

A photograph of three men plowing a field with oxen in a rural setting. The men are wearing casual clothing, and the oxen are harnessed together, pulling a wooden plow. The background shows a simple building and some trees.

**‘Government and Small-scale  
Agriculture: Understanding the  
Successes and Failures in Respect  
of Learning, Planning and  
Implementation’**

**ARDRI, University of Fort Hare**

**ECSECC Public Dialogue**

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# Introduction

- Despite its huge potential and money spent, small-scale farming sector seems static: Why? Plenty of reasons; one possible factor is that it's how gov't and farmers interact
- In rural/agric development practice, there is a long-standing debate about 'blueprint'/'top-down' versus 'process'/'bottom-up' approaches
- Perception in SA at present –
  - attempts to promote small-scale farming sector are too far towards the 'blueprint' end of the spectrum
  - Encourages 'dependency syndrome', ie lack of 'Agency'
- Is this true?

*'It must be noted that, government agriculture support was characterised by shift of support from white farmers (pre-1994) to black (post - 1994) farmers. Land reform was perceived to be a higher priority than agricultural production. 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)*

# Conundrum?

- Farmers are keen to press their demands for more and better support
- When government responds, it would appear to feed the problem, ie foster more 'dependency', which all would agree is not working
- Thus farmers become more dissatisfied
- Farmers' associations are central players in this process as the 'mouthpieces' of farmers

# Research questions

1. How do farmers *and* government *LEARN, PLAN, IMPLEMENT, and COMMUNICATE?*
2. What is the role of farmers' associations in improving 'LPIC capacities', and in conditioning the relationship between farmers and government?
3. Are government, and farmers' associations, 'learning organisations'?

# Approach

- Focused on 4 local municipalities in Eastern Cape – Amahlathi, Nkonkobe, Mbhashe and KSD
- Conducted a baseline survey to get a general profile of the small-scale farming sector, and current efforts to support it (n = 660)
- Conducted interviews with farmers, farmers' associations, extension officers, and other officials in government in order to ascertain current practices inre LPIC
- All the while, partnered with some farmers' associations in various activities, observed interactions

# Farmers

## General:

- Farmers see agriculture as both enjoyable and vital to their survival, even though only a minority (22%) rely on agric as a *main* source of income
- Only 9% are 'youth' (35 yrs or younger) versus 45% who are 61 yrs or older

# Support from government:

- Those small-scale farmers who receive support from government are grateful for it, but relatively few do
  - Only 15% received extension support in previous 12 months; of these, most received 1 to 3 visits
- About 18% are involved in some kind of government ‘project’, and two-thirds of these are ‘satisfied’ with it
- About half of those who do receive extension support are members of ‘projects’ – being a member of project increases your chances of getting extension support
- Government support seems to be concentrated in a relatively small number of farmers; exception = dipping?



## ...Support from government:

- Note that secondary data (Stats SA's General Household Survey) suggests that share of farmers in Eastern Cape receiving extension is lower: 5% overall, 15%-20% for commercially-oriented smallholders
- But according to the same data, EC is 'performing' far better than the country at large
- Even so, numbers don't 'add up' vis-à-vis the perceptions and claims of government

# The phenomenon of 'group projects':

- Supporting agriculture via 'group projects' is the norm for government *and* civil society, but generally not what farmers want

'I prefer to farm on my own'	
Strongly disagree	11%
Disagree	2%
Neutral	8%
Agree	14%
Strongly agree	65%
All	100%

'I prefer to farm as part of a group'	
Strongly disagree	61%
Disagree	6%
Neutral	7%
Agree	8%
Strongly agree	16%
All	100%

- So why do farmers join group projects?
  - “Group projects are advantageous due to funding.”
  - “Individual farming is better, except that it is hard to get funded.”

# Learning:

- Farmers mainly learn from family members and from one another, but not structured, and certainly not enough.

‘Where do you acquire information about farming, marketing, processing or new technologies?’

From other farmers?	47%
From extension officers?	23%
From government projects?	12%
From farmers' associations?	9%
Other	20%

## ...Learning:

‘From whom do you feel you learn the most?’

Family	34%
Other farmers	32%
Extension officers	9%
Umtiza	5%
Self	3%
School	2%
Chemist	2%
Other	13%

# Communicating:

	Percent who said 'True'
'It is easy to get in contact with other farmers if I need to'	66%
'It is easy to get in contact with a local farmers' association if I need to'	17%
'It is easy to get in contact with an extension officer if I need to'	19%
'It is easy to get in contact with an animal health technician if I need to'	19%
'When I speak with an extension officer, it is easy to understand what they are telling me'*	63%
'When I speak with an animal health technician, it is easy to understand what they are telling me'*	59%
'I have a good understanding of government's agricultural programmes'	28%

\* Only for those who speak with Ext Officers or AHTs

# Participation in farmers' associations:

- 'Do you belong to any farmers' organisations, such as a local farmers' association, or a commodity group, whether formal or informal?'
  - About 11% said 'yes'
  - Of these, about half are commodity organisations, half are associations
- Level of satisfaction with associations / organisations varies

## **Tentative conclusions:**

- Farmers have little awareness of agricultural policies and programmes, even less involvement in the development or evaluation of these policies and programmes
- Most black farmers in the former homelands of the Eastern Cape are 'on their own'

# Farmers associations

## General:

- Farmers' associations feel they have a vital role as representatives of farmers, as well as assisting farmers to access services
- But FAs are badly under-resourced, struggle with basics such as transport, telephone, etc.
  - Most are funded out of their leaders' own resources; farmers are too poor to pay, but possibly also a vicious cycle?
  - Regardless of scale (e.g. village / town / LM / DM)
  - Some are formalised, many are not



# Relationship to farmers:

- Difficult for FAs to quantify their members
- Communication is a big challenge, which is why many farmers are unaware of their presence
- Have to be creative and resourceful in order to figure out how to serve their constituencies
- Are keenly aware that they are representing marginalised farmers, but somewhat split on who their core clientele is – ‘emerging farmers’ or everybody?
- Two main modalities
  - try to mobilise third parties to provide services to farmers
  - Lobby, protest, etc.

## Relationship to government:

- Relations are sometimes good, but often fraught
  - “We are leading a struggle”
  - “We are fighting for farmers’ rights”
- Made worse by semi-dependency on government to carry out minor function, eg transport, photocopying
- Are concerned about ‘dependency syndrome’, but not clear what to do

## ...Relationship to government:

- Feel they are not recognised by government – they are consulted, but views not really taken into account
  - “They don’t hear what you’re saying, they are arrogant”
- Surprisingly common theme – ‘divide and rule’
  - “They say you should get yourself organised, but when you do, they make it a point that they are dividing you. They will try to bribe some of the people with inputs, that is what we experience”

## **Learning:**

- Ad hoc, opportunistic
- Constrained by lack of resources
- Importance of engagements between associations, eg Amathole District Farmers' Association meeting with its constituent LM associations

## **Tentative conclusion:**

- FAs do play an important role, but are operating well below their potential

# Government (DRDAR)

## General:

- Extremely well organised, very good systems (eg reporting, policy development), high (increasing?) level of professionalism
- High level of stability and institutional memory
- Complex but functional organogram
- Reasonably well resourced, eg at extension officer level
- Committed and energetic senior management
- But some staff perceive management style as top-down, also unhappiness that some key posts filled by 'political appointments'

# Learning:

- On paper, innovation regarded as a core value, and some evidence of commitment to it
- But difficult to find good examples
- Huge emphasis on performance/compliance monitoring, little real evaluation
  - Are the two necessary in conflict? No, but common problem in government is to use the same units to do both
- Personal experiences – not encouraging

## Communicating:

- Uses multiple channels, eg meetings with farmers, extension officers, agricultural shows, demonstrations, and radio (sometimes)
- But perhaps hampered by not having a clear idea who and how large their clientele is?  
(Note *ambivalence* as to clientele)
- Big problem is that want to believe can rely on associations as conduits of communication, but associations cannot perform this function at present, resources completely lopsided

# The phenomenon of 'group projects':

- Government thinks largely in terms of group projects; farmers are members of these
- Rationale – to reach more people with given resources
- Awareness of the downsides, but what to do?
- Key idea at moment – bring in more strategic partners



# Tentative conclusions:

- Much to praise, but some unresolved issues
- Key concerns:
  - Projectitis
  - Communications and engagement strategies
  - Primacy given to compliance monitoring, the true integrity of which is hard to gauge
  - Unclear as to main role (still)

# Conclusions

- There appears to be a significant gulf between farmers and government, and farmers associations do not appear to be able to bridge this gulf
- On the one hand, evidence of 'dependency syndrome'; on the other, many (most?) farmers have nothing/nobody to depend on
- Contentious relations between FAs and government not helping, but probably better than no relations at all
- Argument for finding a way to strengthen Fas.

# Acknowledgements



**PSPPD**

PROGRAMME TO  
SUPPORT PRO-POOR  
POLICY DEVELOPMENT



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**THANK YOU!**