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ABSTRACT

The paper reflects on the diversity and the multitude of challenges mastered by agricultural extension in South Africa since its founding in 1925. The post-apartheid era (since 1994) saw drastic organizational and other changes. The present-day service is facing new professional challenges aimed at improving the delivery of service to a growing and technically more divergent farming community.

The first 69 years of agricultural extension saw the establishment of a diversity of compartmentalized services: to the commercial (white) sector and to the black, Indian and Coloured communities. Agricultural co-operatives, community organizations and the private sector also rendered services. The South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE) and tertiary training institutions in the agricultural as well as the agricultural extension disciplines were founded during these years.

The post-apartheid era (since 1994) has raised questions concerning effective service delivery and professionalism. It would appear that dual-registration by extension practitioners with the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP) as well as the SASAE should enjoy popular support.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Founding Years

A mere 13 years from now, 2025 will mark the first century since the founding of the South African Extension Service (in 1925). The then Minister of Agriculture, General Kemp, personally approved the appointment of Col. Heinrich du Toit as head of the Service comprising a small group of six extensionists serving the entire country (Penzhorn, 1987).

The people they were serving still carried the scars of the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) and the First World War (1914–1918) to be followed (after founding) by the Great Drought of the 1930s, the Depression and the Poor Whites Problem. The Second World War (1939–1945) affected this country when the Extension Service was in its infancy, a mere 14 years old (Koch, 2007).

1.2 Early Highlights

Those early years were, however, not without highlights as exemplified by:

- The deployment of home economists (primarily serving housewives);
- The establishment of land service clubs (for the school-going youth);

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- The development of faculties of agriculture (at the Universities of Stellenbosch and Pretoria);
- The publication of *Farming in South Africa* (with 6330 subscribers in 1935); and
- The publication of the *Handbook for Farmers in 1939* (Düvel and Koch, 1991; Government Printer, 1957).

The emphasis clearly focused on the dissemination of information by service-orientated extensionists. Of particular relevance was the promulgation of the Soil Conservation Act 1946 (Act 45 of 1946) that formed the backbone or baseline of many extension programmes. The authors of the Conservation Act respected the principles of community involvement by legally mandating democratically elected soil conservation committees to write their own district plans and to supervise the operational implementation of these plans (Koch, 2007).

1.3 The Creation of Academic Homes for Extensionists

During the late 1940s and early 1950s the first steps were taken to establish an academic training and research facility for agricultural extension at the University of Pretoria. Dr. K. E. W. Penzhorn, Prof. H. B. Davel and Prof. F. R. Tomlinson (of Tomlinson Report fame) led the initiatives (Penzhorn, 1987). Prof F. F. H. Kolbe became its head when the Department of Agrarian Extension was established at the University of Pretoria in 1958 (with the enrolment of post-graduate students in 1959). Today agricultural extension is being offered by the University of Pretoria (led by Drs. T. Ngomane, J. B. Stevens and S. E. Terblanché), the University of Fort Hare (headed for many years by Prof. T. J. (Tim) Bembridge, today by Prof. Francois Lategan), the University of Limpopo (headed by Prof. N. M. Mollel), the Tshwane University of Technology (led by Mr. S. S. (Simon) Letsoalo), the University of KZN (Pietermaritzburg Campus, led by Dr. S. Worth), the University of the North West (Mafikeng, led by Mr. K. Yeboah-Asnaman), the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (led by Mr. Andre Coetzee) and the University of Venda (led by Dr. E. N. Raidimi).

The academic status of training courses is graded according to their relevant content while offering specific training for specific situations or needs.

The Department of Agrarian Extension and the Department of Agricultural Economics of the University of Pretoria amalgamated during the early 1990s to form the Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development within an amalgamated Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (Koch, 2007). Dr. T Ngomane is leading the extension component.

1.4 The South African Society for Agricultural Extension as a Professional Society in its Own Right

The founding moment of the South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE) occurred at 22:05 on 23 August 1966 in Room A-3 of the Extramural Centre of the University of Pretoria. The Society was originally known as the South African Institute for Agricultural Extension (SAIEX), but its name was changed from “Institute” to “Society” at the Umhlanga Rocks Conference on 16 May 1979 (Koch, 2007).

The Society has generally been held in high esteem as illustrated by the then State President, the Honourable J. J. Fouché, opening the 1974 conference in Cape Town. Many of its

members have been entrusted with top positions of responsibility in state departments and elsewhere.

The Society serves its members through the national structure as well as a number of branch structures throughout the country. Branches have their own bylaws and undertake their own activities, including branch symposia (SASAE, 2004; SAIEX, 2003).

1.5 The South African Institute for Agricultural Extension

In 1981 the Department of Agriculture seconded Dr. C. H. (Boer) de Klerk to serve as full-time researcher for the South African Institute for Agricultural Extension (SAIEX). He was stationed next to the academic extension (lecturing) staff in the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Pretoria, illustrating the cordial relationships and interactions that existed at the time. He returned to the Department of Agriculture in Pretoria when his secondment expired. The Institute has subsequently opened its doors to qualified external specialists on a contract basis (Koch, 2007).

2. AN OVERVIEW OF EXTENSION SERVICES BEFORE 1994

2.1 Agricultural Extension for Black Farmers

Prior to the new political dispensation in 1994, the extension services for black farmers developed along their own specific pathways. In 1913, the Union Government promulgated the Native Land Act 1913 (Act 27 of 1913), which reserved land for blacks that had been occupied by them at the time of Union in 1910. In 1936, by way of the Released Areas Act 1936 (Act 18 of 1936), a further 6,2 million ha of so-called “quota land” was added to the 9,2 million ha of already “scheduled land” (Coetzee, 1987).

The first School for Agriculture was opened at Teko in 1905. In 1930, the Fort Cox College of Agriculture was established, followed by the Tompi Seleka Agricultural College in 1960 and a fourth College in Taung in 1965 (Coetzee, 1987).

In retrospect one can state that:

- Despite cultural differences (between the African and European cultures) the fortunes of both groups have been inextricably bound together (and have remained so to this day);
- Effective agricultural extension for developing communities calls for extensionists with special abilities;
- Cattle occupies a special place in the lives of black people and consequently (with a few exceptions) any moves to limit livestock numbers was frequently opposed most vehemently; and
- Prescriptive approaches had to make way for education and persuasion (Coetzee, 1987).

The need for a more scientific approach of extension was identified in the late 1950s. The South African Regional Commission for the Conservation and Utilization of the Soil (SARCCUS) contributed to the identification of this need within the Southern African region and served as the medium through which member governments could share knowledge and experience concerning extension. The proceedings of an Extension Methods Workshop conducted in Salisbury (now Harare) during May 1962 served as an impetus for the establishment of a formal extension service for black farmers (Coetzee, 1987).

Today extensionists are working side by side irrespective of race or creed. What astounds many a sceptic is the positive contributions of black women to agricultural development. Their vegetable gardens and housecraft form a backbone of household food security, particularly so in the developing world.

2.2 The Indian Farming Community

Indian farmers remember Dr. J. A. Pentz for his personal interest, friendliness, competence and guidance with a human touch. He was the pioneer who undertook the first extension work among the Indian farmers of KZN. He must have been a real “guru” (Rix, 1987).

Because of special training needs, advisors of Indian farmers were required to register at the M. L. Sultan Technikon for a three-year National Agricultural Diploma, which was linked to practical instruction at the Cedara Agricultural College (Rix, 1987).

The Indian beginnings were humble and closely intertwined with the sugar industry that started in Natal (now KZN) in 1851. Because of a labour crisis in 1859 and after lengthy negotiations, an immigration scheme was agreed upon with the Indian Government and the first Indian labourers arrived in South Africa in 1860. Indian immigration into South Africa continued until 1911 when the scheme was stopped by the Indian Government (Rix, 1987).

Indian farmers did remarkably well in the coastal areas as cultivators of small pieces of land rented on short leases.

During the First World War they began to embark on the production of sugar cane in significant numbers. Today sugar-cane production predominates in Indian agriculture and there are approximately 1850 (Indian) registered quota holders.

As early as 1915, concern was expressed regarding the increase in the number of Indian-owned farms. The concern eventually led to the introduction of the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Bill in 1946. This Act prohibited inter-racial property transactions and posed a major problem in the future development of Indian agriculture.

The extension approach included both the promotion of production and the conservation of resources. Fellow farmers observed the improved production and quality of produce, the improvements increasing the credibility of extension work and its growing sphere of influence.

In view of the large number of farmers (which imposed a physical limitation on giving equal attention to all farmers), it was decided by the relevant decision makers to concentrate their extension effort on a relatively small number of larger growers. It was expected that the extension message would diffuse among farmers from these initial points of contact. It was also decided to give high priority to requested visits (to farmers) with little time to visits not specifically requested. We know today that the so-called trickle-down effect is disappointingly ineffective (Rix, 1987; Lewin, 1951 & Robbertse, 1968).

2.3 The Coloured People of the Cape

The Coloured People have always maintained a low profile within the extension fraternity. They have been linked to the so-called *Oppermangronde*, the Richtersveld and others. A

search for more information from the Central Library at Harvest House, Pretoria, and possible sources at Elsenburg, Wellington and Upington yielded nothing. Their extension history remains unknown although it probably was quite vibrant (Koch, 2007).

3. EXTENSION SERVICES RENDERED BY NON GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

3.1 Extension Services Rendered by Agricultural Co-operatives

The most common challenge facing farmers during the founding years of co-operatives centred on economic issues. Agricultural co-operatives functioned not to their own advantage but solely to that of their members. To this end, they also involved themselves in plant- breeding initiatives, the manufacture of agriculture implements, the processing chain (which included wine cellars and cheese factories), the Citrus Exchange and co-operatives in tobacco, wool, karakul, livestock and grain (Eksteen, 1987). Some highlights included the “Blokhuys” feedlot just outside Harrismith in the Free State, the Co-ordinated Extension Campaign of the Highveld and the OTK experimental farms in the Bethal area.

The agricultural co-operatives that specialized in wool, citrus and the canning of fruit were the first to employ extensionists (during the late 1930s). In 1982, agricultural co-operatives had deployed a total of 242 graduates and 286 technicians. They also served farmers of neighbouring states such as Lesotho. In 1982, the South African Agricultural Union ranked the extension services of co-operatives in the top position in terms of economic and technical services (Eksteen, 1987). Ten years later it became fashionable to privatize and deregulate the economy. Control Boards were dissolved. Agricultural co-operatives were privatized and their extension numbers dwindled into insignificance.

3.2 Commodity Organizations

Commodity organizations such as the wine, sugar and wool industries organized themselves into commodity organizations and are linked to AgriSA through its chambers. Commodity organizations are known for the dedicated inputs of their specialist extensionists to the development of the emerging agricultural sector (without compromising their commercial interests). Some have their own technical backup structures, such as the Mount Edgecombe Experiment Station in the case of the Sugar Industry.

In the case of the National Wool Growers Association (NWGA, established in 1929), sustainable and profitable wool and sheep production is promoted in South Africa. More than 50% of its close on 10 000 members are black commercial and emerging farmers with representation throughout the organizational structures of the NWGA. The NWGA involves itself in developmental programmes often in close liaison with the state’s extension service (De Beer, 2007).

3.4 The Private (Commercial) Sector

The private sector’s involvement with the SASAE commenced with a strong body of representation on the society’s board during the founding years. With the increasing technological sophistication of the economy, the private sector’s involvement in agriculture intensified. The sector concentrates on the supply (and after-sale service) of seed, fertilizer and lime, animal feed, plant-protection chemicals, tractors, farm implements, vehicles, packing materials, fuel and lubricants and financial services (Luus, 1987).

With competing organizations in the field, the necessity arose to establish organizations that, amongst others, would guard against unethical and unprofessional conduct and to promote technical and marketing codes. The Agricultural and Veterinary Chemical Society of South Africa was established in 1956 and the Fertilizer Society of South Africa in 1959 with the above objectives, amongst others, in mind.

While the private sector must reflect a measure of social conscience—particularly in today’s demanding social situation—the sector is not a social service. The target audience is probably the single most significant difference between the state extensionist and the advisor in the private sector (Rix, 1987). The state extensionist targets the poorer masses of people while the private sector concentrates on areas with superior profit potential. Sound extension principles apply to all sectors and they need one another, now more than at any time before.

4. POST 1994: A NEW ERA

4.1 Effect of the new era on the South African Extension Services

The democratic dispensation heralded by the 1994 general election significantly affected the South African Extension Services namely:

- (a) The seven agro-ecological regions were replaced organizationally by nine provincial structures (the nine provinces having replaced the previous four).
- (b) Two official languages were replaced by eleven.
- (c) The previously compartmentalized extension services of the state were re-organized into nine (inclusive) provincial services.
- (d) Organograms were re-organized for government extension giving rise to a multitude of new positions (many of them senior posts).
- (e) Because of the challenges facing agriculture (particularly in the emerging farming sector), it is envisaged that the number of serving extensionists in the governmental sector would have to grow from the present 2210 to an estimated 5500 (Department of Agriculture, 2005).
- (f) The private and semi-private sectors have similarly become increasingly involved in developmental (extension) services to the emerging farming sector. The emerging sector is often represented at the highest levels in the decision-making structures of these bodies (De Beer, 2007).
- (g) The commercial-farming sector has become significantly less reliant on governmental extension, having turned to the non-governmental (private) sector for technical and other assistance or support.
- (h) Extension in general, but particularly governmental extension, is facing new challenges facilitating (mediating) land reform, financial support and other initiatives focusing primarily on the development of the emerging farming sector.
- (i) Women play a significant role within the emerging farming sector with their home-gardens and handicrafts. They are often referred to as a “pillar of hope” (quite correctly so).
- (j) The level of technical expertise of a significant number of serving extensionists deserves to be upgraded. Mandating professional registration in the natural as well as extension sciences could serve such a purpose while, simultaneously, offering credible evaluation of personnel and the possibility of financial reward (Terblanché & Koch, 2011; Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, undated).

- (k) It has been estimated that the bulk of the marginalized practitioners fall into the 3-year qualification category, which comprises 31,9 percent of non-governmental practitioners and 65,1 percent of government-employed extensionists. One would therefore be inclined to exclude the two-year diplomats except in isolated cases of possible Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) evaluations (Terblanché & Koch, 2011).
- (l) The South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE) can play a critically important role to promote the professional standing of its members. The South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP) has recently approved the so-called B-level of accreditation for Certificated Natural Scientists. The B-level accommodates those practitioners who are performing valuable developmental functions while lacking sufficient academic qualifications for the customary certificated, candidate, or professional registration (Casey, 2012).
- (m) SACNASP has been legally mandated by way of the Natural Scientific Professions Act 2003 (Act No. 27 of 2003) to evaluate and register applicants in 17 fields of practice, three of which being agriculturally related, namely agricultural science (including forestry), animal science and soil science. In total, it has accredited 36 voluntary associations, including the SASAE (SACNASP, 2010/2011).

4.2 The Role of the SASAE post 1994

The role of the SASAE in promoting the professional standing of its members can be stated as follows:

- (a) The SASAE should be seen as supportive of the functions of the SACNASP. SACNASP registration is enforceable by law and the SASAE should accept this as part of the objective to render a superior service to the public. SACNASP and the SASAE should work in cordial partnership with one another, supporting rather than opposing one another (Koch, 2011).
- (b) The SASAE may need to amend its own registration categories to fit into the most recent developments concerning professional registration (Koch, 2010 & Terblanché, 2010).
- (c) The SASAE should request a subfield for agricultural extension in the SACNASP fields of practice to accommodate the anticipated large number of its members as serving extensionists, as envisaged in the official “Norms and Standards for Extension and Advisory Services in Extension” dated 2005 (Ref. Chapter 1). This report envisages a growth of serving governmental service extensionists from the then 2210 to an estimated 5500 (Department of Agriculture, 2005).
- (d) The SASAE should support a system of “dual-specialization” for its members. This duality would entail independent registration by SACNASP for the natural sciences followed by the registration as extensionists by the SASAE in terms of its own (independent) procedures, norms and standards (in that order).
- (e) It is hoped that the Department of Agriculture would assist the SASAE as its official guardian or custodian in the execution of its registration responsibilities.
- (f) It is foreseen that the SASAE could function under the umbrella structures of the Natural Scientific Professions Act 2003 (Act No. 27 of 2003), thereby avoiding the necessity of additional (or amended) legislation. The SASAE could continue to function as a voluntary association in partnership with SACNASP (Terblanché & Koch, 2011).
- (g) Depending on the official view of the Department of Agriculture, it is anticipated that the procedures governing SASAE administration would have to be re-visited and would

probably become more complex than at present (Terblanché, undated). Additional administrative and logistical support may become necessary.

- (h) The SASAE would collaborate with other tertiary training institutions as well as credible extension consultants and specialists to develop a credible system of Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The objective of CPD for extensionists would be to promote professionalism and scientific expertise (know-how) and hands-on skills in the natural as well as the extension (and other related) disciplines (Terblanché & Koch, 2011; National Department of Agriculture, undated; EE Research Focus, 2009).
- (i) The current professional inputs of the SASAE should be intensified, thereby promoting more deep-rooted ownership. The intensified involvement could be a logical consequence of the proposed amended registration policies, with positive spin-offs in terms of service delivery (Terblanché, 2007).
- (j) The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) route can probably only apply to a small select group of practitioners. In general, it is expected to have little relevance for practicing extensionists (Terblanché & Koch, 2011).
- (k) Only fully experienced extension field staff and academics should be considered for appointment as mentors. Mentorship programmes should generally be accommodated as contributing (supportive) parcels to further academic training and would, therefore, in all probability, be managed by academics in cross-reference with the SASAE (Terblanché & Koch, 2011).
- (l) The SASAE should never compromise academic or professional standards (Terblanché & Koch, 2011).

4.3 Some Comparisons between Governmental and Non-governmental Extension Services

The following excerpts have been taken from a survey undertaken among governmental and non-governmental extension practitioners (Terblanché & Koch, 2011):

- (a) Non-governmental extensionists appear to be better qualified in the natural sciences than their governmental counterparts are. The situation is reversed in respect of qualifications in extension.
- (b) Only a handful of governmental extensionists belong to scientific organizations other than the SASAE, their main affiliation being the SASAE. The situation is again reversed for the non-governmental sector.
- (c) For obvious reasons, SACNASP registration is more important with the non-governmental sector. In the governmental sector, only a relative few are professionally registered.
- (d) A significant number of governmental extensionists have experienced private sector work before joining the civil service. Their average number of years of farming or research experience is in the range of 4,9 years against the average of 21,5 years for the non-governmental sector.
- (e) Governmental extensionists appear to have committed themselves to improving their academic training with 29,1 percent of practitioners having registered for further training in the agricultural sciences. A significant lower number (3,9 percent) of practitioners have registered for further training in extension.
- (f) The SASAE is regarded in high esteem among governmental extensionists and mainly for the correct reasons, namely, the promotion of professionalism.
- (g) SACNASP is highly respected for its work and its objectives in promoting the standing of the natural sciences in South Africa.

- (h) Extensionists appear to agree that high scientific standards (and a sound work ethic) are not negotiable.
- (i) Most governmental extensionists are deployed as generalists at provincial level, serving commercial as well as up-coming farmers. Their extensionist to client ratio averages 1:171 against 1:1034 for the non-governmental sector (based on data provided by the provinces).
- (j) Only 9,2 percent (203) of governmental extensionists have a B.Sc. Agric. qualification, which is considered sufficient in the natural (agricultural) sciences to be acceptable for SACNASP registration. Only 6,3 percent (139) of practitioners have an honours or higher qualification in extension.
- (k) 53,1 percent of non-governmental extensionists have a B.Sc. Agric. degree, making them eligible for professional registration with SACNASP. The non-governmental extensionists have very little (if any) training in the extension sciences and have indicated their need for training in some extension disciplines (such as communication).
- (l) It has been repeatedly indicated that many governmental extensionists are under-qualified in the natural as well as the extension sciences. There appears to be a relatively wide agreement, however, that higher qualifications are important and one should expect that practitioners would co-operate with trainees once acceptable training options are tabled. The mentoring and CPD options should be considered in parallel (as a package) in support of formal higher tertiary training initiatives.
- (m) Training shortfalls are considered equally serious in the natural as well as the extension sciences.
- (n) Improving training or qualification levels would appear more important than the boosting of numbers. Increasing numbers necessitates additional expenditure in infrastructure, administration and logistics while improved expertise renders higher returns within the already existent infrastructure. (Terblanché & Koch, 2011)

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The history of agricultural extension in South Africa can be divided into:

- The pre-1994 era (69 years); and
- The post-1994 era (18 years to date).

During the 87 years since its founding, the Extension Service has survived many challenges. Its basic principle of “helping people to help themselves” has remained unchanged although service conditions have changed on many occasions. Its members have remained strongly service orientated to this day.

Our immediate challenges centre on:

- (a) Dual professional registration of extensionists under SACNASP and the SASAE (in that order);
- (b) Improving the academic standing of extensionists through further training at tertiary institutions and becoming involved in mentorships, CPD programmes (in both the natural as well as the supportive disciplines) and group initiatives. Experienced and knowledgeable extensionists (i.e. not necessarily administrative heads, who may not be appropriately qualified) should lead such initiatives.
- (c) The promotion of a Code of Conduct addressing positive values and sustainable work ethics. SACNASP has such a Code of Conduct. The SASAE proposed an *Erekode* (Code of Honour) during its founding conference on 23 August 1966, but has never

put it to paper. Such a code should become an integral part of the SASAE registration process and extensionists should commit themselves to the adherence of such a code.

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