



Crafting and Implementing successful Mentorship programmes: Perspectives on Sustainable land reform in South African Agriculture

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Abstract

Land reform is one of the landmark policy initiatives implemented on the auspices of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) by the new African National Congress (ANC)-led government in South Africa (SA), following the April 1994 democratic elections. Land reform was therefore, envisioned as a policy instrument to enable previously disadvantaged individuals to own land and engage in commercial agricultural production. Inadvertently, a new generation of emerging black farmers who benefit from the state's land redistribution program find themselves without sufficient post-settlement and institutional support. The government has therefore, formalized mentorship as part of post-settlement support services in order to equip the emerging farmers with the necessary technical, business and resource management skills required to engage in sustainable commercial agriculture. This paper discusses the need for mentorship in the South African agriculture, citing some of the mentorship programs that the SA government has to date, supported in agriculture. It then highlights some of the lessons that could be learnt from previous mentorship programs in SA agriculture, proposes a model on how to develop and implement mentorship programs and ends with a summary.

Keywords: Mentorship, Land Reform, Commercial Agriculture, Emerging Farmer.

Introduction

New reform policy initiatives introduced by the African National Congress (ANC)-led government after the 1994 democratic elections, were aimed at promoting reconstruction and development, more especially in the agrarian sector¹. Land reform is one of the initiatives that the new ANC government has promised to enable previously disadvantaged individuals (PDI)s access to land and engage in commercial agriculture. PDIs are defined here as people in South Africa who were previously excluded from land markets due to racial segregation. The land reform program is facilitated by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (RDLR) and has three subdivisions; redistribution, restitution and land tenure. The mandate of the land reform process is to transfer 30% (about 24.9 million hectares) of white-owned farmland to PDIs by 2014²⁻⁵.

Lahiff⁶ noted that the new ANC government adopted a land reform policy based on reliance on market mechanisms (*i.e.* the willing-seller/ willing-buyer principle), respect for private property and tightly controlled public spending. However, Lahiff⁹ observed that after 14 years of democracy in South Africa (SA), there is consensus across the political and social spectrum that the state's land reform programme has fallen short of delivering its mandate. Furthermore, Aliber and Mokoena⁷ reported that some proponents of the government land reform blame the willing-seller/ willing-buyer principle for the slow

pace of the land redistribution programme. Other factors attributed to the slow progress in the land reform include lack of capacity (*i.e.* in terms of quantity and quality) in the national and provincial offices of DLA and the Commission of the Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) and poor and/or inadequate post-settlement support^{6,5}. Mokhatla *et al*⁸ caution that the settlement of new farmers in South Africa (SA) has to be done not just for the handing of land over to the landless, but with the aim of attaining the goals of sustainable land reform. However, lack of pre and post-settlement support to the land reform beneficiaries undermines the efforts of the land reform program^{2-4,9}.

Kirsten *et al*¹⁰ noted that support services to participants are often inadequate, unsequenced and un-coordinated. Mentorship has therefore been identified as an important element of professional training and capacity development that could be used to develop talent in the new SA¹¹⁻¹⁶. Hence, the need to institutionalize formal mentorship programmes and incorporate them into support services for settling emerging commercial black farmers. Formal mentorship could therefore, empower the new entrant farmers with the much-needed basic technical, business and resource management skills required to successfully operate modern farms. Additionally, the emerging farmers find themselves without appropriate institutional structures and extension services. Mentorship could therefore, be an ideal vehicle to address the shortcomings of extension services and thus complement the latter.

Literature review: Many authors have defined and described mentoring in various ways. Rivza *et al*¹⁷ argued that the word mentoring is derived from the word “Mentor” in Greek Mythology. The authors highlighted that a mentor was an old wise and experienced man, on whom Odysseus entrusted his son’s education and development. They define mentoring as a “voluntary and interactive relationship in the context of a win-win situation, between an experienced person (the mentor) who agrees to help and support another less experienced person (the mentee), in order for the latter to succeed in his or her endeavours”.

The SA National Department of Agriculture (NDA) has adapted two non-sector specific definitions of the word “mentoring”. That is: i. “mentoring exists when suitably experienced and competent persons act as resources, sponsors and transitional figures for another person. Hence, mentors provide less experienced persons with knowledge, advice, challenge and support in their pursuit of becoming full members of a particular segment of life. Mentors welcome less experienced persons into their world and represent skill, knowledge, networks and success that the new professionals hope to someday acquire, or; ii. mentoring is a process of forming a relationship between a more experienced and seasoned person (mentor) and a less experienced person (mentee), where the mentor assists the mentee to achieve a specific goal or develop a specified capacity”¹⁸.

Mentorship in the South African agriculture: Formal mentoring has the potential to be an important farmer capacity developmental tool in the SA commercial agriculture, given the empowerment policies introduced by the new ANC government (such as AgriBEE and land reform). AgriBEE refers to black economic empowerment (BEE) in agriculture. The broad-based BEE Act was enacted in 2004 to promote PDIs’ access to productive resources and enhance economic growth and equitable income distribution. However, the SA government’s efforts to empower PDIs is not only restricted to agriculture, but includes other sectors of the economy such as mining, manufacturing, and government departments. However, lack of appropriate sector-specific skills has been a common feature among PDIs. Hall *et al*⁹ noted that research conducted in SA has revealed that little attention has been paid to post-transfer support and issues relating to the sustainability of beneficiaries.

Thomson and Bates³ cautioned that the changing demographics in the SA sugar industry would present challenges to the capacity and means through which support services are provided in the future. Hence, the industry’s unique and generally well-coordinated services need to create an environment which is conducive for the success of the new entrant black commercial farmers (through proper post land transfer support, training and mentoring). Thomson and Gillitt⁴ added that the new black farmers generally do not have agricultural or business background. As a result, these inexperienced farmers without the necessary agronomic, financial and labour management

skills may mismanage their farms within a few seasons/years following acquisition. Street and Kleynhans¹⁹ also reported that the composition of commercial farmers in SA is changing and will continue to change due to the emergence of black farmers. Hence, new demands on agricultural extension services, agricultural authorities and other stakeholders in the agriculture sector.

Incidentally, the SA government’s efforts to promote PDIs’ engagement in commercial agriculture has been negatively affected by lack of post-transfer support to the emerging farmers and their lack of experience and skills in agriculture, business, financial, and labour management^{9,3}. Formal mentorship may address the skills shortage amongst the new black farmers and thus properly integrate them into commercial agriculture^{2,3,9,20-24}. Accordingly, various formal and informal state and private funded mentorship has to date been reported in some industries in the agriculture sector, namely; sugar, citrus, beef, ostrich, horticulture and field crop production (Table-1). It is therefore, evident that there are lessons that could be drawn from the mentorship relationships discussed above. More importantly, these lessons could inform policy makers on how best to develop and implement future programmes in the SA agriculture, and thus optimize the desired benefits.

Table-1
Examples of programmes in the SA agriculture

Industry	Province	Source
Citrus	Western Cape	Brodie ²⁵
Beef	Limpopo and North West	Lawrence ²⁶
Crops	Limpopo	Botes ²⁷
Ostrich	Eastern Cape	Erasmus ²⁸ , Burgess ²⁹
Sugarcane	Kwazulu Natal	Xaba ²⁴

Lessons that could be drawn from previous mentorship programmes: Some lessons that could be drawn from the SA mentorship programmes include^{21,24,30}:

Government and private funding or sponsorship of mentorship programs is vital for program sustainability (e.g. both the New Freehold Growers’ (NFG) and CGA mentorship programmes were funded by the government; Committed and enthusiastic mentees who are willing to participate in the programme and implement plans agreed with the mentor; Mentors and mentees being knowledgeable about the programme objectives; Providing programme participants with guidelines; Clarity on the roles of both mentees and mentors; and Having a well-structured programme that strives to address the needs of the mentees.

Incorporating lessons learnt from previous mentorship programmes may also promote sustainable land reform, emerging farmer capacity development and sound crafting and implementation of agrarian sector reform policies, and thus enhance the competitive edge of SA agriculture both regionally and internationally.

A framework on how to develop and implement mentorship programs in SA agriculture: SA agriculture can adopt the following best practices when designing and implementing mentoring programmes. Figure-1 illustrates a conceptual model for developing and implementing mentorship programmes.

Needs analysis: According to Botha, Kiley and Truman³¹, needs analysis is a systematic collection and evaluation of information in order to find gaps in the existing competency levels, knowledge and attitudes of employees. The purpose of this phase is therefore, to gather evidence which justify and support arguments in favour of the proposed mentorship. Needs assessment can be done at three levels, including the industry/organisation, the task/job and the individual, and can identify:

An industry/organisation's goals and its effectiveness in reaching these goals, conditions under which the intervention (mentorship) program will occur and where training is needed (*industry/organisational analysis*); Gaps between current skills, knowledge and competency levels, and the skills knowledge and competencies required to perform current and future tasks successfully and what needs to be taught (*task/job analysis*); and who needs to be trained (*person analysis*)^{31,32}.

Ideally, information gathering is done by a task team or an advisory committee in-charge of the mentorship program. The advisory committee advises the industry/organisation about the consequences of progressing or not progressing with the envisioned intervention programme. Werner and DeSimone³² argued that the advisory committee should consist of members from across the industry/organisation. A broader level of representation and support from all parts of the industry/organisation offer varying perspectives on the industry's human resource development needs. Assuming that a needs assessment yields multiple needs that a mentorship programme should address, the committee, management and the other relevant stakeholders must then prioritise these needs. Resources such as skilled personnel, facilities, equipment, materials and funds should also be mobilised towards program design.

Program design: Following needs analysis, the task team would be faced with questions such as: Is this an issue that can and should be addressed through mentoring?, If mentoring is necessary, do we have the capacity to design and implement the program in-house or should we outsource some services?, How do we select and match mentors and mentees?, Which areas/locations do we start with and why?, Are there particular

scheduling issues that should be taken into account when designing the mentorship program (*i.e.* most agricultural products are seasonal and mentoring could be more beneficial if aligned with farm production activities)?

Furthermore, after a needs analysis the industry/organisation may have detailed information which indicates: Where intervention/training is needed (*i.e.* in the citrus or sugarcane industry); Whether mentoring alone and/or other forms of training and capacity development are needed (*i.e.* whether agricultural extension should complement mentoring); who needs to be trained (*i.e.* emerging black beef farmers); and conditions under which mentoring will occur (*i.e.* a formal mentoring program).

The main activities involved in designing a mentorship program may include: setting objectives, outlining key focus/result areas, drawing program guidelines, program length, frequency of meetings and remuneration of mentors. Werner and DeSimone³² noted that program objectives must have three critical aspects: i. Performance (what mentees should be able to do/or produce to be considered competent); ii. Conditions under which performance should occur (e.g. formal or informal); and iii. The criteria (where possible) of acceptable performance on how mentees must perform in order to be considered competent.

The key performance/result areas on which the program participants need to improve/acquire new knowledge, skills and competencies, should be based on the needs analysis. Table-2 shows some key result areas in a typical mentorship program for the emerging black sugarcane farmers in South Africa. The program guidelines would provide information on how to deal with various aspects relating to selection and matching of mentors and mentees, mentors' and mentees' roles, program length, the frequency of meetings between coordinator and mentors and/or between mentors and mentees and how mentors will be paid. According to Cranwell-Ward *et al*³³, once the overall program approach has been defined and outlined, the task team should consider other practical components that will support the entire process. These may include clarifying the roles and responsibilities of other key industry stakeholders; defining qualities to look for in mentors; determining what training is required by mentors; and what should be done if the relationship fails. The task team also determines and outlines the evaluation criteria and other monitoring tools (such as monthly reports) and how often evaluation would be done.

Empowerment of the program participants: Kotter³⁴ observed that transformation initiatives often fail because people have not been empowered to act on the vision of the initiative either due to lack of communication or the presence of current systems/structures that undermine the intervention. An orientation session is therefore vital for the mentors and mentees. Mentors could be offered training in diversity management so that they would be better prepared to deal with a diverse pool of mentees. The mentees may be diverse in terms

of culture, gender, race and religion. Hence, cross-cultural (*i.e.* whites mentoring blacks) and cross-gender (*i.e.* males mentoring females) mentoring is likely to be more prevalent in the SA agriculture because the agriculture sector is male-dominated and the black farmers are in most cases mentored by white farmers.

The program design phase provides management and the task team an opportunity to clarify any underlying issues and communicate the objectives, guidelines, benefits/consequences of implementing/not implementing the mentorship program, to the mentors and mentees again. Further communication may increase a sense of urgency on the part of mentors and mentees and a better understanding of what is expected of them, thus ensuring more commitment towards program delivering.

Program implementation, maintenance and further development: Ideally, a mentorship program should initially be rolled out on a small scale (pilot program). A pilot program gives management, other stakeholders and policy makers an opportunity to understand and appreciate the pertinent issues about the program and make changes (where necessary) before a nation/industry-wide program is launched. After implementing

the program, the task team or the coordinator should promptly address problems as they arise. Moreover, program maintenance could be in the form of various support activities to the mentors and mentees such as regular contact, formal and informal program reviews, sharing success stories and experiences, additional training of mentors and guiding them on how to deal with difficult personal situations.

Hattingh *et al*³⁵ reiterated that an effective mentoring programme follows a lifecycle, and as the relationship draws to a close, it is very important for it to be concluded properly. Organisations may therefore, be motivated to expand the program further, in the event where mentorship has achieved the desired outcomes. The program also stands to grow naturally as the former mentees may become the next generation of mentors and participate in future programs. Previous research by Clutterbuck and Sweeney cited by Hattingh *et al*³⁵ reported that mentoring programs that do not deliver results share the following failures: Poor planning and preparation; inadequate training of participants; low clarity on roles and responsibilities of mentor and mentee (*i.e.* who does what?); and inadequate support from top management.

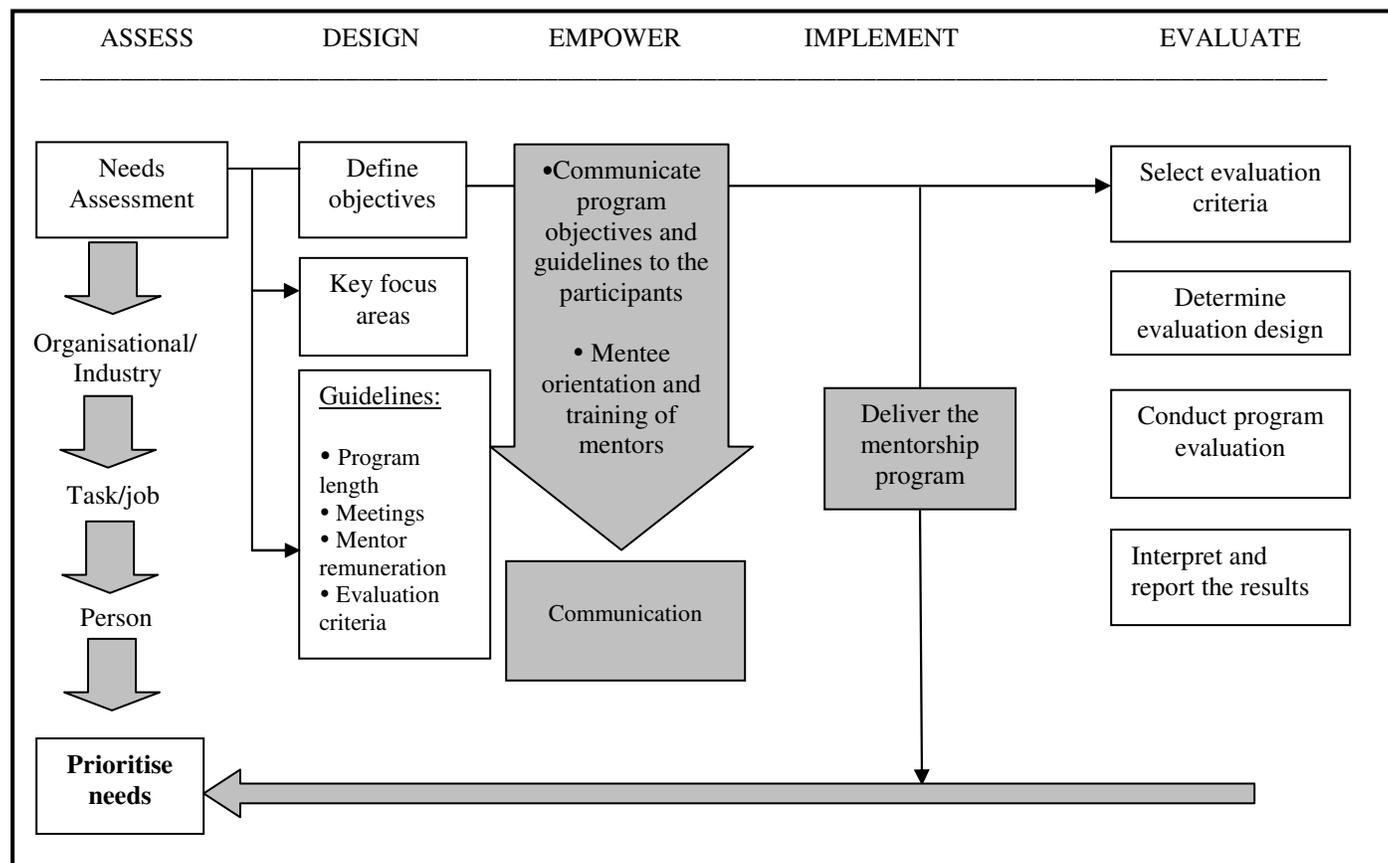


Figure-1

A Conceptual framework for the development and implementation of mentorship Programs, Adapted from Werner and DeSimone³²

Table-2
Key focus areas for a typical mentorship program for the emerging black sugarcane farmers in South Africa

Key Focus Areas			
Financial management	Technical/Cane agronomic aspects	Labour management	Marketing
Budgeting	Ratoon management, weeds and disease control	Statutory labour requirements	Sugarcane prices
Tax-reporting and book keeping	Sugarcane varieties	Supervision and dispute resolution	Transport to the mill
Cash flow management	land preparation and planting		

Program evaluation: Evaluation plays a fundamental role in any project. Project evaluation can be of twofold, namely: i. *ex ante* and ii. *ex post*. *Ex ante* evaluation is done before the programme is launched, through needs analysis and a pilot program. *Ex ante* evaluation therefore, seeks to determine and justify the program need and how best to implement it and optimise the desired benefits. On the contrary, *ex post* evaluation is carried out when the program is running. It is therefore, an on-going monitoring process which involves establishing whether: the participants are developing appropriate relationships, proposed benefits are being delivered or have been met, participants are motivated and that problems are identified and resolved^{6,37-39}.

Consequently, *ex post* evaluation has three key elements: i. *Continuous* (on-going process which establish if all is going as planned), ii. *Impact-oriented* (are the expected benefits being achieved?), and iii. *proactive* (identifies problems and resolve them as they arise). Botha *et al*³¹ added that evaluation is a set of planned, information gathering and analytical activities undertaken to provide management and those responsible for the intervention program with an assessment of the program's quality and impact. Cranwell-Ward *et al*³³ observed that it is not only necessary to have a formal evaluation and review structure in place at the end of the mentoring programme. It is also important to have an on-going review process as part of the programme maintenance activities.

Both on-going and post programme review enhances the overall evaluation of the programme. Hence, an objective strategy that employs multiple methods to obtain both quantitative (objective, numerical) and qualitative data (subjective, non-numerical) should be in place at the beginning of the program life (*i.e.* during the program design phase). Subsequently, evaluation of mentorship programs in the SA agriculture could establish: i. The participants' reaction to the program; ii. If what was learned is/has been transferred at farm level (transfer of learning); iii. The program impact and costs; iv. How future programs could be improved.

Data collection for evaluation could be done through structured questionnaires with a set of questions intended to assess

participants' perceptions and opinions about the program. Focus group discussions may also be an important tool for mentorship program evaluation, and thus complement questionnaires. Krueger cited by Litoselliti⁴⁰ describes a focus group as a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment where, the participants share and respond to comments, ideas and perceptions. Krueger and Casey cited by Israel and Gonzalez⁴¹ noted that although focus groups were previously used in the private sector to conduct market research, extension professionals now use the technique to design programs and assess outcomes.

Israel and Gonzalez⁴¹ added that focus groups are now frequently used because the interviews can yield rich, qualitative information which can be used to identify what should be done, what worked and what did not. This information can then help policy makers identify ways in which to improve the program. Litoselliti⁴⁰ argued that, unlike interviews and participant observation, focus groups: i. present a more natural environment as participants are influenced by others; and ii. offer some flexibility and can be used with emphasis either on intervention (entails more formal and structured groups) or observation (which may result in exploratory, qualitative, naturalistic or interpretative groups).

Conclusion

The landscape of the South African agriculture is being reshaped by extensive land and agrarian reform policy initiatives introduced by the ANC government since 1994. The agriculture sector has and is still experiencing an increasing demand for extension, advisory services and post-settlement support services offered to the land reform beneficiaries. The majority of the beneficiaries lack commercial farming experience and skills. Mentorship has therefore, been identified as a capacity development tool to address skill gaps amongst the emerging black farmers. However, researchers and policy makers have cautioned that institutionalised mentorship should not replace extension, but should rather complement it. In the former, mentors provide hands-on experience, moral support, counselling and promote transfer of learning. Extension on the

other hand, provides theoretical explanation and logic on various aspects in agriculture. Hence, in the context of the South African agriculture, the proposed mentorship program implementation model emphasises adoption of best practices. The model incorporates some key elements and fundamental aspects such as a needs assessment, program design, implementation and evaluation. However, the proposed model is by no means definitive. It merely starts an interrogation of the purpose, functions and steps for implementing mentorship programs. More importantly, the proposed model further opens discussions on: diversity mentoring (more especially cross cultural mentoring); how to deal with soft human relations issues which might be unique to the South African setup (such as trust and previous power relations which were racially based) and how to incorporate them into large scale mentorship programs; and how in a pragmatic manner, put emphasis on nation building, reconstruction and reconciliation issues on which the principle of mentorship is founded, without compromising the sustainability and competitiveness SA agriculture.

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