchers in what is now called “research satellites” such as Mara, Tsoelike, Stellenbosch, Dobie and Hartbees. (The mandate for doing research in South Africa is given to Agricultural Research Council).

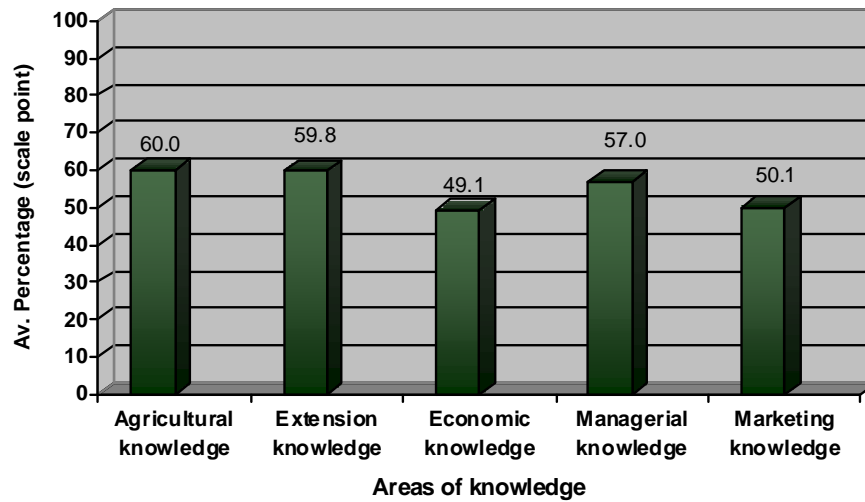
There is no clear line of distinction on the question of whether the agricultural scientist based at the provincial office within the directorate of Research and Extension are researchers or subject matter specialist are the preferred sources of information. The nature of specialization locates them more toward subject matter specialist (SMS) specializing in a wide spectrum of disciplines such as agronomy, horticulture, irrigation, pasture science and aquaculture.

There is lack of more qualified Subject Matter Specialist (SMS) in the Department and in the districts. For example in Capricorn, there are only 10 scientists<sup>23</sup> who could be taken as SMS's and have to service 197 extensionists. The reason why these two sources of knowledge namely ARC and SMS, were questioned could be linked to the costs attached to involving the ARC. As a parastatal the ARC provides services on a pay basis to recoup costs. As far as SMS's are concerned, the respondents might not see the usefulness of them because they are very thinly spread.

#### **12.4 TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE**

An effective knowledge system can be expected to provide knowledge support in different fields (Düvel, 2002:34).

Respondents' judgments concerning the level of support in the different knowledge areas are summarized in Figure 12.2.



**Figure 12. 2: Respondents' opinions of the level of knowledge support in different areas expressed as mean percentages**

The overall impression is that there is positive recognition for knowledge support. For example, the most knowledge support is in the areas of agriculture with 60 percent and extension with 59 percent, while economic and marketing knowledge support is somewhat lower, but still significantly higher than expected.

It is uncertain to which degree these judgments were based on quantitative or qualitative considerations. On the other hand it would appear as if not too much should be read into these findings, since they may be clouded by the phenomenon of respondents tending towards choosing an assessment close to the mid-point of a scale.

## 12.5 DEGREE OF SUFFICIENCY OF EXTENSION RESOURCES

As part of institutional support for extension (Bembridge, 1983) finds that extensionists need to be provided with the necessary tools of trade referring to

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<sup>23</sup> *Out of the ten, 4 are new appointees specialising in horticulture (1), agronomy (2) and soil scientist (1). All 4 have no working experience. The other 6 are old scientists distributed as animal scientists (2) and agronomists (4). All have no working experience.*

transport, teaching aids, housing and office accommodation. The respondent's assessment of the situation is depicted in Table 12.2.

**Table 12.2: The assessed sufficiency of extension resources as perceived by extension staff expressed as mean scale point (15-point scale)**

Districts	Extension or teaching aids	Office accommodation and equipment	Transport	Kilometers	Other
Sekhukhune	5.1	5.77	5.0	4.8	5.8
Mopani	4.4	4.4	5.0	4.1	3.8
Vembe	4.1	6.8	3.9	3.5	3.1
Bohlabela	4.9	6.8	4.3	5.3	3.2
Capricorn	5.8	6.4	5.5	5.6	5.3
Waterberg	5.0	5.3	5.9	4.5	5.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>4.7</b>

The general impression of the findings is that extension resources are inadequate in the various districts. The main constraints point to insufficient transport and allocation of kilometres.

## 12.6 THE USE OF SUBJECT MATTER SPECIALISTS (SMS)

According to (Düvel, 2002:136), the use of SMS could be used as an alternative in providing knowledge support to extension staff as opposed to increasing the number of extensionists or completely replacing them with subject matter specialists. This means bringing in an additional information intermediary.

The SMS is preferred in Limpopo due to its potential in providing useful information into the Researcher-Extensionist- Farmer information chain. Different functions were identified and respondents' opinions obtained regarding their importance. The findings are summarized in Table 12.3.

**Table 12.3: The importance assessment by respondents of the different functions to be performed by the SMS**

	Mean scale	Rating	Mean Weighted % <sup>2</sup>
1	Training of extensionists on request (provide courses where necessary)	7.59	60
2	Continuous and purposeful knowledge upgrading and capacity building of extensionists working in the respective fields (pro-active)	7.65	56.5
3	Assistance and advice to farmers when requested by farmers and/or extensionists	7.51	51.9
4	Training of farmers where knowledge base does not exist among extensionists	7.23	48.3
5	Assistance of extensionists with problem cases	7.33	49.3
6	Assistance of extensionists with message design i.e. designing messages that are technically, economically and human behaviour relevant (where requested)	7.05	45.1
7	Become specialist regarding relevant commodity/discipline in area of responsibility in relation to current production, prevailing problems, needs of farmers (including research needs if there is no solution), priorities and solutions to be promoted by extension	7.0	46.9
8	Seeking solutions through adapted research/demonstrations (adapting innovations to specific local conditions)	7.34	45.8
9	Remain abreast of new research, developments and knowledge in field of specialization	7.54	42.7

<sup>1</sup> Based on a 10-point scale, with 1 = unimportant and 10 = extremely important

<sup>2</sup> Based on a rank order position from most to least important.

The general impression gathered from the information of Table 12.3, is that all the listed functions receive wide support. For example, all were rated as very important with assessments of more than 7 out of a maximum of 10. It does seem though that the more familiar functions are perceived as somewhat more important. There is however encouraging support for new functions, which will have to be introduced in order for subject matter specialists to make a significant impact. These functions include continuous and purposeful knowledge upgrading and capacity building of extensionists working in their respective fields.

Another important function is assisting extensionists with message design i.e. designing messages that are technically, economically and human behaviour relevant. This implies having specialist knowledge of the relevant commodity/discipline in the area of responsibility in relation to current production, prevailing problems, needs of farmers (including research needs if there is no solution), priorities and solutions to be promoted by extension. The SMS has a part to play in South African extension as a source of knowledge. When they are used the following preconditions need to be observed namely (subject matter specialists) have to see the extension staff, (at least those dealing with their discipline or commodity) and not the farming community as their major target group, and they should operate more pro-actively than re-actively (Düvel, 2002:138).

## **12.7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings of this chapter show a strong perceived need for knowledge support in extension. This is also reflected in the majority of respondents being in favour of knowledge support. Using these findings as a basis of departure the following policy guidelines are proposed

### **12.7.1 The need for knowledge support**

The tremendous need for knowledge information makes the establishment or expansion of a proper knowledge support system one of the most urgent challenges facing the Department of Agriculture's extension service. This evidence includes, amongst others, the need for training (58.3 percent) and the fact that the large majority of respondents believe that training is the factor that can contribute most to the improvement of extension delivery in Limpopo.

### **12.7.2 Sources of knowledge support**

The extensionists recommend their supervisor (with a mean scale of 6.2 percent) as an important source of knowledge support. This assessment is not consistent with earlier results where supervisors were perceived not to be knowledgeable. Furthermore a

knowledge support system in the form of an extensive SMS system is strongly recommended. For the proper functioning of the SMS the following is important namely:

- The function of the SMS is to supplement and not to duplicate or perform the same task as the extensionists.
- The primary target group of the SMS is not the farmer, but the extensionist serving the farmer. The SMS should have an increasing pro-active function and should not only respond when requested. Some of the pro-active functions should be continuous and purposeful knowledge upgrading and capacity building of extensionists working in that specific field.
  - Supporting extensionists with message design, i.e. designing messages that are technically, economically and human behaviour relevant. The SMS needs to focus on the following:
    - i) Becoming a specialist regarding his/her own commodity/discipline in relation to current production, prevailing problems/needs of farmers, indigenous knowledge, (including research needs if there is no solution) priorities and solutions to be promoted by extension.
    - ii) Seeking solutions through adapted research/demonstrations (adapting innovations to specific local conditions).
    - iii) Serving as linkage or knowledge intermediary between research and extension, particularly in terms of feedback to research regarding the needs and problems of clients.
    - iv) Remaining abreast of new research, developments and knowledge in his/her field of specialization and make them available in a systematic and regular way to those having a potential need for them.



- v) Coordinate the above in commodity focused programs implemented through and by means of frontline extensionists over the total target area (e.g. district municipalities).

Forging a close collaboration between subject matter specialists of the same field of specialization within a district and, if possible, even beyond the districts in order to function in a maximal complementary fashion this may also apply to scarce specialists, for example those specializing in aquaculture and bee farming. Strengthening of the knowledge support system by also engaging college lecturers as subject matter specialists.

### **12.7.3 Other supportive initiatives**

- Transport and office support material

The lack of sufficient transport and its allocated kilometres is identified as the constraint in terms of the availability of resources that may impact negatively towards knowledge support and service delivery. The Department of Agriculture should (in line with improving the service benefits of the extensionists,) ensure that minimum standards are provided in terms of offices, office support such as means of communications, office furniture and means of transport.

- (i) The Department is aware of the problem of transport and has developed a transport policy to address it. There is a provision in the policy that where genuine reasons exist, privately owned vehicles of agricultural technicians can be recommended to be used under scheme B. This alternative can be expensive, depending on the size of the vehicle.
- (ii) Extension workers are sometimes part of the problem and are to blame because a small number do not possess driver's licenses.
- (iii) The circumstance of the extensionist's task needs should be understood and be taken into account. A uniform approach should be applied to all districts to avoid inconsistency. Considering the three paragraphs above, one can argue that it is not fair to see all transport problems as the fault of the Department,

each case needs to be treated on its own merit. Blanket generalization should be avoided. Alternative options of transport such as allowances may need to be investigated and extensionists be consulted properly prior to its implementation.

The situation of office accommodation needs attention in terms of numbers, equipment, particularly office furniture.

- Establishment of Information Centres

As far as knowledge support for extension science is concerned, the current need can temporarily be dealt with by subject matter specialists in extension. Ultimately, however, this function should be taken over by the extension supervisors and managers. The need for in-service training is clearly demonstrated in the text and it should receive attention. The concept of the digital doorway could serve as foundation for future Centres of Information to solve farmer's problems. Limpopo has made a start wherein three districts are participating in digital doorway pilot studies.

The Department should recruit a qualified person specializing in Information Technology who will be stationed in the Centre to act as a SMS. The districts do not have reliable sources of reference for extensionists. It is recommended that districts should establish Information Centers which can work like a library.

## CHAPTER 13

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 13.1 INTRODUCTION

The study suggests that there is no universally acceptable extension system which fits all situations. An extension system should be situation-specific and dependent on a conglomerate of factors the agro-ecological, infrastructural, historical (previous experience), environmental, socio-economical and even political situation. For this reason a single extension system may not be appropriate for all districts in the Limpopo Province. In view of this discernment, the researcher decided to develop a flexible framework of principles that can serve as broad guidelines for the extension system for the Limpopo Province rather than coming up with a rigid system.

#### 13.2 CURRENT EXTENSION SITUATION

Extension in Limpopo is of a two-pronged nature, namely an advisory approach in the case of the commercial sector and a more educational approach in the case of both the subsistence and emerging small-scale sectors. There are donor-funded projects such as the Limpopo Agricultural Development Programme (LADEP) and (BASED) operating in the Province. Each donor-funded project tends to use different extension approaches.

The Departmental initiative to institutionalize PEA is welcomed because of the implied support for participatory development which should be a basic principle in any seriously considered extension approach. Some of the other characteristics of extension in Limpopo or the environment in which it operates are the following:

- The very diverse farming systems. This presents tremendous challenges to extension personnel in terms of their knowledge and skills, particularly in the fields of economics, farm planning, financial planning, economic viability and

marketing. This must be seen against the background of tremendous knowledge gaps that occur in these and other fields and which have serious consequences for extension personnel's credibility. This emphasises the necessity for a knowledge support system providing in-service training so that extension personnel attain specialised knowledge and skills in their fields of operation.

- Uneconomical and unsustainable farming units. The principle of profitability and sustainability is often overlooked and occurs particularly in cases where large numbers of people are accommodated in projects of limited profitability or size. If unprofitable and unsustainable, the outcome can only be a failure.
- The environment for extension is not favourable. On the one hand there are the multitude of functions and expectations within widely diverse agricultural systems and on the other hand insufficient support in terms of equipments, facilities and training. This calls for a priority approach that purposefully matches the various functions and expectations with the resources available.
- Confusion exists regarding the concept of extension. This detracts from purposefulness among frontline extension staff, while management fails to provide clear policy guidelines in this regard and in some cases even negates the nature and role of extension, seeking to replace it with concepts like “crop facilitation”, etc.

The efficiency of extension in Limpopo is at low ebb. When extension personnel rate their efficiency on an input/output ratio at R81 output per R100 input or investment compared to R130 output per R100 input, which is assumed to be an estimated mean international figure, there is cause for concern; even more so if supervisors judge the same personnel in terms of output per R100 input, to be operating at a mere R60. Although the assessment appears to be an honest assessment, the possibility of a significant over-assessment by respondents cannot be ruled out. This gives justification for a reassessment of the extension service and a revised policy around the following recommendations

### 13.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Having presented detailed recommendations at the end of the various chapters, the following serves the purpose of a brief overview or summary of recommendations relating to the various principles, and in some cases providing additional perspectives or emphasis.

#### 13.3.1 Needs-based and priority focused extension

The importance of needs assessment as a basis for setting priorities and making decisions such as the allocation of resources is widely recognized. There is however agreement about PRA being the only method of accomplishing this. The purpose of need assessments is well appreciated, namely to find a leverage or linkage point for behaviour change purposes, to identify the main focus or content of development and to encourage participation.

However to give effect to these different purposes, it should be clear that the customary PRA approaches are as such insufficient or even inappropriate and need to be adapted to be more problem focused and to pursue a compromise between an “objective” problem assessment (based on considerations of improvement potential of commodities) and community expressed needs or preferences.

There is general consensus, and rightly so, for the principle of participation, but opinions vary regarding the meaning of participation. Similar differences occur among extension personnel as far as the focus or content of development is concerned.

Based on rank order the ultimate in participation (namely the full empowerment and ownership) was awarded a ranking percentage of less than 40 percent (4<sup>th</sup> rank order position out of five) while the most favoured partnership (percentage rank order of 70 percent) is one that is based on the biggest agricultural need (usually a commodity) that has the biggest improvement potential considered on an input/output ratio and where farmers need to be persuaded about the priority.

### 13.3.2 Participation and community involvement

The principle of participatory development is widely accepted as essential. However, extension personnel differ in opinion as to whether participation should be a means to an end or an end in itself. The latter view is shared by 51.6 percent of the respondents and should be further promoted if the ultimate goal of community empowerment and ownership is to be pursued. However much confusion exists regarding the alternative goals of human and agricultural development.

Policy needs to be clear in setting the right priorities, namely that the ultimate goal ought to be agricultural development, with the important proviso though, that it is to be pursued primarily if not exclusively through the means of human development.

The goal of community empowerment to the degree of taking ownership of the development process should, no matter how important, be seen as a long-term goal, which requires a certain degree of maturity on the part of the communities and cannot necessarily be taken for granted.

A challenge for extension workers is to pitch into the most appropriate level of participation or partnership with the farming community. Currently it seems that a partnership where the Department of Agriculture (as service provider) still has to take the major initiatives and responsibilities. However, with the necessary facilitation a partnership equally sharing the development responsibilities should be achievable in most extension service areas. In fact it is already favoured by most respondents as the most appropriate model.

### 13.3.3 Institutional linkages for participatory and coordinated development

There is widespread support for the inclusion of the human factor in development. This finds expression in the unreserved support for participation and especially its purposes and goals, namely that participation is primarily seen as an ultimate goal of development, more so than a means to an end. This is also reflected in the majority of respondents being in favour of human development as the ultimate goal of the Department of Agriculture. However, there are indications that much of this support is

mere lip service, as is evident from the practical implementation, which is often in direct contradiction with the supported principles.

For extension to function as a partnership between the service provider (Department of Agriculture) and the beneficiaries (communities), interaction between the partners is essential. Given the wide ratio of extension worker of one to up to - 3000 farmers, an effective interaction is only possible through a body representing the various interest groups within the community, and thus acting as its mouthpiece and being given the task of coordinating and taking charge of the total development process, but delegating projects and operational activities to specially appointed or nominated task groups (project or programme committees).

These task groups should be accountable to the central or over-arching coordinating or linkage body. Over and above a policy providing for such institutional linkage structures, the following guidelines, as suggested by Düvel (2002), should also be laid down:

- A clear distinction be made between the coordinating and operational functions
- The coordinating or central development body should be limited to one per extension service area. This represents a compromise between, on the one hand, proximity to the grassroots community and, on the other hand, effective coordination (something that would not be possible with coordinating bodies located in every sub-community).
- Operational task groups (project or programme committees, etc.) should be commissioned by the central coordinating committee or council and be regularly accountable to it.
- Service providers should remain partners and not become members of the local community structures so as not to undermine the process of empowerment.

- For the purpose of integrated development, the coordination and linkages should extend beyond agricultural development and seek linkages with other fields of rural development (if not at the extension ward or service area level, then beyond it) and with the local government and municipal structures.

#### 13.3.4 Purposeful programmed extension

Programmed extension should, in view of its unquestionable advantages, be accepted as policy by the Department of Agriculture. It is proposed that at least half of the frontline extension workers' time should be spent on purposeful or programmed extension. In spite of the general support for a programmed approach, it is not reflected in personnel activities. One of the obvious reasons for this (reported by 87.6 percent of the respondents) is the frequent interference in the form of unscheduled responsibilities enforced on frontline extension personnel. To overcome this problem management will have to:

- Be part of the decision making process regarding the time to be devoted to programmes and projects and the subsequent protection enabling them to adhere to the planned schedules;
- Assist in building in programme flexibility;
- Provide dates that have to be accommodated in work plans at a very early stage; and
- Protect personnel against "external interference".

It is important that extension programmes be owned or co-owned by communities and implemented in a situational appropriate manner that provides for maximum participation, ownership and self-determination. Accountability should be to target communities (or their coordinating structure) as well as to management structures within the Department of Agriculture.



### 13.3.5 Monitoring, evaluation and accountability

The general and widespread support for the importance of monitoring and evaluation (M & E), especially with regard to its potential contribution to improve current and future extension delivery, justifies the implementation of a national evaluation and monitoring programme compulsory for all extension personnel.

As far as evaluation procedures and criteria are concerned, the following guidelines should be considered:

- The number of objectives and criteria should be as many and as extensive as possible in order to provide for as much evidence of extension achievements as possible. Programme objectives should be chosen and formulated to focus on and include the full spectrum of criteria ranging from resource and activity inputs to clients' responses and opinions, behaviour determinants, behaviour change (practice adoption), outcome or efficiency aspects and, where possible, the impact in terms of job creation, increase in living standard etc.
- Due attention needs to be given to criteria related to behaviour change since they allow for true monitoring and are the best and most direct reflection of extensionists' achievements. Behaviour determinants, viz. needs, perceptions and knowledge, are the actual focus of extension and their positive change is a precondition for behaviour change (practice adoption) and the consequent change in efficiency and the resulting financial and other outcomes. Behaviour determinants are the focus of every encounter and thus lend themselves to monitoring after every extension delivery. In this way extension can continuously (on a monthly basis) come up with evaluation evidence.
- There is a clear difference between the program objectives and those of the extensionist or program manager, particularly in the phase of program development, i.e. until the delivery begins. For this reason activity objectives should be formulated to form the basis of the agricultural technician's monthly work program or work calendar. Their evaluation, although of an input nature, can

form the basis of performance management and could also serve the purpose of public or community accountability.

- Ultimately the use of evaluation results should be as multi-focused as possible, with as much emphasis on issues relating to the extension process (enabling better extension delivery) as to the outcome. Once the decentralization of local government has been fully implemented and funding is being channelled to district municipalities for distribution or coordination, such local institutions will also have to be accountable for the funds received by them. They are, after all, not the sole stake holders. However, since the farmers, as beneficiaries, are not the only stakeholders of public funds, ways need to be found for them to also account for the aid received. Such a process may revolutionize development aid.

#### 13.3.6 Privatization and outsourcing

The path of privatisation has to be treated with care, but cannot be ignored. It is important that the topic be brought into open debate to rid it of emotional ties and to enable rational debate. In it should feature the strengths and weaknesses, principles of effectiveness and efficiency as well as the issue of affordability which could dramatically change within a short time, depending on national priorities and policy.

Other recommendations in this regard are:

- An immediate but slow introduction of various forms of privatisation where appropriate, such as outsourcing and in-sourcing;
- Promoting and sponsoring research in privatization; and
- Increasing efforts leading to ownership of communities as probably the most ideal form of privatisation.

In judging ostensibly successful privatisation efforts elsewhere in the world, care should be taken that the real determinants, often not part but only associated with privatization, are identified.

### 13.3.7 Knowledge and resource support

A strong knowledge support system is inevitable in view of the low effectiveness and efficiency regarding extension delivery in Limpopo as well as in other provinces of the country, as it can (if correctly implemented) provides the most drastic improvement in the relatively low credibility of extension personnel and thus their extension impact.

The most far-reaching recommendation is a proposal regarding a strong team of subject matter specialists and their revised functions and a new focus on frontline extension workers as primary target audience. The proposed new functions include continuous and purposeful upgrading and capacity building of extensionists working in their specific field or discipline supported with message design, strengthening the link between extension and research and coordinating commodity programmes falling within their (the subject matter specialist's) field of competence.

As far as knowledge support for the extension science is concerned, the current need can temporarily be dealt with by subject matter specialists in extension. Ultimately, however, this function should be taken over by the extension supervisors and managers. The need for in-service training is tremendous and needs urgent attention on a continuous basis.

The concept of the digital doorway could serve as foundation for future Centres of Information needed to solve farmer's problems. Limpopo has made a start wherein three districts are participating in a digital doorway pilot study. The Department should recruit a qualified person specializing in Information Technology who will be stationed in the Centre to act as SMS.