Agricultural development in the North-West Province of South Africa through the application of comprehensive project planning and appraisal methodologies.

by

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ABSTRACT

South Africa’s main economic and social problems relate to poverty, racial inequality and poor growth. An equitable society, founded on a growing economy, is a policy aim, in which agriculture has a catalyst-role. The entrance of small farmers into mainstream agriculture is a specific priority, as historic inequitable support limited access to services and resources. Agriculture consequently plays only a supplemental role in most black rural communities. A favourable policy environment for agricultural development has now been established, but practical empowerment and success remain rare. This limiting environment, dealt with through two hypotheses, constitutes the issue examined: The first hypothesis states that economic rural diversity must be addressed in agricultural planning and support of the project area. The second states that transactions costs are reduced through production chain integration. Focused support, based on these principles constitutes a redesigned project approach, for empowering emerging farmers.

The analytical framework consists of a literature review, analysing agricultural planning to identify criteria for a redesigned project cycle, accommodating holistic planning. This established specific project design criteria to deal with diversity description; linkage facilitation; support co-ordination; participation and empowerment. It is argued the integration of small farmers with role-players through co-operation in a project intervention addresses most access limitations. Recognition and description of economic diversity and application of participative processes are proposed in a redesigned project approach, enhancing commitment and intervention sustainability.

The application of this comprehensive project planning approach, based on these criteria, is subsequently applied in an ex post evaluation and ex ante analysis of a case study. An analytical methodology dealing with direct and indirect project impacts, determined through a combination of qualitative and quantitative procedures was used. Procedural tools included trend and logical framework analysis, a typological questionnaire, basic financial and economic analyses and a conclusive decision rules framework.
The Sheila project in the North West Province of South Africa, aiming to establish commercially viable producers, was established in 1976 and terminated in 1994. Participatory analysis to understand agricultural and social dynamics commenced during 1997. This enlightened the quantitative phase, with a typological survey collecting data on 128 variables through interviews with 123 farmers. Findings indicated significant economic variation between farmers. Farmer involvement was limited with project management being responsible for production. Benefits included access to mechanisation, credit and management. Land holdings were enlarged from five to 15 ha while average yields improved from ±0.5 t/ha to ±2.0 t/ha. The project resulted in more food, income and infrastructure, enhancing quality of life.

However, independent farmers were not established. In terms of the project design criteria, economic diversity was not integrated in planning whilst linkages between role-players were insufficient. Coordination and cost saving measures were not sufficiently developed, nor were participation and empowerment. Technical innovations used (mechanisation and management) failed to account for social realities (literacy and skills level, communal practices). The major objective: to develop arable potential and increase self-sufficiency was achieved temporarily, for a limited number of farmers, at significant public cost (subsidisation and debt write offs), leading to chronic debt problems and lack of preparation for the discipline of the subsequent free market. Farmers were often technically ill-equipped to farm. Neglect of diversity and farmers' never accepting ownership played a significant role in ultimate project failure.

Participative enquiry established that crop yields dropped by 20% while farmer numbers decreased from roughly 400 to fewer than 50 since project termination. Sharecropping still constitutes access to cropland. Current constraints relate to capital, mechanisation and communal relations. A typology describing economic diversity was developed: 'Inactive landowners' have limited access to resources; for 'opportunists' mechanisation services are scarce; 'entrepreneurs' complain of communication and mechanisation failure; while 'commercialising farmers' are constrained by a lack of cropland.

This study established that project design criteria, dealing with description of economic diversity and cost saving, through integration of role-players, will enhance resource poor farmer participation and thus empowerment, and should shape project development. Integrating these criteria in a comprehensive project design and implementation cycle, will address economic diversity, cost and access constraints, and will constitute a focus shift towards participative human capacity development. Such a redesigned project approach represents a sound development strategy facilitating equitable agricultural growth and access to services and resources.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... 2

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................. 3

TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................................................................................. 5

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................................ 10

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................... 11

ABBREVIATIONS: ...................................................................................................................... 12

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................... 13

1.1 Background .......................................................................................................................... 13

1.3 Contextualising the study .................................................................................................... 17

1.4 Aim and outline of the study: ............................................................................................. 18

1.4.1 Specific objectives: ........................................................................................................ 18

1.4.2 Outline: .......................................................................................................................... 18

CHAPTER TWO: STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS: AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SA ...................................................................................................................... 20

2.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 20

2.2 Agriculture's role in economic transformation ................................................................... 20

2.2.1 International perspective .............................................................................................. 20

2.2.2 Linking poverty and transformation: .......................................................................... 21

2.2.3 The transformation process: ....................................................................................... 22

2.2.4 Unique South African development features .............................................................. 27

2.2.5 South African development strategies ........................................................................ 30

2.2.6 Policy evolution towards a growing and equitable agriculture: ................................ 33

2.2.6.1 Broad policy framework ...................................................................................... 33

2.2.6.2 Agricultural policy directives .............................................................................. 35

2.2.6.3 Guidelines for the future: The Strategic Plan for South African Agriculture: ........ 37

2.2.7. Conclusions ................................................................................................................ 39

2.4 Rural development: dealing with diversity ....................................................................... 40

2.4.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 40

2.4.2 Rural reality: A role of small-scale agriculture? .......................................................... 40

2.4.3 Quantifying diversity: .................................................................................................. 43

2.4.4 Application of the typological approach: .................................................................... 45

2.4.5 South African categorisation efforts: .......................................................................... 47

2.4.4. Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 51
CHAPTER THREE: THE DEVELOPMENT ROLE OF AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS 52

3.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................................. 52
3.2 Defining integration in agricultural development ................................................................................... 53
  3.2.1 Addressing inhibitive transactions cost ......................................................................................... 53
  3.2.2 Collective action strategies ............................................................................................................. 54
  3.2.3 Designing integration and collective action .................................................................................... 55
3.3 Describing the project approach ............................................................................................................. 58
  3.3.1 Definitions and notions: ................................................................................................................ 58
  3.3.2 The project cycle ........................................................................................................................... 60
  3.3.3 Causes of project failure ................................................................................................................. 62
  3.3.4 The future of the project approach? .............................................................................................. 65
3.4 Redesigning the project approach for agricultural development: .......................................................... 67
  3.4.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 67
  3.4.2 Project design criteria .................................................................................................................... 68
  3.4.3 Comparing design criteria with a systemic evaluation framework ............................................... 69
  3.4.4 Incorporating the proposed design criteria in the project cycle .................................................. 73
  3.4.5 Conclusions .................................................................................................................................. 75

CHAPTER FOUR: A METHODOLOGY FOR INTEGRATED AGRICULTURAL PROJECT PLANNING ............................. 76

4.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................................. 76
4.2 A comprehensive impact analysis framework ......................................................................................... 77
4.3 Direct project impact ............................................................................................................................... 79
  4.3.1 Institutional project impact ........................................................................................................... 79
    4.3.1.1 Institutional change ................................................................................................................ 79
    4.3.1.2 Changes in the enabling environment .................................................................................... 80
  4.3.2 Project Effectiveness .................................................................................................................... 80
  4.3.3 Social impact .................................................................................................................................. 82
  4.3.4 Financial and economic impact analysis ........................................................................................ 83
4.4 Indirect impact ....................................................................................................................................... 86
  4.4.1 Spillovers and linkage impacts ...................................................................................................... 86
  4.4.2 Environmental Impact Assessment .............................................................................................. 87
4.5 Qualitative, systemic impact analysis framework ................................................................................... 88
4.6 Data collection ....................................................................................................................................... 89
  4.6.1 Data collection procedures and verification .................................................................................. 89
  4.6.2 The participatory learning and action (PLA) phase ..................................................................... 89
  4.6.3 The questionnaire .......................................................................................................................... 90
4.7 Methodology framework ......................................................................................................................... 91

CHAPTER FIVE: CONTEXTUALISING AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA ................................................................. 92

5.1 Introduction: ......................................................................................................................................... 92
5.2 Physical and biological description of the Province: ............................................................................ 92
CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION (EX POST) OF THE SHEILA PROJECT

6.1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 122
6.2 Direct project impact ................................................................................................. 128
6.3 Social impact ............................................................................................................ 139
6.4 Financial & economic impact ................................................................................... 157

5.3 A historical perspective (until 1994) ................................................................. 95
5.3.1 Social, cultural and political dimensions .......................................................... 95
5.3.2 Agriculture’s historic position ........................................................................... 96
5.3.3 Agricultural support in Bophuthatswana ......................................................... 97
5.3.4 Bophuthatswana’s agricultural potential ......................................................... 101

5.4 Socio-economic profile ......................................................................................... 102

5.5 Recent agricultural policy, support systems and performance ......................... 105
5.5.1 Policy and services development ....................................................................... 105
5.5.2 Agricultural performance .................................................................................. 107

5.6 Descriptions and classification of Northwest’s farmers .................................... 111

5.7 Focusing on the Ditsobotla projects .................................................................. 114
5.7.1 Physical description: Ditsobotla ....................................................................... 114
5.7.2 History of the Ditsobotla projects .................................................................... 115
5.7.3 Infrastructure ..................................................................................................... 117
5.7.4 Tenure ................................................................................................................ 118
5.7.5 Agricultural activities ........................................................................................ 118

5.8 Conclusions ............................................................................................................ 121
7.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 183

7.2 Defining issues and impacts .................................................................................................... 184

7.2.1 Logical Framework Analysis: The participative group process ............................................ 184
7.2.1.1 Dynamics of sharecropping at Sheila ............................................................................. 184
7.2.1.2 Describing constraints - Logical framework analysis ..................................................... 185
7.2.1.2.1 Inactive landowners .................................................................................................. 185
7.2.1.2.2 Opportunists ............................................................................................................ 187
7.2.1.2.3 Entrepreneurs ......................................................................................................... 188
7.2.1.2.4 Commercialising farmers ......................................................................................... 189
7.2.1.3 Project design - Logframes for farmer-types .................................................................. 193
7.2.1.3.1 Project design for ‘inactive landowners’ ................................................................. 193
7.2.1.3.2 Project design for ‘opportunists’ ............................................................................... 194
7.2.1.3.3 Project design for ‘entrepreneurs’ ............................................................................ 194
7.2.1.3.4 Project design for ‘commercialising farmers’ ......................................................... 195
7.2.1.3.5 Concluding remarks ............................................................................................... 196

7.2.2 Institutional impact ............................................................................................................. 198
7.2.2.1 Strategy ......................................................................................................................... 198
7.2.2.2 Organisation ............................................................................................................... 198
7.2.2.3 Support services ......................................................................................................... 199
7.2.2.4 Extension, training and access to information .............................................................. 199
7.2.2.5 Input supply and mechanisation services .................................................................. 200
7.2.2.6 Procedure .................................................................................................................... 200
7.2.2.6.1 Participant selection ............................................................................................... 200
7.2.2.6.2 Tenure and land allocation ...................................................................................... 201
7.2.2.6.3 Project committee and study group responsibilities .............................................. 201
7.2.2.7 Enabling environment ................................................................................................. 201
7.2.3 Farmer-level impact .......................................................................................................... 202
7.2.3.1 Social impact ............................................................................................................. 202
7.2.3.2 Financial impact ....................................................................................................... 203
7.2.3.2.1 Without project ...................................................................................................... 203
7.2.3.2.2 Enterprise budget – farmer level analysis .............................................................. 205
7.2.3.2.3 Project level analysis ........................................................................................... 206
7.2.3.2 Economic Impact: efficiency analysis ....................................................................... 207

7.3 Indirect impact ....................................................................................................................... 208
7.3.1 Spillover and linkage impacts ............................................................................................ 208
7.3.2 Environmental impact assessment .................................................................................... 209

7.4 Application of the systemic impact analysis framework ...................................................... 210
CHAPTER EIGHT: REFLECTION

8.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 214
8.2 Proposing a new approach for agricultural development .......................................................... 215
8.3 Lessons from history, policy and experience .............................................................................. 216
8.4 The project model ......................................................................................................................... 218
8.5 Ex post analysis of the Sheila project ............................................................................................ 219
8.6 Towards a new project design for the Sheila project .................................................................... 222
8.7 Concluding remarks ..................................................................................................................... 223

REFERENCES ..................................................................................................................................... 225
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.4.1: A summarised description of the role of project design criteria in the project cycle 74
Table 4.5.1: A summation of the 'decision rules' to facilitate project analysis 88
Table 4.7.1: A description of the comprehensive impact assessment of the Sheila project 91
Table 5.3.1: Crop area cultivated during 1988/89 for Bophuthatswana 101
Table 5.4.1: Number of people in the North West province (DBSA, 1999) 102
Table 5.4.2: Social and Physical Indicators of the North West province (DBSA, 1999) 103
Table 5.4.3: Structures of rural incomes for some provinces 104
Table 5.5.1: Expected prices for major crops of North West, 2000/2001 season 109
Table 5.5.2: Enterprise costs and yields in North West, for 2000/2001 109
Table 5.6.1: A description of the agricultural population of the North West province 111
Table 5.7.1: Occupational breakdown for the Ditsobotla district 115
Table 6.1.1: Household dwellings and water source of three villages in Ditsobotla 124
Table 6.1.2: Age distribution and education level in three Ditsobotla villages 126
Table 6.1.3: Employment, occupation and individual annual income 126
Table 6.2.1: A stepwise discriminant analysis, to identify the most significant variables 141
Table 6.2.2: Number of Observations and percent classified into groups 142
Table 6.2.4: Analysis of group variance, using Principle Component 1 scores 142
Table 6.2.5: Post hoc analysis to illustrate significant differences between groups 142
Table 6.2.6: Average monthly spending of Sheila ward respondents on five basic items 143
Table 6.2.7: Land size frequencies of ruralites from Sheila ward 145
Table 6.2.8: Kilograms of the major inputs utilised by Sheila respondents 147
Table 6.2.9: Results of respondents that harvested during the 1997/98 & 1998/99 148
Table 6.2.10: Production data for different size of land holdings planted 148
Table 6.2.11: A compilation of livestock types of respondents from Sheila ward 150
Table 6.2.12: Summarised spending of Sheila ward respondents on fodder and medicine 151
Table 6.2.13: A description of 'inactive landowners' of the Sheila typology 155
Table 6.2.14: A description of the 'opportunists'-type of the Sheila typology 155
Table 6.2.15: A description of 'entrepreneurs' of the Sheila typology 156
Table 6.2.16: A description of type four of the Sheila typology 156
Table 6.2.17: A summarised description of the four groups of the typology for Sheila 157
Table 6.2.18: 'Without project' financial analysis for maize, for Sheila farmers 160
Table 6.2.19: 'Without project' financial analysis for livestock for Sheila farmers 160
Table 6.2.20: Average maize income and cost parameters per farmer group at Sheila 161
Table 6.2.21: Maize enterprise input cost and output data for farmer groups for 1976-1980 162
Table 6.2.22: Relevant input cost and output performance data for the Sheila typology 162
Table 6.2.23: Agricultural performance for individual farmers of the Sheila typology 163
Table 6.2.24: Financial parameters as determined for the Sheila project 165
Table 6.2.25: Financial analysis at the project level, for the farmer typology at Sheila 167
Table 6.2.26: Maize; U.S. number 2 yellow, fob Gulf of Mexico: US Dollars per Metric Ton 168
Table 6.2.27: A summary of the economic analysis of farmer groups at Sheila 169
Table 6.2.28: Economic parameters, as determined for the Sheila project 170
Table 7.1: Project design through a logframe for 'inactive landowners' 193
Table 7.2: Project design through a logframe for 'opportunists' 194
Table 7.3: Project design through a logframe for 'entrepreneurs' 195
Table 7.4: Project design through a logframe for 'commercialising farmers' 195
Table 7.5: 'Without project' financial analysis for maize for a Sheila typology 204
Table 7.6: 'Without project' financial analysis for livestock for a Sheila typology 204
Table 7.7: Financial analysis [in nominal values] of the average participant in the project 205
Table 7.8: Financial analysis of the proposed revived Sheila project 207
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.1</td>
<td>The evolution of agricultural development</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.2</td>
<td>The evolution of rural development theory and practice</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1</td>
<td>The project cycle</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.2.1</td>
<td>Framework for Impact Analysis of the project approach at Sheila</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.2.1</td>
<td>Predominant agricultural activities per district in North West</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.2.2</td>
<td>A problem tree description of agricultural constraints in North West</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.1.1</td>
<td>A map illustrating the location of Springbokpan, Sheila and Verdwaal</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.1</td>
<td>A ‘problem tree’ illustrating constraints in agriculture at Sheila</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.2</td>
<td>An ‘objective tree’ illustrating solutions for agriculture at Sheila</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.3</td>
<td>A box and whisker plot preliminary identifying groups</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.4</td>
<td>Education levels of respondents from three Ditsobotla villages</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.5</td>
<td>Utilisation of the homestead area for agricultural practices</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.6</td>
<td>A breakdown of mechanisation sources for respondents of the Sheila ward</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.7</td>
<td>Constraints in crop production as perceived by respondents from Sheila ward</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.8</td>
<td>Serious constraints in livestock farming, as perceived by Sheila farmers</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.9</td>
<td>Agricultural information sources of ruralites from Sheila ward, Ditsobotla</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.10</td>
<td>Training needs as perceived by respondents from the Sheila ward</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.11</td>
<td>A two-dimensional representation of respondents from a PCA</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.12</td>
<td>Financial project analysis: Comparing with and without project scenarios</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.13</td>
<td>Financial project analysis on the basis of farmer types</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.2.14</td>
<td>Economic project analysis: Comparing with and without project scenarios</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.1</td>
<td>Problem tree for ‘inactive-landowners’</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.2</td>
<td>Problem tree for ‘opportunist’</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.3</td>
<td>Problem tree for ‘entrepreneurs’</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.4</td>
<td>Problem tree for ‘commercialising farmers’</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.5</td>
<td>Objective tree for ‘inactive-landowners’</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.6</td>
<td>Objective tree for ‘opportunist’</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.7</td>
<td>Objective tree for ‘entrepreneurs’</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.8</td>
<td>Objective tree for ‘tree for ‘commercialising farmers’</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABBREVIATIONS:

ABC: Agricultural Business Chamber
AIDS: Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome
ANFP: average net farm profit (gross income-depreciation)
ANOVA: Analysis of variance
ARC: Agricultural Research Council
ARDRI: Agricultural and Rural Development Research Institute
CBA: Cost-Benefit Approach
CBO: Community Based Organisation
CED: Corporation for Economic Development
CV: Coefficient of Variance
DBSA: Development Bank of Southern Africa
DSI: Directorate Statistical Information
EIA: Environmental impact assessment
EU: European Union
FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation
FSP: Farmer Support Programme
FSR: Farming Systems Research
GATT: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP: Gross domestic product
GEAR: Growth, Employment and Redistribution Program
HCD: Human Capital Development
HDI: Human Development Index
HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICRA: International Centre for Research in Development orientated Agriculture
IDP: Integrated Development Programme
IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development
IRD: Integrated Rural Development
IRR: Internal Rate of return
ISRDP: Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme
LAPC: Land and Agricultural Policy Centre
LFA: Logical Framework Analysis
LRAD: Land reform for agricultural development
NAFU: National African Farmers' Union
NDA: National Department of Agriculture
NGO's: Non Government Organisations
NPV: net present value
NWAU: North West Agricultural Union
NWC: North West Cooperative
NWDACE: North West Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Environment
OVI: Objectively Verifiable Indicators
PCA: Principal Component Analysis
PLA: Participatory Learning and Action
RDP: Reconstruction and Development Program
RSA: Republic of South Africa
SA: South Africa
SADC: Southern African Development Community
SPSS: Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SWC: South West Cooperative
UN: United Nations
USA: United States of America
USAID: United States Agency for International Development