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## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PREVIOUS SMALL FARMER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN SOUTH AFRICA?

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This article firstly gives a short chronological overview of the small farmer development concept in South Africa and shows how this was generally associated with the traditional black rural areas and subsistence agriculture. This restricted the wider application of this concept. Valuable lessons however can and must be learnt from this experience because small farmer programmes is currently viewed as an important aspect of agricultural development in South Africa. The discussion then highlights several problems of which policy constraints, insufficient participation, lack of ownership, ad hoc participant selection, lack of property rights to farm land, rigid project planning and design, the incorrect choice of a farming model and deficient support services played a significant role—all issues which are valid in the current restructuring environment in the country. In conclusion a number of "rules" are proposed for future small farmer development schemes.

### WAT KAN ONS LEER UIT VORIGE KLEINBOERONTWIKKELINGSTRATEGIEË IN SUID-AFRIKA

Die artikel beskryf die evolusie van die kleinboerontwikkelingskonsep in Suid-Afrika. Dit toon hoedat die konsep hoofsaaklik geassosieer word met "swart" boerderyontwikkeling in die voormalige tuisland gebiede. Hierdie begrip en ondervinding beperk egter die toepassingsmoontlikhede van kleinboerstelsels in Suid-Afrikaanse landbou. Waardevolle lesse kan nogtans geleer word vir huidige en toekomstige kleinboer ontwikkelingsinisiatiewe. Die bespreking lig 'n aantal probleme uit: beleidsbeperkings, onvoldoende deelname aan beplanning en implementeringsbestuur, ad hoc seleksie van deelnemers, gebrekkige grond gebruiksregte, rigiede projekbeplanning en ontwerp, die verkeerde projekmodel en swak ondersteuningsdienste. Ten slotte word 'n aantal kern reëls vir toekomstige beplanning en implementering geformuleer.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

New agricultural policy initiatives in South Africa, focus strongly on transformation, reconstruction and development. Small farmer development is likely to become an important programme for a growth with equity strategy in South African agriculture (White Paper on Agriculture, 1995; RDP, 1994; Van Rooyen, Ngqangweni and Njobe, 1994). The concept of small farmer development however remains unclear, even controversial (Christiansen, Van Rooyen & Cooper, 1993; Singini and Van Rooyen, 1995). One of the reasons for this is because it is difficult to visualize and extrapolate the history and South African experience with small farming development systems. This is so, especially for commercial small scale farming, because the experience with small farmers have largely been restricted to low input : low output farming and agricultural projects in the "subsistence homeland" environment.

In the future, systems will in all likelihood be introduced to establish (settle and support) substantial numbers of new and emerging farmers in the wider South African environment - in previous "homelands", on public land and in commercial farming areas. The "homeland" experience could therefore provide only partial albeit valuable lessons from experience. These should be noted in future strategies while innovative and new approaches will also be required to promote a productive and sustainable small farmer approach in South African agriculture.

Many studies on small farmer development in South Africa highlight the problems associated with a single dimensional analysis approach ie credit, extension, technology, etc. These constitute restricted analyses. It is argued that a systems analysis approach to small farmer development strategies is useful to give effect to the multi dimensional nature of such initiatives (Bembridge, Graven, Hough and Van Rooyen, 1982; Van Rooyen and Botha, 1994). In this paper a systems view will be taken to analyse lessons from experiences

with small farmer development in South Africa and to guide future small farmer development strategies.

## 2. THE SMALL FARMER DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa small farming is generally associated with black agriculture in homeland areas and the evolution of South African agriculture substantiates this perception (Brand, Christodoulou, Van Rooyen and Vink, 1992).

Small holder type of farming played a significant role in the supply of food and grain crops to the diamond and gold mines during the latter part of the previous century. The productivity and innovativeness of "peasant" farmers were particularly acclaimed (Bundy, 1979). During the early decades of this century, a range of policies and laws however were introduced, which excluded black (small) farmers (Brand, *et al*, 1992). The concept of small scale farming as a major development strategy was first seriously promoted by the Tomlinson Commission in the mid-fifties of this century. The small scale farming approach advocated by Tomlinson was based on the observation that agriculture in "traditional black areas" had the potential to produce surplus agricultural commodities. The Tomlinson vision also promoted the concept of an "economic unit" farm size which enabled a rural household to produce a livable income through full time farming. The emergence of a "middle class" farmer group in the traditional black areas was envisioned.

The Tomlinson recommendations required the planning of farm areas in "economic" units and the provision of support services and infrastructure. These recommendations however were not accepted by the government of the day. As a reaction to the recommendations of Tomlinson, small scale farming was however promoted *inter alia* by the Department of Development Aid, (in its various forms) since the late fifties. In practise the Tomlinson strategy was largely reduced to rural land use planning, fencing and the

provision of some infrastructure i.e. "betterment planning". Land units for arable production were small ( $\pm 1,2$  ha), support services were lacking and no major incentive existed to be involved in farming. Homeland farming therefore remained a "subsistence" or "residual" type of production system under resource poor conditions (Kirsten, Van Zyl & Van Rooyen, 1994).

During this period the existence of black farming outside the "homeland" areas was effectively restricted due to the range of laws (such as the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts), and the discouragement of share cropping and tenant farming by blacks while policies and institutions were rather directed to support large scale commercial farming (Brand, *et al.*, 1992).

The next phase in the evolution of the farming concept in the "homeland areas" was prompted by the establishment of the Agricultural Division of the Bantu Investment Corporation (BIC) in the early 70's. This introduced the large scale farming project approach. In this strategy it was argued that expatriate management and modern technology were required to modernize farming in the homelands. Those projects were primarily being implemented by parastatal development companies/corporations and local persons were trained for managerial positions. During the late nineteen seventies, the idea of small scale farming on projects was introduced whereby selected black farmers were settled on mini-farms within a centrally controlled/disciplined project management system.

The major objective that evolved over time was to guide selected farmers towards "full time" small scale commercial producers. One problem experienced in this context was that certain schemes were originally designed as large centrally managed estate farms. The idea of small farmers however was increasingly attended to in project design. Some of those schemes are still operative and have, as their ultimate objective, the settlement and establishment of commercial farmers through a system of co-ordinated and centrally managed support services. On these types of schemes farmers are supported by a service unit or co-operative responsible for the management and delivery of support services such as input supply, mechanization, credit and marketing. In some cases production is centrally managed; in other cases more flexible arrangements apply. Examples are the Mid-Letaba irrigation project in the Northern Province, and the Kwandebele Land Consolidation projects in Mpumalanga.

A successful variant of the settlement project is currently found in the outgrower scheme (OGS) concept where support services linked to a central estate farm are provided to outgrower small farmers. An example of OGS's is found in the sugar industry where small cane farmers operate as outgrowers linked to sugar mills. Cotton farming is another example in areas such as the Makatini.

Modern farming practises and technologies were introduced through the project approach on schemes and this became the major strategy for agricultural development in the homeland areas during the seventies and early 80's. Increased yields were often recorded. This strategy on the other hand however largely failed to promote the establishment of an independent class of small farmers while it constituted high investment costs

with a relative low profit and development impact and often these schemes competed with adjacent small scale farming (Bembridge, *et al.*, 1982; Brand, *et al.*, 1992; Kirsten *et al.*, 1994).

During the mid-eighties the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) introduced a different strategy for small farmer development through the Farmer Support Programme (FSP) concept (Van Rooyen, Christodoulou & Vink, 1987). The DBSA proposals regarding FSP's were based on the "real world" successes of small farming systems in various areas of the world but notably in Zimbabwe after independence when comprehensive support services were directed towards the farmer problems and farming needs of small holder producers. In addition to these influences an alternative investment strategy was sought for the very costly and management intensive large scale agricultural schemes in homeland areas. Some of the DBSA borrowers also approached the Bank with requests to develop a loan package which could support a broad based rural clientele of small scale agricultural producers operating outside projects.

The FSP promoted by the DBSA was based on the assumption of the economic rationality of small farmers when supported with the necessary services and a definition of small farmers as "those who allocate resources in the production of agricultural commodities". Secondly, the FSP was designed to provide access to support mechanisms within a systems context - extension, training, research, inputs, financial services, mechanization, marketing services. The DBSA funded FSP's were designed to be demand driven and focused on selected target areas. Various institutions were mobilized to render support services. These programmes did not require central management as in the project approach and broke away from the full time farmer concept. Parttime farming was accommodated in FSP's. "Economic" farm size was thus not considered relevant *per se* although *de facto* land rights was recommended (Van Rooyen, *et al.*, 1987). The programme entailed an integrated strategy, attempting to alleviate constraints under which farmers (all those producing agricultural products) were operating by providing access to the necessary services.

The FSP did represent a change in the strategy for agricultural development in homeland areas from the supply driven project approach to demand driven support programmes (Singini and Van Rooyen, 1995). The impact of this new strategy however was constrained by problems of implementing capacity and the questionable legitimacy of support institutions in the homelands during the late 80's and early 90's (Cooper, 1995). DBSA recently revised some of its programme lending criteria after the initial years of implementation to become more "borrower friendly" and to serve both governmental and non-governmental development agencies. The need for local participation and capacity building was recognized and provided for. The programme is still evolving within a rural infrastructure mandate emphasizing the wider rural environment (water supply, food storage, marketing etc.) (Christodoulou, Sibisi & Van Rooyen, 1994).

The FSP approach to small farming, although constrained by many factors, did give evidence of the positive impact of demand driven support strategies.

Similar experiences were recorded by a range of non-governmental and other development agencies which provided farmer support services in homeland areas.

It was also observed that the FSP approach had a definite impact on the design of farmer settlement projects in "homeland" areas. The concept of demand driven support systems introduced a movement to more flexible management systems, farm sizes and cropping systems on agricultural schemes.

Small farming in terms of the above approaches was largely promoted in the homeland context, but this concept was never introduced under fully supportive conditions under which large scale farming was promoted in the commercial areas. The situation will however now change dramatically as the small farming concept is viewed as relevant within various Government policies. Provincial agricultural departments (and the national department) and institutions such as LANOK and the New Farmers Development Company are already in the process of promoting small farmers and pilot schemes are in the process of implementation. The Agricultural Research Council is currently in the process to implement small farmer systems research projects. The concept is based on a "research-development" approach and is following a "learning-by-doing" methodology (Van Rooyen, Marassas, Wessels, Burger and Carstens, 1996).

### 3. SMALL FARMER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES: LESSONS FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE<sup>3</sup>

Two points of departure are required to interpret lessons from the South African farmer experience. Firstly, small farmer development and support strategies do not occur in isolation from the wider environment. A wider perspective is therefore needed. Each case should however also be considered as unique. A note of caution must therefore be expressed when lessons from experience are generalised.

A second point of departure argue for the need to assess small farmer experiences within a holistic and integrated context. Three major systems are proposed to address the integrated nature of the small farmer support system viz project planning and design; project implementation and management; and institutional support systems (Figure 1).

The systems view accepts the interactive and integrated reality of small farmer support activities. The section below will discuss lessons within each sub-system. It is however important to note that issues are interrelated.

#### 3.1 Lessons from the planning and design of agricultural projects

*Planning, participation and the project cycle:* The management of projects through the formal project cycle (Gittinger, 1982) should be extended to allow for participation by the communities and groups involved in the whole project cycle (Botha and Coetzee, 1993; Kirsten, Van Zyl & Sartorius von Bach, 1993). This will require deliberate intervention efforts such as mobilization and capacity development of involved communities and intended beneficiaries. Caution must be taken that the participation process remain democratic and representative. The processes of participation, mobilisation and capacity development will invariably take time, but will allow for interventions that are derived from real felt needs, and local capacity and opportunities can be taken into account. This will enhance the sustainability and the added value of any small farmer strategy.

*Focusing on farmer development:* Developing the farmer and not the agricultural production system *per se* should dictate design and the pace of implementation. It is advisable to allow for a flexible implementation of farming plans and settlers should not unnecessarily be restricted or limited by design parameters. They should rather be empowered to develop as farmers on their farming units. This should also allow for mistakes

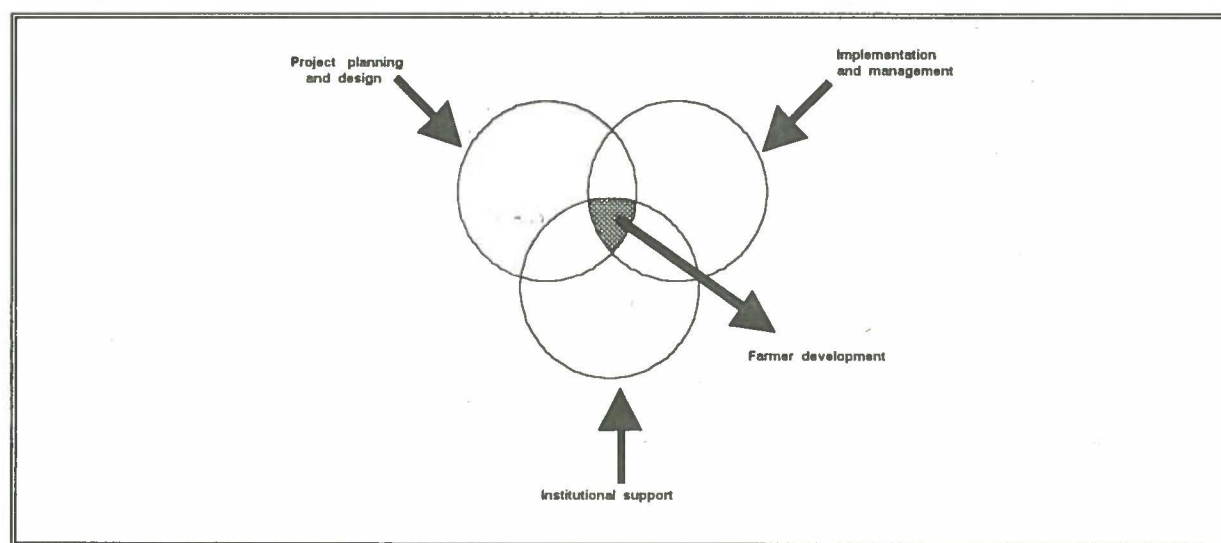


Figure 1: Dimensions of a small farmer development system

through a "learning-by-doing" process. Under certain circumstances, where for example product quality control is required for down stream processing, more controlled arrangements through outgrower schemes may be required.

*Optimal farm size and farm income:* Farm income must be viewed as a major incentive in the settlement of farmers or in FSP's. An attractive farm profit remain important to attract investment and energy. The approach to farm planning should however not be to fix a farm size according to a standardised income.

Emphases should again rather be to provide farmers the necessary security of land use, the right to exchange land use rights and access to effective support and marketing services. On a settlement project a fixed farm size may initially have to be used for start up. Different farm sizes and income objectives should however be allowed to evolve and reach optimal levels as a result of market forces and farmers' objectives and capacities (Van Rooyen, *et al.*, 1993).

*Farmer selection:* This aspect remains a serious "political mine field" (Lombard, 1994; Van Rooyen and Njobe, 1996). Up-front selection of farmers should at best be understood as a preliminary and objective procedure that gives access to project participation (farming), but it does not guarantee non-eviction for unsuccessful candidates. Initial selection of prospective farmers should be as objective as possible and criteria should emphasize a positive attitude towards farming.

Selection should also be followed by a "learning by doing" process whereby successful candidates will be afforded the opportunity to continue and those who failed, to quit.

### 3.2 Implementation and management lessons

*Project management and control:* Project management should serve farmers to the extent that it empowers them (Bembridge, *et al.*, 1982). Clear rules and responsibilities and transparent management decisions are important. An approach is required with emphasis on individual responsibilities and accountability especially for those activities over which farmers normally have control i.e. farm level planning, implementation, co-ordination, control, supervision, evaluation and accepting the outcome of efforts (profits or losses) (Botha and Coetzee, 1993).

*Mechanisms to enter and to exit schemes:* Procedures to provide for the clear measurement of successful farming as well as arrangements for the voluntary withdrawal or the eviction of unsuccessful farmers is an essential part of the contractual arrangements (Van Rooyen, *et al.*, 1993). Farmers should know right from the outset what is expected of them and how they will be measured in this regard. Trust between management and farmers is absolutely imperative. They should play a crucial role in explaining the contractual details to farmers.

*The need for a development implementation agency:* The implementation of a small farmer development require the simultaneous and sequential introduction of a range of activities in an integrated manner. Single dimensional approaches such as the introduction of financial support, or the provision of mechanization services *per se* generally led to unsustainable systems.

The financial affordability of an agent to co-ordinate such services however is in question because it can seldom be covered out of project returns. Some form of subsidization is thus required. Where such services were rendered or co-ordinated by parastatal development agencies, high overhead costs and inefficiencies led to unsustainable systems. Consultants and NGO's, on the other hand were also problematical, and led to inefficiencies. Innovative mechanisms are required for this important function. Linkages between projects and established co-operatives as implementing agents, the restructuring of existing development parastatals and the involvement of NGOs should remain alternatives to facilitate small farmer development. Agricultural Boards could also play a facilitative role. A clear statement of responsibility, functions, funding and performance criteria is however required, while the choice of an implementing agent should be treated in a participative manner involving the farmers.

### 3.3 Institutional support systems

*Land tenure and rights to farm land:* Land tenure arrangements should ensure fair and equitable access, security of land use and tradeability of land rights (Fenyas and Groenewald, 1985; Kille and Lyne, 1983). Community preferences should be accommodated in the evolving land rights system. The establishment of a system whereby land use security and tradeable land rights are promoted require the demarcation of land parcels and the establishment of farm boundaries. The cost of land measurement and demarcation could however, prove to be to high. Innovative and cost saving approaches to this matter needs to be explored.

*Demand driven services:* Services could be provided on demand by both the public and the private sectors. Where the private sector could be involved in the provision of a service and where the level of provision and quality of service is of the required standard, this sector should be preferred. Farmers should however be allowed to select the agency that is to provide them with support services. Farmers normally pay market related fees or prices for private goods and services. If they are not satisfied with the service provided, farmers should be in the position to choose to take their business elsewhere. This greater commercial orientation acts as an incentive to support agencies and suppliers to provide the best possible service and price. The selling of cotton to agents of own choice on the Makathini Flats and KaNgwane is an example of such freedom. The implementing/management agent of a scheme should facilitate access and provide information on alternatives. Access to several elements have to be promoted as a coherent part of a support programme (Singini and Van Rooyen, 1995; Kirsten *et al.*, 1993). The role of a facilitating/implementing agent seems important in this context (see 3.2).

*Collective action and co-operation:* The organizational structure of co-operation between farmers must be considered with caution (Machete & Van Rooyen, 1983; Groenewald, 1993; Botha, 1991). Cooperatives are frequently established on a top-down manner to direct most of the support programme. Co-operative arrangements should however be investigated from an economic efficiency and cost saving point of view. The principle of letting farmers participate in decision-making regarding the implementation and use of co-operatives, or other forms of co-operation arrangements

is important. Farmers should however agree to operate on a co-operative basis and co-operatives should not be imposed on a top-down basis.

**Markets:** Market development and access to market opportunities remains vital. Support should include information, access to appropriate physical facilities, secure payment systems, transportation, etc. A relevant aspect is to allow farmers to exploit local market situations. This requires flexibility in production regimes and choice of crops, especially on outgrower schemes, where central processing facilities depend largely on the crops produced by small farmers (Groenewald, 1993).

**Subsidization, cost recovery and user charges:** The subsidisation of financial interest rates are often argued as an important mechanism to assist settlers and emerging farmers with low cost credit during their establishment period. The main reasons conventionally given for a subsidized interest rate are that (a) emerging farmers are still inefficient; (b) farmers need to be induced to invest; and (c) such farmers cannot afford market rates. However, it is now recognised that access to credit facilities and the necessary support services are more critical than the level of interest rates charged (Van Rooyen *et al.*, 1993). The reduction of the transaction cost for obtaining loans are of more importance than the level of the interest rate. Approaches should therefore rather concentrate on opening up access to a comprehensive financial support system and reducing the transaction costs of obtaining such financial support. Where soft rates are currently charged, levels should gradually be lifted to market levels.

**Human capital development:** Large returns were generally recorded where human capital development (training and demonstration) for small farmer development and research was deliberately introduced as part of the support programme (Singini and Van Rooyen, 1995).

**Gender and power relations:** Feminisation of poverty and the deteriorating quality of family life among rural households is a growing phenomenon in South (and Southern) Africa. Through historical and political experience South African households are increasingly becoming female headed, whether *de jure* through widowhood, divorce and desertion or *de facto*, through male outmigration into urban employment. Any farmer support programme, that fails to acknowledge women's central role in household food security on the one hand and the unbalanced manner in which benefits accrue within and between households, on the other, the nature of rural power dynamics which favour certain households at the expense of others through commercialisation of communal lands for the benefit of a few powerful households, runs the risk of undermining good intentions of bringing about rural transformations. Cultural practices of dispossessing women of land rights regardless of the nature of land tenure (Mini, 1994) coupled with legal incapacities to access credit and lack of collateral to raise bank loans in their own right undermine efforts at rural transformation (Saito and Weideman, 1990; Sivard, 1985).

The exclusion of women from decision making forums at different stages of the project cycle and their exclusion from human capital development and technical training weaken their partnership role.

Women, even more than men, need assistance with sorting their reproductive and productive responsibilities and learning to set priorities and goals.

A properly grounded research based integrated programme that unpacks all the elements of power relations within and between households; land access and tenure, institutional management, extension, infrastructure, markets and support systems for women farmers within a gender sensitive framework is required to inform project design and implementation.

**Policies and integrated development:** Good policies are a pre-requisite for successful farming, but rural policy is generally lacking in South Africa and consequently the contextualization of farming and optimizing of linkages are lacking (Van Rooyen, *et al.*, 1994). Farming does not occur in isolation from aspects of infrastructure development, health and educational services, to name a few. Farming is also a sub system of the household system. Farming development should therefore occur in an integrated development context and this should be directed by sound policies.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND "RULES" FOR THE FUTURE

Small farmer development must be viewed as an important strategy to secure an "equity with efficiency" growth path in South African agriculture. Experience with small farmer strategies in South Africa highlights several problems, of which insufficient participation, lack of ownership, *ad hoc* participant selection, lack of proper rights to farm land and deficient support services play a significant role, in failing to establish a small farmer category in the country.

The major support elements of future small farmer development programmes should in particular focus on the following aspects: getting the community to participate at significant levels throughout the whole project cycle; shifting the focus from production to farmer development; rendering advice with regard to farm income and management; information supply to farmers with regard to the production and marketing processes; facilitating co-operation arrangements and institutionalising linkages with various agricultural development role players in the vicinity; and focus on human capital development. Gender relations and impacts should also be attended to.

In a development project small farmers should be allowed to set the pace of development. Technocrats, project managers, politicians and planners should accept this as the **most important rule** for future development. A **second rule** is to advise only on new technologies that have been tested at on-farm levels. Risks in small farming is high and technological experimentation could be disastrous to this type of farming system. A **third important rule** is to ensure efficient marketing systems and information. This should be complemented by the required support services of which financial support is one element. The **fourth rule** focus on flexibility in design and implementation, entrance and exit, land use and organizational format. The emphasis should remain on farmer development and not farm production. In this context a **fifth rule** would be to analyze and understand the nature of the household and gender relations within communities. A majority of small farmers are women and support systems should recognise this. A **sixth rule**

is that an implementing agency is required to support small farmer development. No fixed institutional format can be proposed to attend to this function. Service orientation and facilitation however are the main design criteria for such a function.

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