

# FACTORS INFLUENCING PERFORMANCE ON EXTENSION SERVICES WITHIN THE LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT

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## ABSTRACT

Extension services as a core function of the department of Agriculture in the Free State Province was assessed. Aspects that could either have positive or detrimental impact on delivery of extension services to the farmers were looked into. Amongst others, current available extension officers (EOS) within the stated district, their qualifications, number of farmers per extension officer in a ward, available resources required per ward office and the services provided to the land reform farmers were considered in this study. Moreover, progress on extension recovery plan and the effects it brought to the farmers was reviewed and the ward resource model was developed for the Lejweleputswa district which could be piloted to other districts.

**Keywords:** Extension services, Extension Officers and performance

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Extension section within the department of agriculture in the Lejweleputswa district has twenty two officials of whom two are the managers. It is supported by the specialised support services which comprises of the following units; non formal training, research, project management, soil conservation, veterinary services, food security, economic sections and the engineering unit with the engineering technicians stationed at the district and the engineers at Glen. However, it may be overshadowed by the specialised support service, particularly if there are no standard and clear extension programs drawn for identified farms together with all the relevant support services.

Available skills and tools enabling the extension officers for appropriate and proper service delivery in the district were investigated. The Free State Department of Agriculture (FSDoA) have nine strategic programs that are reflected in the Annual Performance Plan of the financial year 2009/2010. Those that are more extension related and are within program three which is farmer support, were selected in this research namely; conducting land reform campaigns to the interest groups, linking emerging farmers with commercial farmers, support Land Redistribution in Agriculture and Development (LRAD) beneficiaries with advise, support LRAD farmers through mentorship program, formation of commodity groups, study groups and cooperatives, facilitate and provide training to the beneficiaries, provide advices to both the commercial and emerging farmers, ensure contacts where research related information is shared, facilitate and ensure the holding of information and farmers days.

“The aim of department is to support allocation of farms through land reform processes; furthermore, it looks into implementing various projects and activities to benefit farmers and to promote access to services. Though there is a need to ensure that farmers are organised and that legal business entities are established to serve as conduits to access services (Free State DoA Strategic Plan, 2010-2015). This research commenced in the year 2005, when factors restricting extension service delivery were identified as follows; (1) Overstocked commonage land, it was by then identified that the current commonages were overstocked within the district and it was impossible for EOS to manage veld conditions on commonage lands. (2) Too many farmers for one extension officer to service, (3) Unclear measures from the strategic plan in this regard extension officers stated the criteria of linking emerging farmers with commercial farmers was not standardised and many other measures from the strategic plan. (4) No training material for extension officers (5) Lack of Information Technology equipment and agricultural journals (6) Extension officers are doing more facilitation work than providing extension services to the

farmers and it was further explained that according to the structure EOS have to invite Non Formal training officials to come and train the farmers on the subjects that they specialised in.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hadebe, Globbelaar, Lephoro, Mohale, and Mavhunga, November (2003:15) reflected that extension officers are jack of all trades and they have much administration responsibilities, from cleaners to receptionists, from human resource administration to social workers, from events coordinators to secretaries.

Twenty extension officers are employed for eighteen towns within Lejweleputswa district and they are in various fields of studies. They are strategically tasked to report to their supervisors on monthly basis and with the expectation to provide the best extension services to the farmers.

Agricultural extension is a service or system which through educational procedures, assists rural people in improving their productive efficiency and income by bettering their levels of living, lifting social, educational and environmental standards of rural life (Seobi, 1990:47). However, it will require South Africans to be intellectually and technically skilled and to have superior communication, leadership and social abilities to provide the best extension services (Morwala, T2006: 22). "The main areas of knowledge that are important for the extension officers and which forms the basis of extension training are; technical skills, they must be adequately trained in the technical aspects of their work and have a good working knowledge of the main elements of the agricultural system in their area of work (Seobi;1990:60). Furthermore he indicates that rural life which includes anthropological and social studies of the rural area where extension officer is working must be known, as well as the local traditions, practices, culture and values; policy, the agent must be familiar with the government policy which affect rural areas, development programmes, credit programmes, bureaucratic and administrative procedures and adult education. Although a strong technical support system is essential to help extension officers to provide a service to their target groups. As well as to bring challenges and establish viable farming communities (du Toit, 1999:256-262). Realizing that they can not afford the expensive extension services yet they were dissatisfied by the services offered by the government, the Italians did what their ancestors did 400 years ago, they took extension into their own hands by setting up interest groups, forming associations and they bypass the motionless authorities or the old associations and the model which was established was supported by most of the commercial farmers and it was managed by three major farmer associations (Jordan, Nell & Zecca, 2004:46).

Many factors are motivating the formation of farmer groups, including an efficient means for community and transmitting information, sharing information (e.g. study groups, focus groups, identifying and evaluation of group techniques, improving on farm and off farm income (Stevens & Terblanché, 2004:40-49). Louw, 2005: 29) stated that most farming enterprises comprise of several sections which may be operated as separate business units, although they may be viewed separately in valuation process, they become one, ultimately comprising of the value of a farm as single unit and it is useless to separate the business components from the land. Performance of the farm is determined by the way the farm is managed and the ten most important factors that affect the success of a farm are, slackness or lack of discipline, timorousness', time management, standard of living, greed, keeping records, lack of judgement, adaptability and stagnation (Theunissen, 2005: 30-31).

Van Rooyen & Van Zyl (1996:59) stated that the mission of the extension workers should focus on the information communication to inform and assist farmers with decision making on technology choice and farm management, sub-invention processes provide an important opportunity for extension workers to participate in farm systems research although this aspect should not be viewed as the main function of extension with the impact viewed as negligible on aspects such as technology invention, general science and public choice dimensions.

Extension workers should primarily view their responsibility in human capital formation process as brokers of knowledge and information and to provide a vital facilitating link between farmers and the research training system. Last, C. (2001:13) argued that development did not start with physical goods but with people and their education, organisation and discipline.

The longevity and sustainability of an agricultural development projects can be based on factors such as; project initiated by the community, careful selection of beneficiaries, availability of high potential human resource, the availability of high potential natural resources, the high degree of self sufficiency in terms of finances and technical capabilities, easy access to extension services and markets (Potgieter, Potgieter & du Toit, 1996:85).

**4. MATERIALS, METHODS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**4.1 Sample Area**

The research was conducted on twenty extension officers within the Lejweleputswa District in the Free State province. The district comprises of five local municipalities namely; Tswelopele, Masilonyana, Tokologo, Nala and Matjhabeng. The extension ward offices are in the following towns; Welkom, Windburg, Brandfort, Hertzogville, Boshof, Hoopstad, Builtfontein, Ventersburg, Odendaalsrus and Bothaville.

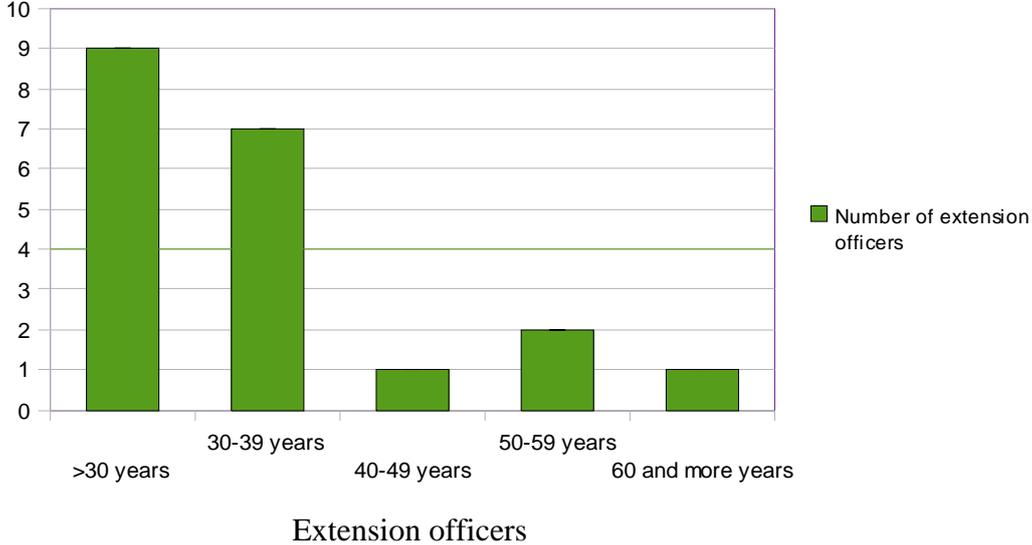
**4.2 Data Collection**

The questionnaire was developed to collect data from the extension officers during the year 2005. Due to the changes in extension section some of the data collected become outdated because of new developments made in extension. However for updating the collected data on yearly basis observations, surveys, meetings, workshops, reports, annual performance and strategic planning documents were used as secondary data.

**5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**5.1 Age of Extension Officers**

Forty five percent of the twenty extension officers are within less than thirty years of age and that could both ease or restrict performance or service delivery. The reason being, it is postulated that they are of the idea that they almost know everything about extension services since they are newly appointed from the tertiary institutions. Whereas they lack practical experience. However their perception could create conflicts between extension officers of other age groups. Five percent (5%) of extension officers within 40-49 years of age are flexible in adopting any other latest technology since they can adapt to both the young (less than thirty years), old age(50-59 years and 60 and more years) groups. In the age group of 40-49 years the EOS provide the best performance in the delivery of extension services. Although (10%) of EOS between 50-59 years of age are not easy to accept the latest technology. Particularly if they have stopped studying in the past fifteen and above years. There is quite a lot of experience that can be reaped from them and it is not easy for them to reap from the young generation. Age distribution of extension officials is illustrated in figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: Age distribution of Extension officers.**

It is also reflected in the figure above that one of the extension officer is above the age of sixty. Experience taught us that in every age group EOS are important to each other in exchanging whatever may improve the extension services. The old age group need to team up with the young age group in sharing experiences and latest technology. The average age of extension officers is thirty four point eight years.

## 5.2 Years of Experience For Extension Officers

The more the age of the extension officer the more the experience collected. However, that does not proof high extension performance and some of the reasons are already mentioned in 5.1 above. Twenty five percent (25%) of EOS have above 16 years of experience whereas sixty five percent (65%) are still inexperienced and that can affect performance since majority have less experience.

It is therefore, postulated that providing extension services to commercial farmers may be difficult for inexperienced EOS. Ten percent (10%) of the EOS have sufficient experience as illustrated in figure 2 below.

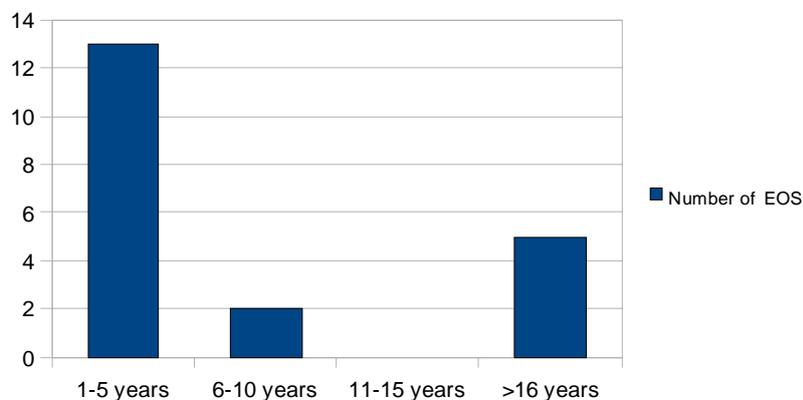


Figure 2: Experience of EOS in years.

Generally, we can assume that thirty five percent of EOS has got enough experience to service the farmers. Seven point four is the average years of experience for extension officers.

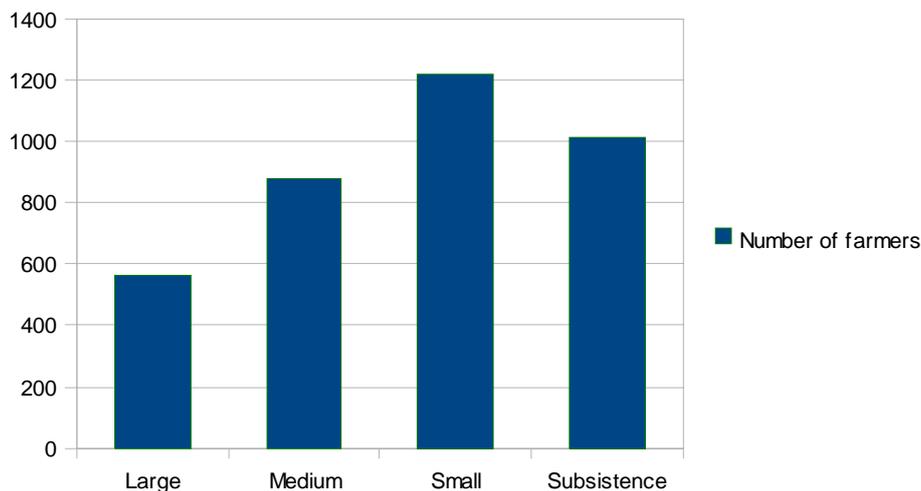
## 5.3 Qualifications

Thirty percent (30%) of the EOS have certificates or Diplomas, sixty five percent have the four year degrees (B.Tech. degree and B.Sc. degree) and only one extension officer recently completed Masters Degree. In the past three years, three EOS (one with B.Sc. Hon. and two with MSc degrees) left the district for higher positions. To mention but few this are some of the factors that restrict service delivery because we had to loose experience and recruit or employ new graduates almost on yearly basis.

## 5.4 Number of Farmers Per Extension Officer and Categories of Farmers

The Lejweleputswa District have 3683 farmers in total and of the total fifteen percent (15.3%) are large scale farmers, (23.8%) are medium scale farmers, (33.17%) are small scale farmers and (27.5%) are subsistence farmers. In average an extension officer service about 184 farmers with an average of twenty six farming units. When an average of seven beneficiaries per farming unit is used as a dividend.

It is impossible for an extension officer to service twenty six farming units particularly if a detailed extension program is used as an approach. Since the extension program is the best tool for servicing emerging farmers as compared to other extension approaches which are more group based. Categories of the farmers per district are illustrated in the figure 3.



**Figure 3: Number of farmers per category.**

## 5.5 Leadership and Supervision

Twenty extension officers are directly reporting to the Assistant Director (Extension and Development) whereas only one official report directly to the Deputy Director (Extension and development) and that restrict service delivery since no manager can effectively manage more than eight officials as subordinates.

## 5.6 Location and Availability of Extension Offices

Most (55%) of the extension officers are allocated offices to operate from. Whereas (45%) are operating from the offices of other EOS not in their area of operation within the district. That is very costly for the farmers since they have to travel long distances to acquire services. Again 90% of the offices are within different towns in the district and they are too far for the intended clients. In most cases, sharing of offices create conflicts amongst the EOS thus restrict service delivery to the farmers.

## 5.7 Available Resources

### 5.7.1 Transport for Extension Officers

Extension officers are allowed to travel 1750 km per month which restrict service delivery because the distance between different extension offices and their area of operation differs. In some instances, transport policies restrict service delivery to the farmers. The reason being, if an extension officer is involved in an accident with a government vehicle, he or she is suspended till investigations have been completed around the accident sometimes it takes up to four months and more. It is therefore recommended that the transport policy be revised.

### 5.7.2 Information Technology and Computer Equipments

Twenty of the extension officers are in possession of lap top computers only forty five percent of them are connected to Intranet and fifteen percent are connected to internet. Some of the extension officers' computers have been installed with 3GS modems. Whereas most of the extension officers are still without internet and they are struggling to access the extension e-suite program which assist them to acquire required information for the farmers. It is recommended that the second IT technician be appointed for the district and the current one be appropriately capacitated.

## 6. A MODEL FOR WARD OFFICE RESOURCES

Model 6.1 below illustrates the Resources needed for a ward extension office when developed for the district for the new appointees or extension officers. Meaning that the district management need to equip ward offices with all the resources as illustrated in the Model 1 below.

**Model 1: Resources needed for a Ward extension office.**

(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)
<p>RESOURCES NEEDED FOR :</p> <p>A NEW EXTENSION OFFICE</p>	1. WARD profile	<p>1.Database of farmers:</p> <p>2.Map of the Ward and local municipality of the Ward</p> <p>3. Calendar of events for the current year</p>	<p>Which includes; Age and gender of farmers, disabilities, land size (Arable, grazing, pastures), farming systems, soil types, history of livestock farming, crops history, List of study groups and commodity groups.</p>
	2. Strategic plans, Annual plans and extension programs	Previous years strategic plans, extension programmes and annual plans must be provided to the extension officer	
	3. IT equipment	Lap top with wireless connection Digital camera or a cell phone with a digital camera, office telephone line	
	4. Office Accommodation	Office equipment, tables , chairs, and office administration tools	
	5.Transport	An extension officer must be provided with an appropriate vehicle to travel around the farms	
	6. Human resources	Animal health technician, soil conservationist, Researcher, economist, a cleaner as well as an administration clerk need to be employed for a WARD office	

It is believed that if all the resources reflected in column B and C can be provided to the extension officers in a ward, extension service delivery will improve.

**7. LAND REFORM SUPPORT BY EOS**

**7.1 Commonage Land and its Restrictions to Extension Service Delivery Prior 2005**

Most of the commonage veldts within the district are overgrazed since there are no laws to regulate the number of animals to be stocked in an area. These were consequences of commonage land allocation to the farmers without determining the carrying capacity of the commonage area and the number of animals possessed by the new commonage entrants. This makes it impossible for the extension officers to manage veld condition on the commonage land. Municipality together with the extension services need to plan the rotational grazing with the DoA prior land allocation to the farmers and the animals of the occupants need to be assessed. The carrying capacity of the commonage land has to be attached to the commonage agreement entered into by the farmers. Any farmer who will exceed the carrying capacity as stipulated on the commonage contract have to be penalised. Then this will hopefully ease the work of the extension officer of ensuring that commonage land is not deteriorating.

**7.2 Commonage Policies and By-laws**

The Department of agriculture together with the local municipalities developed commonage policies which assist in managing commonage land. Although municipalities still have to develop by-laws which will assist in ensuring that the resources within the commonage land are

well managed and that will improve the delivery of extension services within the district. Conflicts amongst the commonage groups will also be reduced when by-laws are in place.

## **8. LAND REDISTRIBUTION IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT (LRAD)**

LRAD farms need to be supported with necessary production inputs to improve extension services delivery. Otherwise the farms will be out of production and the farmers will always beg for financial assistance from the EOS. Since they cannot differentiate between the extension section and supporting section such as project management. Extension can only bear fruits if farmers commit themselves to purchasing production inputs.

## **9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Each of the twenty extension officers need to be provided with a Ward office well equipped with all resources as reflected in the extension resource model. Strategic plan of the FSDoA need to have detailed extension program guide that will assist the extension officers in improving their service delivery to the farmers. The district extension structure need to be modified, Deputy Director (extension and development) must directly manage more than one official. Whereas the workload of the Assistant Director (extension and development) can be reduced to at least managing eight extension officers not twenty any more. Every local municipality within the district need to have an Assistant Director (extension and development). Information exchange between the experienced and inexperienced extension officers is recommended within the district whereby the experienced EOS will learn latest technology from the inexperienced EOS and the experienced EOS will transfer their practical knowledge to the inexperienced EOS. It is also postulated that at least an Extension officer with a Masters or PhD degree in extension can be appointed to manage the ward office. Extension ward offices need to be moved next to the farming communities. Required resources be allocated per ward office and every extension officer has to be entitled to all the necessary resources since it is a must for improved services. Inexperienced EOS need to be mentored and the extension recovery plan be implemented and completed as soon as possible. A mentorship program guiding documents were developed for the province and it is postulated that the guiding documents be drawn for monitoring and evaluation of the extension performance.

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