



“South Africa in Context: The Link between Agricultural Extension & Household Food Security – Part 2”

Ubuntu AgriRenaissance

23/12/2020

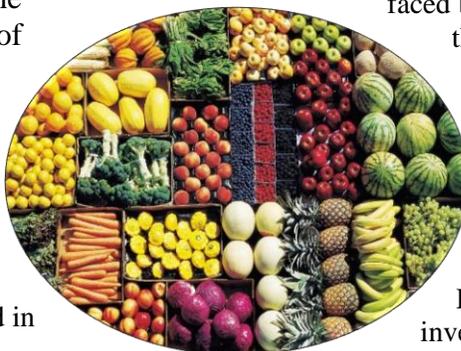
Agricultural extension is one of the most effective models that is used across the world to improve farming at both subsistence and commercial scales. By definition, agricultural extension (also known as agricultural advisory services) is the dissemination of information of agronomic skills and techniques in order to improve productivity, food security and livelihoods. The person who renders the extension/advisory service is called an agricultural extension officer/extensionist or an agricultural agent. Such a person is responsible for the development and distribution of educational programs that are aimed at assisting people in socio-economic and community development, leadership, and agriculture.

In South Africa, agricultural extension is widely practiced in rural communities where most households are actively involved in smallholder agriculture.

The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (G-FRAS)¹ indicates that South Africa had 2092 Agricultural extensionists in 2008 and were responsible to serve a population of nearly 50 million people. At the time, the Northern Cape province comprised of more than 10 000 white commercial farmers and over half a million African smallholders whose resilience stemmed from subsistence agriculture. During this period, the province only had 23 extensionists who were responsible for handling the challenges of subsistence farming and the emerging commercialization of farms. This was, and still remains practically impossible.

¹ <https://www.g-fras.org/en/world-wide-extension-study/africa/southern-africa/south-africa.html#extension-providers>

Borrowing from my own experience as a community development researcher and having interacted with rural farmers from different communities in the northern region of KwaZulu-Natal, it does not come as a shock when smallholder farmers indicate that they have never had any interaction with extension personnel nor do they know of their existence. When I probe further about the former, I would often be told that extensionists only work with organized groups (such as cooperatives), or that they lack resources that would enable them to reach everyone (e.g. transport). This inaccessibility to extension services is one of the greatest challenges that is faced by smallholder farmers in most parts of the country.



To win the battle against food insecurity that is experienced by more than 6.5 million people in SA (approx. 11% of the population), there is a need for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) to consider investing in knowledge development and the recruitment of extensionists. This is especially important at a time where the global state of the economy (of which SA is not exempt) seems to be at a constant decline. Failure to address this immediately, not only are the poor likely to be left vulnerable and in what Chambers describes as a deprivation trap², but the corollary may also lead to the country being unconducive for people to thrive; with increased crime rates resulting from poverty and murders due to an inability to secure a living for loved ones.

By Qinisi Qwabe

Recommended read: <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/sajae/v47n1/02.pdf>
For more info, contact: agrirenaissance@outlook.com

² Chambers, R. (1983). Rural Development: Putting the Last First. London: Longman.