Research Journal of Management Sciences _____E-ISSN 2319–1171
Vol. **5(2),** 1-7 February **(2016)** *Res. J. Management Sci.*

Mentorship and Extension a Complementary approach: Evidence from the South African Sugar Industry

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Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me
Received 12th November 2015, revised 16th January 2016, accepted 2nd February 2016

Abstract

Agricultural extension and mentorship are back on the international development agenda and experiencing a much-more renewed focus. In the South African (SA) context, emphasis on improved agricultural extension and other support services originates from the land redistribution program, introduced t, post 1994. Some policy analysts view agricultural extension, mentorship and training as important capacity developmental tools that have the potential to equip emerging small-scale and commercial farmers with the much-needed technical and farm business management skills to successfully engage in commercial agriculture. This paper therefore, reports on some socioeconomic characteristics of the surveyed emerging black sugarcane growers in the SA sugar industry in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and establishes how emerging farmer capacity development could be enhanced through mentorship and extension. The majority (80 and 91%) of the 43 surveyed NFGs respectively had no educational background in agriculture and business-related fields. Nearly 70% (30) of the surveyed NFGs had prior experience in general management, with almost 47% of them from the North Coast region. About nine percent of the sample NFGs had prior-experience in managing a sugarcane farm. The surveyed NFGs emphasized that mentorship and extension are important sources of skills for sugarcane agronomic aspects, while accountants and formal training are significant in financial management. Own experience was viewed as the most important source of skills in labour management and transport to the sugar mill. Nonetheless, extension accounted for almost 27% as a source of skills in transport to the mill. These results suggest that (a) policy makers should design mentorship and other support services such that they address the needs of participants from diverse backgrounds, and (b) mentorship and extension should be used to complement each other and not to replace each other.

Keywords: Extension, Mentorship, Land Reform, Commercial Agriculture.

Introduction

Land reform in South Africa (SA) is a broad policy initiative, which is aimed at redressing some of the injustices created by the apartheid government. 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 previously disadvantaged individuals (PDIs) by 2014[1,2,3,4]. PDIs are defined here as people in South Africa who were previously excluded from land markets due to racial segregation. However, the land redistribution program has in some cases, led to the emergence of a large pool of new and inexperienced black farmers from diverse backgrounds. Due to some segregations created by the former apartheid regime, PDIs were excluded from actively participating in the land markets. For that reason, the PDIs predominantly practiced subsistence agriculture in the rural areas and mainly on tribal land. Consequently, some of the PDIs who acquire farms through the government's land redistribution program do not possess some key skills required to successfully engage in commercial farming. This has therefore, compelled the state to come up with innovative ways of integrating new entrant farmers into commercial agriculture and address skills gaps.

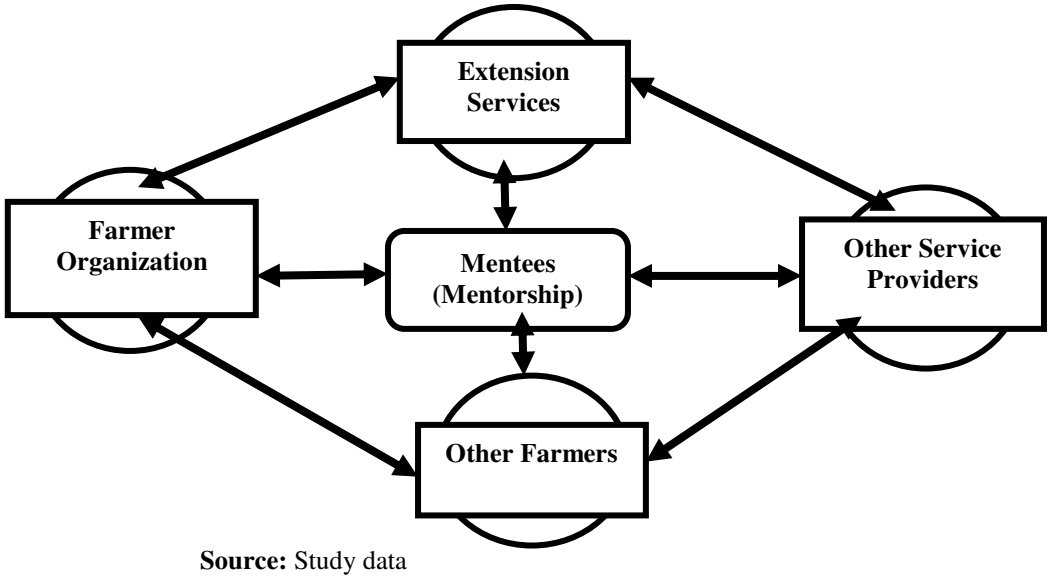
Furthermore, there has been an increase in the demand for extension, pre and post-settlement support services. Some researchers and authors have reiterated that lack of pre and post-settlement support to the land reform beneficiaries undermines the efforts of the land reform program[5,1-3]. Kirsten *et al*[5] concur and add that support services to beneficiaries are often inadequate, unsequenced and un-coordinated. As an intervention strategy, the new African National Congress (ANC)-led government identified formal mentorship as a capacity development tool to address skill gaps among emerging black farmers and thus promote equity, emerging farmer learning, orientation, capacity development, entry and engagement in commercial agriculture. According to KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs (KZNDAEA)[6], a mentorship relationship is either between an experienced farmer/s (mentor/s) and an inexperienced farmer/s (mentee/s) or between a strategic commodity partner and a mentee/s. A commodity partner in the SA sugar industry could be the South African Canegrowers Association (SACGA). Accordingly, mentorship further promotes sustainability of the land reform program by equipping emerging farmers with the vital skills and knowledge required to engage and succeed in commercial farming. Additionally, mentorship enhances post-settlement support services and complements extension.

Nonetheless, the "dual nature" of the SA agriculture necessitates inclusion of mentorship as part of post-settlement support services to emerging farmers. Dual nature here means that the South African agriculture has a well-developed commercial sector mainly operated by the white farmers and a predominantly subsistence sector in the rural areas and largely operated by black farmers. As a result, mentorship is invariably, an important part of integrating PDIs into commercial agriculture.

This study therefore, seeks to (i) report on some socioeconomic characteristics of the surveyed emerging black sugarcane growers and (ii) establish how emerging farmer capacity development could be enhanced through mentorship and extension. Owing to the current developments in the SA agriculture, associated with land reform and AgriBEE**,** there is a likelihood that: (1) the demand for mentorship and extension services may increase as more new entrant farmers engage in commercial agriculture, and (2) there might be need to reassess the specific role of both mentorship and extension in emerging farmer capacity development, *ceteris paribus*. Figure 1 shows a conceptual model of mentorship-extension complementary model. 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.

Literature review: According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Bank[7], Agricultural Knowledge and Information System for Rural Development (AKIS/RD) links people with institutions and facilitate mutual learning and create a platform for sharing and utilizing agriculture-related technology, knowledge and information. Consequently, Figure-1 below illustrates that mentees (farmers) are at the center of the knowledge and information sharing wheel. Extension, farmer organizations, other farmers and other service providers, are an important source of knowledge, skills and information needed by the new entrant farmers to successfully engage in commercial agriculture. Worth[8] observed that farmers engage as partners in the learning process. Extension and other supporting agents should therefore, engage with farmers in as facilitators. Even so, literature reveals a wide range of opinions about the need for formal mentorship programmes to be part of support services for settling emerging farmers in SA[1,3,5,9-13]. It is envisioned that mentorship could empower the new entrant farmers with the much- needed basic technical and business knowledge and skills required to farm successfully.

Further, GFRAS[14] noted that other farmers are an important source of informal agricultural advice in Sub-Saharan Africa, more especially where most farmers have not had much contact with extension services. As a result, farmer-to-farmer knowledge and information sharing is recognized as an important way to close the gaps left by extension and other support services such as mentorship. However, Street and Kleynhans[9] caution that extension provides farmers with theory while mentorship gives practical orientation. The authors recommended that extension and mentorship should not replace one another but should rather, be used to complement each other. Additionally, Reeve and Stayner[15] caution that farming is becoming increasingly professionalized. Hence, the highly evolving technical nature of commercial agriculture, the increasing importance to establish and maintain relationships with service providers, requires new skills on the part of the farmers. The main challenge facing policy makers is therefore, to ensure efficient extension services, integrate mentorship and extension and, design and implement other post-settlement support programs that may facilitate smooth transition of the emerging farmers into commercial agriculture in SA.



Source: Study data

Figure-1
Sources of Knowledge Information and Skills for Mentorship

The SACGA rolled-out the first formal mentorship programme in the SA sugar industry from October 2003 to May 2005 in KZN. The state funded programme involved about 80 emerging black sugarcane growers, also commonly known as new freehold growers (NFGs). NFGs are emerging black growers who have acquired about 100 ha of freehold commercial sugarcane farmland. The programme included both mentoring and training. The new farmers were divided into groups (*i.e.* according to geographical areas) and did 21 modules towards an outcomes-based learnership certificate in agriculture. The training course lasted between 15 and 18 months. Further, the programme utilized a group of mentors (*i.e.* predominantly white commercial farmers) with various expertise in different sugarcane farming areas. The SACGA ran the second NFG mentorship programme from June 2008 to June 2009.

The year-long programme included NFGs and other growers who were not covered by the 2003/5 programme, such as small scale farmers and community projects. The emerging growers were mentored on financial, cane agronomy, marketing and labour management aspects. However, mentors did not have a prescribed set of modules like in the 2003/5. Mentors assisted mentees depending on issues on the ground. Additionally, SACGA provided growers with a one-stop facility known as CANEFARMS, which helped NFGs with book-keeping. This study focuses on the 2008/9 programme. Hall et al[5] 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 Bates[2] 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).

Methodology

A survey questionnaire designed to identify farm and farmer specific, socio-economic and industry factors that influence NFGs' participation in mentorship was administered in the three KZN sugar growing regions from April to June 2010. The questionnaire was first tested for clarity with four respondents in one of the regions. A random sample of 70 NFGs was drawn population of 291 emerging black growers in KZN. However, a major challenge that faced the researcher during data collection was the unwillingness of the majority of the NFGs to be interviewed. The growers' unwillingness to be interviewed was partly due to the fact that they felt that they the NFG mentorship programme was not beneficial. As a result, fewer NFGs and mentors, than originally planned were surveyed. A total of 43 NFGs were interviewed, with 22 of the respondents from the North Coast, 15 from the Midlands and six farming on the South Coast. Additionally, a focus group discussion was held in early April 2010 with some of the key stakeholders in the sugar industry, mainly from the SACGA and the South African Sugar Research Institute (SASRI). The purpose of the discussion was to get more information and understanding about the two mentorship programmes implemented in the sugar industry and make further adjustments in the survey instrument. The study data was analysed using SPSS.

Results and Discussion

An illustration in Table-1 shows that the majority (81.4%) of the sample NFGs were male and 18.6% female. Half (4) the surveyed females NFGs participated in mentorship up to the end and the other 50% discontinued. The majority (75%) of the female NFGs who discontinued were from the North Coast region. Overall, about 35% (15) of the surveyed NFGs discontinued from the mentorship programme, with the majority (73.3%) from the North Coast region. The average age of the sample NFGs was 51.51 years, with the youngest being a 26 year old male from the Midlands and the oldest 72 years old (*i.e.* a male from the South Coast). Furthermore, 32.6% of the surveyed NFGs fell within the 51 to 60 age category. The mean ages per region were 49.13, 59.50 and 50.95 years for the Midlands, South Coast and North Coast, respectively. Furthermore, on average, the surveyed NFGs participated in mentorship for duration of 6.29 months (with a minimum of 1.83 and a maximum of 8.52 months in South and North Coast, respectively). Almost 12% of the surveyed NFGs who participated in the mentorship programme up to the end were from the Midlands region, followed by the North Coast region at 9.3%. None of the surveyed NFGs from the South Coast region completed the programme. Furthermore, 44.2% (19) of the surveyed NFGs had never participated in any mentorship programme (with a 20.9% from the Midlands region).

Participation of fewer mentees in the interviews suggests that the new farmers perceived them insignificant because mentorship did not benefit them as they had anticipated. Further, the mentorship programme was supply-driven (*i.e.* provided by the state without consulting farmers and carrying out a detailed needs assessment), and hence low participation and/or high drop-out rates. In addition, NFGs dropped out when their expectations were not met. This implies that proper monitoring and evaluation tools need to be in place any NFG mentorship programme. Proper monitoring and evaluation would have ensured that the desired relationships between the mentees and mentors are nurtured and the programme is monitored and evaluated periodically in order to enhance the achievement of the desired outcomes.

A summary presented in Table-2 shows that nearly 19% (or 8) of the surveyed NFGs had an educational background in agriculture. The majority (62.5%) of them were men from the Midlands. The only woman with an educational background in agriculture was from the North Coast region. Nine percent of

the surveyed NFGs had a business-related educational background, with the majority (75%) of them men. Additionally, about 70% (30) of the surveyed NFGs had prior experience in general management, with the majority (46.6%) of them from the North Coast region. Nearly 40% of the sample NFGs acquired their experience in management while employed elsewhere. Almost nine and nineteen percent of the sample NFGs acquired their managerial expertise by managing farms and through formal training, respectively.

An estimated 63% of the sample NFGs had previous experience in finance, with 18.5% of them female. On the other hand, about 23.2% of the sample NFGs had acquired their experience in finance while employed elsewhere and through formal training, respectively. Almost forty-nine percent of the surveyed NFGs had previous experience in marketing, with the majority (85.7%) of them male. Managing own farms and formal training accounted for a higher proportion of NFGs' previous experience in marketing (*i.e.* about 19% respectively). A summary in table 3 illustrates that the surveyed NFGs were of the view that mentorship and extension are important sources of skills for sugarcane agronomic aspects. However, own experience and other farmers are a significant source of skills to the emerging farmers in sugarcane growing key areas.

Mentorship and extension collectively accounted for 41.9 and 44.2% % of sources of skills in ratoon management and varieties, respectively. On the contrary, the surveyed growers viewed accountants and formal training as significant sources of skills in financial management. Additionally, own experience was viewed as the most important source of skills regarding labour management and transport to the sugar mill. Even so, extension accounted for almost 27% as a source of skills in transport to the mill.

Table-1
Mentorship participation status and the demographic characteristics of the surveyed NFGs by gender and region, 2010

Characteristic	KZN (n=43)	Midlands (n=15)	South Coast (n=6)	North Coast (n=22)
Mentorship participation status and duration				
Fully participated (number)	9	5	0	4
Discontinued (number)	15	1	3	11
Never participated (number)	19	9	3	7
Mean participation duration (months)	6.29	4.93	1.83	8.52
Mentorship participation status and gender distribution				
Male NFGs				
Fully participated (number)	5	1	0	4
Discontinued (number)	11	0	3	8
Never participated (number)	19	9	3	7
Total number male NFGs (number)	**35**	**10**	**6**	**19**
Female NFGs				
Fully participated (number)	4	4	0	0
Discontinued (number)	4	1	0	3
Never participated (number)	0	0	0	0
Total number female NFGs (number)	**8**	**5**	**0**	**3**
Mean age (years)	51.51	49.13	59.50	50.95
Minimum (years)	26	26	45	32
Maximum (years)	72	70	72	70

Source: Survey data, 2010.

Table-2
Educational background and source of prior experience in management, finance and marketing by region, 2010

Characteristic	KZN (n=43)		Midlands (n=15)		South Coast (n=6)		North Coast (n=22)	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Educational background in agriculture and business management								
With agricultural educational background (number)	**1(7)**	**7(28)**	-(5)	5(5)	--	1(5)	1(2)	1(18)
With business related educational background (number)	**1(7)**	**3(32)**	-(5)	1(9)	--	1(5)	1(2)	1(18)
Prior experience in management, finance and marketing								
NFGs with prior experience in management (number)	**2(6)**	**28(7)**	-(5)	9(1)	--	5 (1)	2(1)	14(5)
NFGs with prior experience in finance (number)	**5(3)**	**22(13)**	3(2)	7(3)	-	5 (1)	2(1)	10(9)
NFGs with prior experience in marketing (number)	**3(5)**	**18(17)**	1(4)	7(3)	--	4 (2)	2(1)	7(12)
Source of experience in management								
Managing own farm (number)	**-**	**4**	-	1	-	1	-	2
Employed elsewhere (number)	**1**	**16**	-	5	-	3	1	8
Formal training (number)	**1**	**8**	-	3	-	1	1	4
No experience (number)	**6**	**7**	5	1	-	1	1	5
Source of experience in finance								
Managing own farm (number)	**1**	**2**	1	1	-	-	-	1
Employed elsewhere (number)	**1**	**10**	-	2	-	3	1	5
Formal training (number)	**3**	**10**	2	4	-	2	1	4
No experience (number)	**3**	**13**	2	3	-	1	1	9
Source of experience in marketing								
Managing own farm (number)	**1**	**2**	1	1	-	-	-	1
Employed elsewhere (number)	**1**	**8**	-	1	-	2	1	5
Formal training (number)	**1**	**8**	-	5	-	2	1	1
No experience (number)	**5**	**17**	4	3	-	2	1	12

NB: 1. F = female; M = male; **2.** The numbers in parenthesis are for NFGs with no agricultural and business educational background, prior management, finance and marketing experience.

Table-3
Surveyed NFGs Views about the Sources of Skills for Mentorship Key Result Areas (KSAs), KZN

Sources of Skills In Building NFGs' Capacity in Financial, Agronomic And Other Key Result Areas	Financial KSAs (%)				Agronomic KSAs (%)				Other KSAs (%)	
	Budgeting	Tax reporting	Book keeping	Cash flow mgt	Ratoon mgt	Varieties	Harvesting	Trashing/ burning	Labour managemet	Transport to mill
Mentorship					9.3				9.3	
Extension					9.3	14.0	16.3	16.3		25.6
Mentorship, formal training and own experience	20.9			11.6					9.3	
Mentorship and extension	16.3		9.3		23.3	20.9	16.3	11.6		
Others	55.9	41.9	60.5	68.2	58.1	55.8	53.4	60.4	55.8	39.5
Accountant	6.9	16.3	20.9							
Extension and formal training		14.0								
Formal training		11.6	9.3	11.6						
Formal training and own experience				14.0						
Own experience and other farmers						9.3	14.0	11.6		
Own experience									25.6	20.9
Mentorship, extension and own experience										
Mentorship, extension and other farmers										14.0
Total percentage (%)	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Conclusion

The sample NFGs were mostly male and relatively old and the majority of them had no educational background in either agriculture or any business-related field. However, most of the respondents had prior experience in general management. Relatively few surveyed growers had prior experience in managing sugarcane farms. Further, most of the sample growers had gained financial management experience while working elsewhere and or through formal training. As a result, policy makers should design mentorship and other support services such that address the needs of participants from diverse backgrounds. More importantly, the surveyed NFGs also placed emphasis on mentorship and extension as important source of skills for agronomic or technical aspects of sugarcane production. However, own experience and other farmers also play a significant role as a source of skills to the emerging farmers in sugarcane growing key areas. Consequently, mentorship should not be used to replace extension, but should rather complement it. The surveyed growers also viewed accountants and formal training as the significant sources of skills in financial management aspects. Further, the surveyed emerging growers also put emphasis on own experience as the most important source of skills in labour management and transport to the sugar mill. Extension is also viewed as an important source of skills regarding transport issues. Policy makers, should therefore, carry out a detailed needs analysis before implementing any mentorship interventions, and profile the participants in order to optimize the desired program outcomes. Furthermore, policy makers should promote demand-driven mentorship programmes, where farmers are consulted regarding the structure and implementation of the programme.

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