



Case Notes 2

Principles of Success in Implementing Community Development Projects

About Seriti Institute

Seriti Institute, formed in 2009, is a social enterprise specialising in Community Development. Seriti's supports interventions which promote community self-reliance. Seriti implements and manages community development projects, and provides other technical services such as capacity building and training within communities it works in.

About Seriti TALKS

Seriti TALKS is a platform that brings together development practitioners, academics, policy makers, funders, and other stakeholders to share knowledge, ideas and experiences. The purpose of Seriti TALKS is to promote networking among all stakeholders involved in the development fraternity, while also trying to influence change among policy makers by disseminating best practice models of development.

The second "agricultural" series of the Seriti TALKS was held on the 11th July 2019, and focused on GrainSA's experience in its Farmer Development Programme.

Grain South Africa's Farmer Development Programme (FDP)

The GrainSA Farmer Development Programme works with 13 144 smallholder farmers, in KwaZulu Natal (KZN), North West, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape and North West Provinces. The FDP's project activities which involve training smallholder farmers (i.e. on agronomic practices, use of pesticides and herbicides, and proper on-farm storage, among other activities) either as groups or individuals.

The group model implemented by GrainSA involves clustering the smallholder farmers into "study groups", and then using a "learning by doing" approach to adopting many of the agronomic practices that increase yields, such as effective weeding. Other smallholder farmers learn by observing neighbours, adopting these "new practices" because they have seen the evidence of such practices working for others. Update and adoption rates of various agronomic practices have been impressive.

There are various funding models for the project, which involves variable financial contributions by smallholder farmers themselves (who include subsistence, semi-subsistence and commercial), in addition to the contributions from commercial companies, the Maize Trust, and other specific funding streams such as the Jobs Fund.

Challenges

While there are many success stories, the project is beset by some key challenges. First, farmers still face problems trying to access finance, and this is primarily due to the Credit Act.

Secondly, smallholder farmers in the project also face challenges accessing markets. Most of the grain is traded in the country is on the South African Futures Exchange (SAFEX) platform. The SAFEX platform requires offtake agreements of a minimum of 10 tons, and small scale farmers typically have small volumes and cannot easily trade on this trading platform.

Thirdly, there is a lack of diversification of crop enterprises, and smallholder farmers need to look beyond traditional crops and grow more profitable cash crops. Fresh produce, while a good option, requires cold chain management and significant investment in inputs and infrastructure. However, more viable options could be considered, such as cowpeas and lentils, which already have an offtaker in companies such as ETG (Kynog), who procure for export markets.

Last but not least, infrastructure remains a problem in the former homelands, and there is very limited accessibility that can allow farmers to have inputs delivered closer to their location. For instance, there are marginal areas where one is unable to bring an interlink to service farmers with input delivery.

Areas for future interventions

There are other broader areas that are critical, which the FDP has not been able to address. First, youth involvement in agriculture is key, but is beyond the purview of the FDP's focus areas. There has not been a deliberate effort to recruit youth into the programme, and agriculture is not as attractive for the youth because it is a high effort low return industry. The recruitment of youth into farmer development programmes should be a drive for the future.

Second, the other area that requires future attention is how to graduate farmers from projects. There is not enough work being done in the area of post-programme support to ensure that smallholder farmers who go through the development programme continue to receive technical and financial support to ensure that they learn and become competitive.

For instance, post-implementation support can be in the form of training smallholder farmers to do proper book-keeping and accounting to manage their crop enterprises. This not only helps to acquire funding in the future, but it can also help small-scale farmers to acquire diesel rebates from the South African Revenues Services (SARS).

Third, even though GrainSA publishes its "Pula Imvula" Magazine, distributing some 16,000 copies per month, there is potential to repackage and publish the success and efforts of the FSP to circulate to a more targeted audience – such as prospective funding organisations, policy makers and other potential partners who share mutual goals and interests. The

objective here will be to use various mediums and platforms to popularise the FSP to garner more attention and funding support.

Speak Profile



Jane McPherson, Manager of the Grain SA Farmer Development programme has a passion for agricultural development and her work is aimed at seeing sustainable production on every hectare of arable land in South Africa – irrespective of the size of the land. To this end, Jane and her team spend all their time and efforts on training and on-farm support to developing farmers. The programme, which was introduced in 2000 – and under Jane’s helm since, establishes a platform for healthy and sustainable transformation on a broad base. Through funding by the Maize Trust, the Oil and Protein Seeds Development Trust, the Winter Cereal Trust, the Sorghum Trust, the ARC and the AgriSETA, the programme has made a huge difference to the economic viability of developing farmers.