S. Afr. J. Agric. Ext. Zantsi & Nengovhela
Vol. 50 No. 1, 2022: 163-177
10.17159/2413-3221/2022/v50n1a11283 (License: CC BY 4.0)

A review of the land reform beneficiary training in South Africa: The role of agricultural extension

Zantsi, S.[1] and Nengovhela, R.[2]

Corresponding author: S. Zantsi. Email: siphezantsi@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Lack of competent commercial farming skills in emerging farmers is identified as one of the reasons for poor productivity on redistributed commercial farms. To address this shortcoming, the government and non-governmental organisations spend significant amounts of money providing a range of beneficiary training. However, very few objective studies exist that report how these pieces of training occur and how they are performed. This research aims to provide an initial basic understanding of the requirements and loopholes in the land reform beneficiary trainings, paving the way for future studies. The objective was to identify and discuss the role of agricultural extension in administering these beneficiary trainings. These objectives were achieved by critically reviewing the relevant literature, policy documents, and some relevant official statistics. In our synthesis of the literature, we identified key attributes for a competent commercial farmer which are: the need to know how to adopt, regularly, new technology, new production processes, and new marketing arrangements, while continuing to take a calculated risk and have sound business and financial management skills. We then assessed these attributes to all small-scale farmers and land reform beneficiaries and found little theoretical evidence of such. However, some of the beneficiary trainings converge with the key commercial farmer competencies but others were missing. There were significant discrepancies in the beneficiary training expenditure and few details of the service providers and skills supplied.

Keywords: Commercial farming skill; Emerging farmer; Land redistribution

[1] Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Centre for Sociological Research and Practice, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg, siphezantsi@yahoo.com, Orcid 0000-0001-9787-3913

[2] Department of Agricultural Economics and Environmental Sciences, University of Limpopo

1. INTRODUCTION

Land reform is a highly contested policy issue in South Africa. It has the power to unite the country through peace, economic stability, and the creation of inclusive and vibrant rural areas (Mufune, 2010; NPC, 2011; Greenberg, 2015; Conradie, 2019). However, it can also completely shut down the economy of the country as it did in Zimbabwe (Cliffe, Alexander, Cousins & Gaidzanwa, 2014). It is therefore not surprising that researchers and the National Planning Committee (NPC) have argued for years that the South African land reform policy implementation needs to be improved as that could lead to a politically stable country and vibrant rural communities (e.g. NPC, 2011; Kepe & Tessaro, 2014; Vink & Kirsten, 2019).

The South African land reform policy has three pillars with different objectives (Department of Land Affairs, 1997). The land tenure pillar seeks to strengthen the rights of farm workers and residents in the former homelands. The land restitution pillar seeks to restore the land to those individuals and families who were previously forcefully removed from their land. The land redistribution pillar aims at deracialising land ownership and creating a harmonised agricultural sector. Although all three pillars have important objectives, the land redistribution pillar carries the most weight because large areas of agricultural land have been and continue to be redistributed (Kirsten, Machethe, Ndlovu & Lubambo, 2016).

In addition, land redistribution should be done with great care to avoid jeopardising the country's food security (NPC, 2011). To date, analysts have come to the same judgementthat land redistribution has been very slow and accompanied by poor productivity on the redistributed land (Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture, 2019; Mtero, Gumede, & Ramantsima, 2019). For land reform to work, numerous important requirements have been suggested (Groenewald, 2004; Vink & Kirsten, 2019). One is selecting suitable beneficiaries and giving them the necessary post-settlement support. Another is a decentralised one-stop-shop support provided by the government and the private sector along with training for beneficiaries.

Regarding these trainings, Chapter six of the National Development Plan states that to make land reform work, there is a need to 'ensure sustainable production on transferred land by making sure that human capabilities precede land transfer through incubators, learnerships, apprenticeships, mentoring and accelerated training in agricultural sciences' (NPC, 2011:206).

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Moreover, following the recommendations of the Strauss Commission (YEAR) to provide comprehensive support for small-scale agriculture, the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP) was designed in 2003 and launched in 2004 in KwaZulu-Natal by the former and current minister of agriculture, Thoko Didiza (Department of Agriculture, 2004). Among the six pillars of CASP are the training and capacity-building pillars.

Training is defined as the process of obtaining or imparting knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required to execute a specific task (Milhem, Abushamsieh & Aróstegui, 2014). Training usually result in skills as outcomes (Magidi & Mahiya, 2020). In the context of land reform beneficiaries, the training outcomes are competent commercial farming skills. Although CASP caters to different categories of small-scale farmers, its main mandate is to support land reform beneficiaries. To date, the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) and non-governmental organisations, such as the Lima Rural Development Foundation, have been providing training to smallholder farmers and land reform beneficiaries. Lima extension service and training to smallholders were estimated to have added R3 326 per adult equivalent to crop revenue in one financial year. It is further reported that analysis of the financial cost and benefit of the outsourced extension service at the district level at Lima was R5 million, annual net incremental benefit with a 95% probability of returns exceeding 20% (Lyne, Jonas & Ortmann, 2018). However, on the DRDLR side, there is little systematic information about the execution of such trainings, and the extent to which they have been successful. Yet, such information could help us understand what has worked and what has not, to build from it and design effective training to equip beneficiaries.

Also, there is considerable evidence that potential emerging farmers need to be trained (see, for example, Khapayi & Celliers, 2016; Conradie, 2019). Therefore, the objective of this research note was to describe this information gap through a critical review approach to enhance our understanding of this problem. A further objective was to discuss the implications of this gap for agricultural extension. These objectives were achieved by reviewing policy documents, the relevant literature, and some statistics on the trained beneficiaries. In section 2, we describe the methodological approach. In section 3, we first examine why land reform beneficiaries need training, and then identify what kind of training is required and how it has been provided. We end this section by discussing some lessons from the ongoing trainings and identifying areas for future research. In the last section, we discuss the implications for agricultural extension.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

We conducted a literature review to achieve our objective of providing basic information on the execution and success of agricultural skills training in the South African land reform context. Literature reviews have emerged as an important methodology in the academic research community (see for example; Okoli, 2015; Fielke Taylor, and Jakku, 2020; Zantsi, Mulanda & Hlakanyane, 2021). There are numerous designs and methods of conducting a literature review study, and examples include systematic, semi-systematic, and integrative literature reviews (see Snyder, 2019). In this study, we adopted the integrative literature review method, which combines different approaches and is suitable for studies such as the present study that seeks to do a critical assessment and point to new research areas (Torraco, 2005).

We based our argument on scientific literature searched from the largest scientific databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar), from which we retrieved articles relevant to our study (Blakeman, 2013; Zhang, Xu, Zhang, Wang, He, & Zhou, 2020). Relevant articles included those that focus on beneficiary training, competent commercial farming skills, all small-scale farmers, and land reform in South Africa from 1994 until today. In reviewing these articles, we also browsed through their bibliography in a snowball approach as used in Fielke et al. (2020). Furthermore, we reviewed relevant land redistribution policy documents and some statistics from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the DRDLR.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The need for training among land reform beneficiaries

There is significant evidence that documents how commercial farming skills among black farmers have been lost over time (see, Dlamini, Verschoor & Fraser, 2013; Schirmer, 2015). This loss is largely attributed to discriminative and punitive policies that sought to discourage black farmers and thereby avoid competition for white farmers. This process has driven many black farmers into becoming subsistence farmers and selling their labour to meet their survival needs (Bundy, 1979; Vink & van Zyl, 1998).

The lack of farming skills in land reform beneficiaries is regarded as one of the reasons for the failure of redistributed farms (Manenzhe, Zwane & van Niekerk, 2016), and beneficiaries themselves have acknowledged their lack of commercial farming skills (Maka & Aliber, 2019). Even the group of commercially oriented smallholders, who are regarded as prime beneficiaries

for agricultural land redistribution by the DRDLR (2013), have been found to lack basic farming skills in some parts of the country, example includes the Eastern Cape (Khapayi & Celliers, 2016). Simulations and forecasts for reformed agriculture have also suggested a decline in productivity and economic growth because of a lack of skills in land reform beneficiaries, among other factors (Mkhabela, Ntombela & Mazibuko, 2018).

So, what exactly is commercial farming, and the skill set needed to become a commercial farmer? Schirmer (2015:51) defines commercial farming and its drivers and enablers. He argues that commercial farming is based on modern forms of accumulation, which are linked to the view that modern development is primarily driven by an ongoing process in which capital[1] is continually used to make a profit, which is then turned into more capital. Thus, the intensity of the capital expansion and the associated technology-adopting processes can drive and enable success in commercial farming (Schirmer, 2015).

Another essential component of commercial farming that is linked to the previous point and has been proven over time is the willingness and capacity to deal with the risk of investment and to expand production (Schirmer, 2005:83). Schirmer (2015) argues that moving from one farming mode (in this case from a commercially oriented smallholding) to another (large-scale commercial farming) requires both a change in social relationships and the acquisition of new knowledge, most of which is tacit. The latter is the most challenging part for land reform beneficiaries and those (e.g., the state or the government) who want to impart such knowledge to the beneficiaries.

Such knowledge cannot be entirely taught, but can be acquired through practice (Schirmer, 2015; van Niekerk, Mahlobogoane & Tirivanhu, 2015). Hence, it is believed that selecting beneficiaries who already have some farming background will enhance the dispersion of commercial farming, as opposed to selecting people who have no experience with any kind of farming (van Rooyen & Njobe-Mbuli, 1996; Groenewald, 2004). Equipping land reform beneficiaries with commercial farming skills would require specific training focused on the qualities of becoming a good commercial farmer.

[1] Schirmer (2015) defines capital as the land, buildings, machinery and other assets that can be used to generate output.

3.2 The type of training required by land reform beneficiaries

Based on Schirmer's (2015) argument, future commercial farmers need to know how to adopt, regularly, new machines, new production processes, and new marketing arrangements. Andrews, Zamchiya, and Hall. (2009) recommend training beneficiaries in agricultural, business, and financial management skills and further recommend that the training should build on the latent capacities in these areas that are often present in communities. From this argument, we see that many of the necessary commercial farming skills are embedded in knowledge. According to Hatak & Roessl (2015:10), knowledge is the sum of expertise, skills, experiences, and abilities applied by individuals in the form of worldviews, theories, and actions taken to solve problems. It can include facts and information as well as understanding gained through experience, education, or reasoning.

3.3 The method of training provision

Since the beginning of land reform, efforts have been made by the government to equip beneficiaries with the necessary training. In the early years of land reform, Jacobs (2003) identified three methods that are used to train land reform beneficiaries. These include training through agricultural colleges, mentorships, and management programmes. Most recent evidence from Aliber et al. (2018) confirms that land reform beneficiary trainings are offered by agricultural colleges and accredited service providers. These trainings are delivered as short courses that take, on average, five days.

Table 1 illustrates the number of beneficiaries trained per year across provinces and what the participants were specifically trained for. Farming skills, farming methods, and market identification seem to be the predominating the trainings. However, these training categories are very abstract and lack detailed information on the intensity of the training and the service providers. Yet such information is crucial in ensuring fair and effective training. In this regard, there has been emerging evidence of inadequate and unfair service provision, including training, for land reform beneficiaries (Business Enterprises, 2013). Much of this misconduct occurs because of little or no accountability. As Aliber (2019:15) puts it, "…a big problem with current agricultural support services is that they are not held accountable to anyone, and in particular farmers have little or no information with which to hold government offices accountable". Yet significant sums of money ranging from about R55 000 to just above a quarter of a million Rands per year are spent on beneficiary training (see Table 1).

On a positive note, the listed training categories seem to match some of the important commercial farming skills identified by Schirmer (2015). However, we found no evidence for trainings related to the willingness to take risks and risk management strategies, identified by Schirmer (2005) as important aspects of successful commercial farming.

Table 1: Summary of the number of beneficiaries trained on various skills, by year and province

Year	Province	Amount spent	Number of beneficiaries	Category of skills
2011/12	Not specified	Not specified	36 505	Not specified
2013/14	Eastern Cape	R216 390	1474	Farming methods
			1646	Identifying markets
	Free State	R140 274	1210	Farming methods
			220	Identifying markets
	Gauteng	R55 759	309	Farming methods
			41	Identifying markets
	KwaZulu-Natal	R202 522	3000	Farming methods
			124	Identifying markets
	Limpopo	R208 020	721	Farming methods
			700	Identifying markets
	Mpumalanga	R130 289	6201	Farming methods
			8022	Identifying markets
	Northern Cape	R371 539	1354	Farming methods
			929	Identifying markets
	North West	R165 198	284	Farming methods
			5146	Identifying markets
	Western Cape	R106 376	36	Farming methods
			432	Identifying markets

2016/17	Eastern Cape	R263 490	2000	Farming methods or opportunities along the value chain
			1061	Accessing markets
	Free State	R171 367	1782	Farming methods
			49	Accessing markets
	Gauteng	R84 091	679	Farming methods
			839	Accessing markets
	KwaZulu-Natal	R222 155	5121	Accessing markets
	Limpopo	R247 894	1029	Farming methods
			454	Accessing markets
	Mpumalanga	Not specified	8759	Farming methods
			863	Accessing markets
	Northern Cape	R117 763	2302	Accessing markets

Source: Annual reports of the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (2012, 2014, 2017)

Although many of these trainings have had a positive impact in equipping beneficiaries, some challenges hindering their effectiveness have emerged. One is the suboptimal timing of the training, which is often delivered with delay after beneficiaries have been allocated land and thus tends to not be aligned with the farming process (Jacobs, 2003). This challenge seems to be persistent. Manenzhe et al. (2016) reported a lack of training and its delay which has been provided as one of the causes of the unsustainability of the land reform farms.

The other notable challenge is that these land reform beneficiary trainings are not demand-driven and not tailored to individual needs. Instead, a top-down approach is followed without first assessing the training needs of the beneficiaries (Manenzhe et al., 2016). For example, a report from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (2015) noted that some of the beneficiaries of the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy were allocated to farms without checking their state of farming knowledge. The report furthermore stated that only 65 out of 113 beneficiaries knew asset registration. This evidence suggests that skills assessment is done after the beneficiaries have begun farming, although it should be done before.

3.4 Lessons from administered trainings

This research note provides a closer look at land reform beneficiary trainings in South African land reform. It was motivated by the existing evidence pointing to a lack of competent farming skills in emerging farmers as one of the causes of the failure of land reform farms (Dlamini et al., 2013; Schirmer, 2015). Through a review of the relevant literature, we highlighted the need to train the land reform beneficiaries as well as the important aspects the training should cover. The literature we consulted suggests that there is at least some convergence between the provided training and the required commercial farming skills.

However, several aspects such as risk management are missing from the list of training provided by the government. Furthermore, the timing of these training seems not to be aligned with the time when the skills are needed, which diverts the whole point of the exercise. In addition, the trainings seem to follow a top-down approach rather than being demand-driven. Moreover, there is a lack of empirical evidence about the quality and effectiveness of these trainings in transferring the required skills. Thus, there is little information about monitoring and evaluation of these beneficiary trainings, although the government funds them with considerable sums of money. Disparities in expenditure per beneficiary across provinces are also evident despite beneficiaries being trained on the same aspect.

Another neglected aspect is the age of the beneficiaries. Age is important because training and attaining commercial farming skills is a lengthy process (Sihlobo & Nel, 2016), and therefore training is arguably the most effective and sustainable when given to relatively young beneficiaries to allow time for application of the skills. However, few of the land reform beneficiaries are young (DRDLR, 2015; Mtero et al., 2019). These aspects need further research and discussion to improve the administration and effectiveness of land redistribution.

4. HOW CAN THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION BE ENHANCED?

As we outlined in the discussions above, a fair share of farmers' success depends on their source of knowledge and expertise. One of the agricultural extension roles is exactly that, to disseminate information, expertise, and technology. It is no surprise that chapter six of the National Development Plan has raised a call to promote a cadre of agricultural extensionists that will equip land reform beneficiaries with both expertise and the necessary information required in the commercial farm world (NPC, 2011). To complement these trainings,

agricultural extensionists can be used to assess the extent beneficiary's knowledge of the required expertise in commercial farming to recommend appropriate training. This will not only reduce the cost of unnecessary and unneeded trainings, but it will also ensure that beneficiary trainings are tailor-made to the needs of the beneficiaries.

The materialisation of the NDP suggestion, however, has not been so prominent and documentation of the success is very limited. Numerous factors contribute to limited or lack of extension roles. There is still a shortage of extension officers, and many extension officers are not specialists (Lukhalo, 2017). Considering these limitations, to enhance the role of extension, one alternative could be building on the farmer field schools. Farmer Field Schools were developed in the 1980s by the Food and Agriculture Organisation as a form of adult education in agriculture. It is a group-based approach in which a facilitator meets with producers regularly and sets in motion a process by which producers learn how to learn (Pontius, Dilts & Barttlet, 2002). A pilot study in the Eastern Cape has reported positive results of the FFS to small-scale home gardeners (see Apleni, Aliber, Zou & Zantsi, 2019). Trying it on land reform beneficiaries may yield good results. Another option is an outsourced agricultural extension and training from NGOs such Lima to complement the currently used approaches and FFS.

5. CONCLUSION

The objectives of this research note were (1) to provide an initial basic understanding of the requirements and loopholes in the land reform beneficiary training, paving the way for future studies, and (2) to identify and discuss the role of agricultural extension in administering these beneficiary trainings. These objectives were achieved by critically reviewing relevant literature, policy documents, and some relevant official statistics. Our synthesis of the literature suggests that future commercial farmers need to know how to adapt regularly to new technology, new production processes, and new marketing arrangements. While continuing to take calculated risks and have sound business and financial management skills to run a farm business and reinvest profits. Some of the key attributes are offered in the trainings, while others such as risk management are completely missing. Many of the necessary commercial farming skills are embedded in knowledge some of which is tacit. Therefore, it helps to combine these trainings with mentoring as it is currently done. Agricultural extensionists can be used to assess the beneficiary skill set and facilitate farmer field schools to minimise costs and deal with the shortage of extension officers.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The objectives of this research note were (1) to provide an initial basic understanding of the requirements his work is based on the research support by the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

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