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Forms of agricultural support and the 'Culture of Dependency and Entitlement'

Aliber M[1],

[1]University of Fort Hare

Corresponding author email: michaelaliber@gmail.com

Abstract:

The paper is based on a study that sought to understand the nature of the interaction between small-scale farmers and government in the Eastern Cape from a variety of different perspectives. The study involved a sample survey of farmers, and in-depth interviews with farmers, extension officers and other government staff, and leaders of farmer associations. This particular paper explores two themes that emerged in the course of the larger study: first, what is popularly known in South Africa and elsewhere as the 'culture of dependency and entitlement', and second, the forms of support that government chooses to offer to small-scale farmers. The paper argues that government is stuck in a vicious cycle whereby it seeks to placate expectant small-scale farmers with material support, which it can most effectively do via problematic group projects; although generally ineffective, the practice has the effect of maintaining widespread demand for such support, even to the point that small-scale farmers forming group projects for the sole purpose of attracting it. In seeking to compensate for the weaknesses of this approach, government has sought to introduce compensatory measures such as 'strategic partnerships', sometimes with the ironic consequence that small-scale farmers no longer play a role in farming in 'their' agricultural projects. The paper concludes that government in the Eastern Cape needs to return to the basics of effective extension support aimed at supporting individual farmers; to the extent material support is still needed, it should no longer be given away for free.

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Abstract

The paper is based on a study that sought to understand the nature of the interaction between small-scale farmers and government in the Eastern Cape from a variety of different perspectives. The study involved a sample survey of farmers, and in-depth interviews with farmers, extension officers and other government staff, and leaders of farmer associations. This particular paper explores two themes that emerged in the course of the larger study: first, what is popularly known in South Africa and elsewhere as the 'culture of dependency and entitlement', and second, the forms of support that government chooses to offer to small-scale farmers. The paper argues that government is stuck in a vicious cycle whereby it seeks to placate expectant small-scale farmers with material support, which it can most effectively do via problematic group projects; although generally ineffective, the practice has the effect of maintaining widespread demand for such support, even to the point that small-scale farmers forming group projects for the sole purpose of attracting it. In seeking to compensate for the weaknesses of this approach, government has sought to introduce compensatory measures such as 'strategic partnerships', sometimes with the ironic consequence that small-scale farmers no longer play a role in farming in 'their' agricultural projects. The paper concludes that government in the Eastern Cape needs to return to the basics of effective extension support aimed at supporting individual farmers; to the extent material support is still needed, it should no longer be given away for free.

1 Introduction

Agriculture has long been regarded as a sector of great promise, especially in terms of employment creation and as a stimulant to rural development. However, it would appear that much of this vast potential remains unrealised. Most smallholders are below the poverty line, many subsistence producers are still food insecure, and vast stretches of arable land in the former homelands around of country remain under-utilised (NPC, 2012). And yet, there is little agreement as to why, and just as little as to what to do about it. If we are not doing something right, what is it? The purpose of this study was to tease out the possibility of one contributing factor based on a prior hunch, namely the manner in which government and farmers interact. The study sought to understand the nature of the interaction between small-scale farmers and government in the Eastern Cape (author et al, 2018).

This paper explores two themes that emerged in the course of the larger study: first, what is popularly known in South Africa and elsewhere by the phrase 'culture of dependency and entitlement'; and second, the forms of support that government tends to employ on behalf of small-scale farmers. The paper argues that government is stuck in a vicious cycle whereby it seeks to placate expectant small-scale farmers with material support, which it can most effectively do via problematic group-based production projects; although generally ineffective, the practice has the effect of maintaining widespread demand for such support, even to the point that farmers form groups for the sole purpose of attracting it. In seeking to compensate for the weaknesses of this approach, government has sought to introduce compensatory measures such as 'strategic partnerships', sometimes with the ironic

consequence that small-scale farmers no longer play a role in farming in 'their' agricultural projects.

Overall, the research involved the use of secondary data, a survey of small-scale farmers, and in-depth interviews with farmers, government officials and leaders of farmer associations. The survey was conducted in three local municipality areas, namely Nkonkobe Local Municipality (now comprising the larger part of Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality), Amahlathi Local Municipality, and an area comprising roughly the eastern half of Mbhashe and the western half of King Sabato Dalindyebo (KSD) Local Municipalities. The questionnaire covered a range of issues, of which support services received was one. The final survey amounted to 660 observations, roughly split three ways between the three areas.

The present paper mainly employs thematic analysis, which Braun and Clarke (2006) declare should be regarded as a foundational method in qualitative analysis, and which Nowell et al. describe as "a method for identifying, analysing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a dataset" (Nowell et al., 2017). The 'dataset' in question is the wealth of statements collected in the course of various types of interviews conducted as part of the study, or found already published, together with the content of selected documents, such as government policy statements. The main themes explored include 'dependency', 'entitlement', and a variety of concepts linked to efforts at group-based production.

2 The 'culture of dependency and entitlement' – a brief background

The 'culture of dependency and entitlement' is a sort of casual diagnosis as to a mind-set that characterises many poor people, including small-scale farmers, and complicates government's efforts to support them. But what is this 'culture of dependency and entitlement'? Does it exist, and if so, what are its origins, and implications?

Neither the expression 'culture of dependency and entitlement', nor the seemingly synonymous term 'dependency syndrome', generally feature as official concerns of South African policy-makers, perhaps because of a wish to avoid sounding moralistic. However, this alleged 'culture', or 'mind-set', is often raised in discussions and debates about the possibly undesirable effects of social grants, meaning the loss of drive of recipients to improve their own situation. The National Development Plan, for instance, delicately alludes to the need to build a social protection system which avoids "the creation of dependency and stigma" (NPC, 2012: 362), without commenting on whether or not the current system has the effect of doing so.

Among academics, there has mainly been effort expended to demonstrate statistically that social grants do *not* engender 'dependency', nor, for that matter, teenage pregnancies (EPRI, 2004; Makiwane, 2010). The following quote from one contribution to this literature conveys a sense of how the question of dependency evokes a mix of ideological and statistical arguments:

> "Though the spectre of the 'dependency culture' is most commonly raised by right-wing opponents of states espousing social democratic values in the northern hemisphere, its proponents have found sympathetic ears in South Africa. Often we hear it said that in South Africa social grants foster dependency and that people should be given a 'hand-up' not a 'hand-out'…. Using a specially designed module in

> the HSRC's South African Social Attitudes Survey 2006, some hard facts emerge which demonstrate a very positive orientation of both the unemployed and existing social grant recipients towards work… and, importantly, no evidence that social grants generate a culture of dependency." (Noble and Ntshongwana, 2007: 6)

However, outside of the specific issue of welfare/social grants, the claim has been made that long-standing institutionalised racism in South Africa created economic dependency (though certainly not entitlement) which in turn had damaging psychological effects. Drawing among others on Biko, Lephakga writes, "The exploitative system of colonial apartheid, which resulted in the impoverishment of many blacks in South Africa, created 'a people' who are disturbed, exploited and psychologically fearful" (Lephakga, 2017: 10). And as Biko himself wrote, "Powerlessness breeds a race of beggars who smile at the enemy and swear at him in the sanctity of their toilets" (Biko, 2004: 86).

While the idea of 'dependency syndrome' is offensive to observers such as Noble and Ntshongwana, for other social scientists the concepts of 'empowerment', 'agency', and 'capability' are not, even though they are defined – implicitly or otherwise – as the converse of dependency, e.g. "Empowerment involves helping citizens to change from passive and dependent citizens into more independent, active, responsible, and participating citizens" (Pacho, 2014: 292), and "We can easily recognize this kind of powerlessness; the name for it is dependency" (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993: 376). These and many others write from the perspective that the manner in which the state or other agents seek to support people can either engender empowerment or agency, or undermine it. In other words, psychological disempowerment and dependency may not be only the result of deliberate oppression such as colonialism and apartheid, but of well-meant but counter-productive interventions.

This dialectic is overt for example in the community development literature, which juxtaposes the 'Asset-based Community Development' approach to the dominant 'needs-based approach':

> "In the needs-based approach, well-intentioned efforts of universities, donor agencies, and governments have generated needs surveys, analysed problems, and identified solutions to meet those needs. In the process, however, they have inadvertently presented a one-sided negative view, which has often compromised, rather than contributed to, community capacity building…. People in the communities start to…see themselves as deficient and incapable of taking charge of their lives and of the community." (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003: 475-476)

But agricultural development is different, and of course, the situation in the Eastern Cape is not necessarily the same as elsewhere, so what about the 'culture of dependency and entitlement' in the context of Eastern Cape's small-scale farming sector?

3 The case of small-scale agriculture in the Eastern Cape

In late 2016, the Eastern Cape's Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform (DRDAR) finalised the *Eastern Cape Agricultural Economic Transformation Strategy 2016-2021,* in which it declared:

> "It must be noted that, government agriculture support was characterised by a shift of support from white farmers (pre-1994) to black (post-1994) farmers…. This led to greater dependency on government and created a passive citizenry waiting for government to provide almost everything and people become bystanders in their own development." (DRDAR, 2016: 12)

Does this claim have any substance? Consider this assortment of typical statements collected by means of the farmer survey regarding respondents' overall perceptions of support from government:[1]

- "Government is a liar. They told us they would give us livestock but they didn't. If government could offer me money I could be able to farm better."

- "We get no support. We asked government to build a shelter for our goats and also help us to secure our lands by fencing. Roads and water are critical constraints because we cannot reach the markets with bad roads. We find it difficult to irrigate…."

- "There's no support from the government, I use my own money for farming. If government could introduce projects in our village, improvement could be possible and also government could assist us by offering us resources such as seedlings and fertilisers."

- "I don't get any support from the government, I do not have money to buy seedlings or more especially for water, I depend on the rain and lack equipment. So government must supply me with these critical things."

- "A dam and irrigation system should be built for us. We should also be supported with tractors and equipment."

In short, farmers' expectations are often prodigious, if not impossible. In fact, reading through the full 'wish list' of small-scale farmer respondents, one is struck by the unimportance attached to extension relative to the pronounced wish to receive material support in the form of inputs or machinery or infrastructure – or better yet, all three.[2] One is also impressed by the pervasive sense of expectation – some farmers appear to feel that it is unjust that they have to use their own money for purchasing agricultural inputs, whereas in many countries this would be widely regarded as the norm.

It is also noteworthy that of these five selected statements, three were made by farmers who did in fact receive some kind of support in the previous 12 months: the farmer who made the first statement had received training, extension and free inputs; the second statement was

[1] These responses were given to an open-ended question which was included at the end of the questionnaire in order to provide respondents an opportunity to express anything in their own words on the theme of farmer support: "Is there anything else you would like to let us know about the support you get or don't get from government or from other farmers?"

[2] This is where our research tends towards 'content analysis,' an approach akin to thematic analysis but in which the expression of themes is counted and therefore rendered available for quantitative analysis. For purposes of this paper, we are generally not concerned with precise counts or quantitative analysis as such, but make do with generalisations such as the one in this paragraph to the effect that some themes articulated by our sample of small-scale farmers are more or less universal.

made by a farmer who was part of a government-supported project; the farmer who made the last statement had benefitted from four visits from an extension officer, and government-supported veterinary care for his livestock. (This is not to suggest that most farmers are in fact receiving support.)

Three responses with a different view only serve to reinforce the dominant trend. These following utterances are the picture of non-dependence, but they express each in their own way the frustrated expectation out of which this non-dependence apparently evolved:

- "We get no support, we manage the farms ourselves on our own, we buy equipment, seedlings and medicine with our money. Government is unreliable so I must do what I think because I'm tired of asking assistance from government."

- "Dependence on the government is not beneficial because there is not much support. If stock medicine given by government is finished or out of stock it might take years for it to be provided again. So it means as a farmer you need to be independent."

- "I have learnt to be independent so am happy with the way I have been farming, because waiting on the government could have you waiting forever."

But are the views expressed above indicative of 'dependency', or of 'entitlement', or of both? There is no discernible direct evidence of *dependency*, in the sense that recipients of state support become passive or less driven to take action in their own interest. On the contrary, it could be argued that wanting, say, free inputs, is quite different from wanting a continuous flow of social grants, because in order to benefit from such inputs one has to go to the effort of using them. (Some inputs, in fact, make one's job larger in proportion to how much one uses, e.g. more fertiliser often means more effort to cope with weeds, more effort harvesting, etc.) Moreover, farmers' attitudes as illustrated by the selection of quotes above are irrespective of whether they receive support or do not, and most do not.

The perspectives of extension officers interviewed for the study tend to support the observations above that small-scale farmers are demanding more than they are dependent, for instance:

- "If as an extension officer you do not give farmers time or visit them, they disappear."

- "Farmers look for information somewhere and come to me to challenge me at times to test my knowledge."

- "If you are not honest with the farmers they do not respect you."

- "Farmers are very disciplined when it comes to their work, for instance if as an extension officer you had a problem with transport to visit the farmers for a second time and come after a long time, the farmers will not take you seriously and they will not come again to your meetings. This results in a bad image of extension officers."

- "[Farmers' priority is] …to get something material, because they're saying that, yes, you can come to advise us on certain issues, but don't come with nothing; inasmuch as you talk, they expect something."

To summarise, while there is little evidence of dependency, there *is* a palpable sense of entitlement, by which is meant an unreasonable level of expectation of state support, where 'unreasonable' is admittedly a judgement call based for example on affordability and capacity to deliver.

This suggests among other things that the common phrase 'culture of dependency and entitlement' invites confusion, because 'dependency' and 'entitlement' seem to have quite different meanings. But whereas the negative consequences of dependency (i.e. if it were to exist) are self-evident, why should one worry about entitlement?

4 Implications for agricultural extension?

As intangible as this notion of entitlement is, it does appear to be problematic for government. As explained by one senior official with the Eastern Cape's provincial agriculture department and echoed by others, extension officers nowadays are reluctant to go to communities 'empty handed', meaning in the absence of something tangible that they can leave behind; new ideas or information are not good enough. In the words of some farmers: "Extension officers must come and give support, not advice and promises," and "Extension officers do not encourage us because they stopped giving us resources." To be more precise, extension officers are seen as the conduits of material support from government: "The government must send extension officers, maybe we can get support such as seedlings."

In fact, the word 'promise' features prominently in small-scale farmers' lexicon when discussing their relationship to government: "Government must be reliable, not to tell us false promises"; "They promised to fence our field and nothing happened"; and "Promises and lies from the extension officers who came and promised to come back and do something that never existed".

This poses a dilemma especially for agricultural extension officers, whose role in principle is to offer ideas and advice, but who increasingly are seen as dispensers of government largesse. The irony is that while small-scale farmers may not appreciate extension officers as sources of information and advice, this is not to say that they do not value learning, even learning through their own experimentation. However, according to the survey, a larger share of small-scale farmers learn from family members (34%) and other farmers (32%), with extension officers being a distant third (9%). This partly reflects the inaccessibility of extension officers – only 19% of small-scale farmer respondents agreed with the statement that, 'It is easy to get in contact with an extension officer if I need to' – but it also serves to underline the extent to which the traditional function of extension officers has been distorted by their newer role as conduits of material support.

While this paper does not claim to prove it, this distorted role of extension officers possibly also helps explain why extension officers seem to interact with so few farmers, partly because of the aforementioned reluctance, and partly due to the administrative burden they bear in relation to managing various forms of material support. Out of their five-day work week, extension officers across the Eastern Cape spend two days doing paperwork and having

meetings in their offices, if not more. According to the survey, only about 15% of small-scale farmers interact with extension officers in a 12-month period, whereas according to the General Household Survey, the share of small-scale farmers in the Eastern Cape that interact with an extension officer in a typical year is in the order of 6%.

How did this situation come about? The quote above from DRDAR's Agricultural Economic Transformation Strategy suggests that the turning point in small-scale farmers' attitudes coincided with the sudden shift of support from white to black farmers that came about with the new dispensation. There may be some truth to this claim, but it ignores the fact that during the era of 'separate development', homeland agriculture departments and development corporations had support programmes as well, not least in the Eastern Cape. As noted not long ago by the director of East Cape Macadamia,

> "Historically, schemes were more farming for the people rather than farming with the people, especially in the former homelands with the Ulimocor and Tracor projects.[3] As a result, they created a form of dependency; without any control over how they were operated, the communities became reliant on those projects and the continued support of the homeland structures." (Pakade, quoted in Hollins, 2017)

Whether the phenomenon described by Pakade was truly 'dependency', or 'entitlement' as understood here, it is probably correct that increased levels of intervention by government prior to 1994 already started to condition farmers' expectations. But regardless of the exact timing of when this conditioning began, it is likely that current policies have reinforced if not strengthened it. As recalled by one the chairperson of one active farmer association, in the Ciskei in the 1980s under Lennox Sebe, government generally 'expected farmers to meet it halfway', whereas this is not necessarily the approach that has prevailed post-1994.

The irony is that East Cape Macadamia epitomises the very approach that Pakade condemns. Moreover, this sort of approach whereby government or strategic partners farm on behalf of farmers, appears to be more mainstream since 1994.

5 The rise of 'projectism'

Gittinger begins his classic handbook *The Economic Analysis of Agricultural Projects* by asserting that "Projects are the 'cutting edge' of development" (Gittinger, 1972: 3). Whether or not this heady characterisation was ever warranted, it is important to note that what Gittinger had in mind is something closer to what is typically meant in South African parlance by 'schemes' or 'programmes', for example irrigation investments, the construction of processing plants, and large land settlement interventions. The economic rationale for these is that they have the potential to uplift numbers of individual farmers in an area, in effect by altering the production environment.

For reasons that are difficult to understand, a 'project' in the South African agricultural development context more often refers to an intervention on behalf of a single farming 'enterprise', whether that 'enterprise' is individual-based or group-based. Very often, however, projects are group-based; put differently, where small-scale farmers are concerned, there is a tendency in South Africa to think about groups.

[3] Ulimicor and Tracor were the agricultural development corporations for the Ciskei and Transkei, respectively.

The phenomenon whereby government and other agencies organise farmers into groups, is not associated with an easily identified body of literature or school of thought, perhaps because the circumstances and motivations are so varied, or possibly because they are of less interest from an academic perspective. Nonetheless, a quick survey of current practice in South Africa suggests how widespread 'group-based production projects' are, from the government's main cropping programme ('Fetsa Tlala'), to community garden-based food security interventions (e.g. community gardens and group-based poultry projects), to various instances of land reform. But even while group projects are extremely common, extension officers and others express their misgivings about them, as reflected for example in the well-worn term, 'group dynamics'.

From the farmer survey conducted as part of the present student, it emerges that small-scale farmers often engage with government by virtue of being members of government-supported projects, many of which take the form of 'group production projects' of some kind. Altogether 16% of respondents reporting being part of a government project within the past 12 months; four fifths of these also reported receiving one or more of the kinds of support such as extension or free inputs. As indicated above, only 15% of respondents had interacted with an extension officer in the previous 12 months; half of these are members of production projects.

In order to probe this issue a bit more, there were also questions posed in general as to farmers' perceptions of farming as individuals versus farming in groups (Table 1). While there is a sizable minority who prefer to farm as part of a group rather than on one's own, the overall trend was emphatically in the other direction. Interestingly, of the respondents who reported participating in a government project, 78% were among those who indicated that they preferred to farm on their own (not shown).

Table 1: Farmers' preferences regarding farming alone versus as part of a group[4]

	'I [would] prefer to farm on my own'	'I [would] prefer to farm as part of a group'
Strongly disagree	11%	61%
Disagree	2%	6%
Neutral	8%	7%
Agree	14%	8%
Strongly agree	65%	16%
All	100%	100%

Source: field survey

Among the laudable reasons respondents gave for appreciating projects was the notion that projects provide an opportunity for one to learn from other farmers:

[4] The rationale for asking both questions despite the apparent redundancy of the one or the other, was to check to see if the responses were internally consistent, which they are.

- "It is very helpful to work with in a group with different minds helps production to grow."

- "I like meeting as a group because in a group meeting I exposed to more ideas."

However, it is important to point out that learning from one another does not have to imply 'group *production* projects', nor is this the main reason farmers seem to join groups. Rather, farmers form groups in the belief that they will be better able to attract government support, or they are required by government to form groups (as in Fetsa Tlala, government's main cropping programme) in order to qualify for support:

- "We formed a group and asked for assistance from extension officers."

- "By forming groups it is easier to communicate with government."

- "It's only those who are members of the project that are being supported."

- "I do not get support from government concerning farming because I am not involved in any project."

- "The government seems to only tend to support those under projects. The government should supply us with seedlings and tractors."

- "The support is scarcely found by individuals so we wish the support can be given to individual farmers not only to groups or projects."

As a consequence, many farmers more or less regard government support as synonymous with support for projects:

- "Government is not supporting us at all, they must create projects because our children are unemployed. Offer us tractors because we hire tractors and pay whereas we do not have enough money. They must also construct roads because it's difficult to go to town."

- "The government should introduce projects in order for my children to be employed."

The fact that these respondents see government-sponsored projects as a solution to the unemployment problem, perhaps suggests a conceptualisation of government-supported agriculture as a kind of public works intervention rather than a personal initiative that might or might not benefit from outside support, adding some texture to the discussion in the previous subsection regarding farmers' expectations.

Even so, as the results above show, most farmers do not want to farm in groups, but then, what do they dislike about group projects? This question was not actually asked explicitly in the questionnaire or in the interview schedule for the in-depth interviews, however a number of incidental remarks were captured which shed some light on the issue:

- "We no longer continue with that project now because people are lazy."

- "We tried as community members but we failed due to the boldness of the chairperson."

- "Government is trying but the problem is our leaders, they are corrupt and as a result I get nothing from government, it's only the farmers who are supporting each other."

- "I don't like to associate myself with groups."

In short, farmers are wary of projects because of two inter-related issues, namely the free-rider problem, and 'group dynamics', a catchall phrase familiar to every extension officer and DRDAR official, meaning that groups often struggle to function because of discord among members or between members and their leaders.

From government's perspective, working with farmers in groups is pragmatic (which is not to say unproblematic) given the reality that extension staff are too thin on the ground, but also because sometimes farmers seem to form groups spontaneously.[5] Said one regional manager:

> "I think the idea was to assist as many people as possible, working with groups makes it easy, except for group dynamics might defeat the purpose… that you want. Personally I think to work with individuals might be much better, but there are groups that have organically grown, but others… [can] make life difficult. Even at a national level they'll buy farms for groups, … [but] maybe we are slowly moving away from that group mentality now, and converting into maybe small groups, even up to individuals."

Extension officers echoed the same sentiments – in effect, working with/through groups enables extension officers to reach more farmers given limited time and resources, however there are possible (or inevitable) downsides:

- "The easiest way to interact with farmers is in the form of a group because they are all there and that does not consume time."

- "The advantage of working with farmers in groups is that cooperation between the farmers is easy, you will see farmers coming to join. The challenge is that at times when we give them inputs, they bring their political or social issues and that affects the group."

[5] There is some official support for the idea of the 'project approach' as one of a larger number of 'extension approaches' discussed in the Department of Agriculture's *Norms and Standards for Extension and Advisory Services* document of 2005. However, what these projects actually consist of – in particular whether or not they are meant to be 'group production projects' – is not very clear: 'The approach of "Managing by Projects" is a powerful instrument whereby planned, targeted extension actions are introduced. All funded projects have to be registered, with clearly defined objectives, action plans, timelines, deliverables, key performance indicators and resource assignment and execution responsibilities. Within these broad approaches, provinces should develop their situation-specific implementation strategies in conformation with norms and standards. The diversity of farming practices and systems should be considered in developing appropriate implementation strategies at provincial level.' (DoA, 2005: 6)

- "The advantages of working with farmers in groups is that they can influence each other and teach one another if any of them have experience in that commodity. But the disadvantage of groups is that at times farmers do not care or show responsibility because it is for the group; people at times do not honour the other farmers, they cannot be led by this person, and then the extension officer has to take over."

The second quote is ironic in the sense that one knows from interviews with farmers that receiving support (especially inputs) is one of the main reasons they come together in groups in the first place, however the groups also sometimes struggle to manage to fairly allocate the resources they are given. The third quote – which was not unusual among the interviews – suggests a sort of motivational as well as pedagogical benefit to groups, in that farmers can be inspired by one another as well as learn from one another, which is consistent with what was learned from the farmer interviews to the effect that farmers rely principally on one another as sources of learning.

Given these misgivings, how do these projects come about? For the most part, it seems that this is how government programmes are designed, for example the cropping programme, whereby participation is more or less only possible as part of a group in which the members pool their land and interact with government as a group. Other group projects may have arisen in response to the Department of Trade and Industry's Co-operative Incentive Scheme, whereby farmers are eligible for funding provided they form a co-op of five or more people. (The fact that relatively few farmers actually received the DTI grant is beside the point – many if not most agricultural cooperative formed in the past 10 years were formed in hopes of accessing this funding, as acknowledged by the DTI's own study; see DTI, 2012.)

6 Partnerships and 'new generation projects'

According to one senior area manager, over the past few years there have been significant changes in how DRDAR undertakes its programmes, in particular who it chooses to support:

> "We were supporting *everybody*, and when we were looking at the impact of our programmes, we found that no, maybe it is the way we are doing things. From last year there has been a change in who we are supporting… people who are committed. Even with infrastructure, we are saying we must support people who are showing commitment. The infrastructure is there but it's not being utilised. Maybe because of commitment from the side of farmers…, or failure on the part of the Department in identifying farmers. Politically, here in our district, everybody here is a farmer, that's what is said. But in the Department we're trying now to identify real farmers. The grants will go to the real farmers. *And these farmers, we've got to make sure that we get them linked to the strategic partners*."

'Partnerships' are the solution to many challenges, not least the challenge of group dynamics. Partnerships are therefore, not surprisingly, a key pillar of the *Eastern Cape Agricultural Economic Transformation Strategy*. To continue the quote above of the director of East Cape Macadamia: "Our model empowers the community as business owners, who then make business decisions with their partners to ensure the long-term sustainability of the business". The extent to which the 'community' is empowered and/or genuinely contributes to business decisions can be debated; what is absolutely clear however is that there is no small-scale

farming happening, because in projects such as Ncera macadamia the farming is managed and undertaken according to large-scale commercial norms in which 'group dynamics' play no role because the group is not directly involved.[6]

Another example is the Centane Agricultural Initiative (CAI), which is funded by a private sector consortium led by investment company Wiphold. It is in effect a more successful version of government's cropping programme in which local plot holders make their land available in terms of a sharecropping arrangement.[7] What CAI and Ncera have in common with one another and with government's cropping programme, is the wish to transplant large-scale commercial farming into communal areas, sending the message that small-scale farming (commercial or otherwise) is irrelevant.[8] Said a senior manager in DRDAR, "One of the most important things we have learned is that we aren't giving enough space to the farmer, we seem to be thinking for them," but these recent, large-scale initiatives do not have any farmers to think or not think.

7 Conclusions

Based on the General Household Survey data (Stats SA, 2015; Stats SA, 2016; Stats SA, 2017), in any given year about 20 000 to 30 000 small-scale farmers in the Eastern Cape receive free inputs in one manner or another; even though this represents only about 5% of farmers, it is visible enough that farmers generally are aware that government routinely gives away free inputs, as well sometimes as tools and machinery. Interestingly, much of this money comes from national programmes such as Ilima-Letsema and the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP), suggesting that this is not a uniquely Eastern Cape story.

The effectiveness of this spending on free inputs and tools is questionable, partly because so few farmers receive it, but at least as much because of how they receive it, i.e. by means of dysfunctional groups, or functional groups that have little to do with small-scale farming.

[6] This is not to say that there are no problems. In June 2016, a number of these 'business owners' from the community sought to damage the project; as quoted in a *Dispatch Live* article under the headline 'Ncera residents go nuts destroying R100m project', one irate community member said, "There have been sales of plants and macadamia nuts since 2013 but no one knows how much we have made. We need those answers, yet when we call government to come and address this, they don't come" (Charter, 2016). According to a more recent *Dispatch Live* article, the 2017 harvest was a record high for the project, in which 'The state has invested R147-million …to date with 151 people having been employed' (Oreilly, 2017). The point however is that the nature of these 'group dynamics' are different to those that have tended to afflict traditional group-based production projects, for the simple reason that 'the group' is not involved directly in production except as labourers.

[7] According to Wiphold's head of transformation and corporate affairs: 'With white maize being the primary crop produced by the CAI, it was agreed by all that the community members who actually allocated their croplands to the initiative should, out of fairness, be paid a land-use fee for this land. This ranges from five to ten 40kg bags of maize, depending on the size of the final harvest. Once the land-use fees and working capital loans have been repaid, and part of the income from the harvest has been retained for reinvestment the next season, any remaining profits will be shared out equally among the residents of each community.' (Phillips, 2015)

[8] The clear exception to this pattern is the development programme run by Grain SA, which does work with farmers in groups, but in such a manner that they farm as individuals on their own land. Perhaps not coincidentally, the programme receives little government support apart from the Jobs Fund.

What this spending does seem to achieve, however, is to raise expectations,[9] and encourage more small-scale farmers to join groups, many or most of which will prove futile in attracting support and which will problematic otherwise. The pattern has been in place long enough that it seems to have created a culture not of dependency, but of entitlement.

If the manner in which government interacts with farmers engenders a counter-productive sense of entitlement among farmers, even in government officials' own estimation, what is government doing about it? At operational level, there are some indications that DRDAR has tried to adapt. For instance, in contrast to most other provinces, farmers in the Eastern Cape wishing to benefit from the national cropping programme are required to make a non-trivial own-contribution towards the input costs – somewhat reminiscent of support programmes under Sebe.

However, other government programmes do not have a cost-sharing requirement, or even require a commensurate contribution in the form of 'sweat-equity', and our interviews with farmers generally reveal that burden-sharing is not what farmers expect. And yet another positive sign are the discussions happening at national level about the need to shift from 100% grants, to loans and/or partial subsidies. The challenge that will eventually have to be faced, however, is to withdraw free material support for long enough to allow farmers' 'mind-sets' to readjust, notwithstanding the temporary political cost of doing so. Hopefully, in due course this will allow extension officers to return to their core function, which is to assist farmers to solve their own problems and realise their potential.

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[9] One might speculate that the primary function of the MEC for agriculture is to preside over events at which freebies are dished out to chiefs, farmers, projects, and 'communities'.

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