

**THE ROLE OF FEMALE FARMERS IN POVERTY
ALLEVIATION IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE: A
CASE STUDY OF THREE COMMUNITY PROJECTS
IN THE CENTRAL REGION – RAMATJOWE,
SEKAKENE AND BENEDICT.**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Acknowledgements	i
1. Chapter 1 Background and Introduction	1 - 18
2. Chapter 2 Review of <u>relevant literature</u>	19 - 24
3. Chapter 3 <u>Analysis and Interpretation of Data</u>	25 - 30
4. Chapter 4 Recommendations and conclusion	31 - 42
5. References	43 - 44
6. Addendum: Questionnaire	

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Similar to the rest of Africa, the majority of South Africa's poor live in rural areas, and are part of a total rural population of 52%, with 72% of these rural poor being found in peri-urban areas. According to current census figures, the poverty rate of rural areas in South Africa is 71%, and that of the Northern Province is 59%.

This grim picture shows clearly how efforts directed towards poverty alleviation in the Northern Province cannot be over-emphasized (Saito & Spurling, 1993:8).

Because of the endemic migrant labour system, women predominantly constitute the most stable rural population and tend to outnumber men. In the absence of the men, they head households and fulfil the role of family providers. They therefore engage themselves in smallholder community projects in order to provide food for the family and also to generate income. This underlines the importance of targeting women (especially rural women) in agricultural development programmes, as well as programmes to develop small, medium and micro enterprises (SMME) in the fight against poverty.

The critical levels of poverty and unemployment currently experienced in rural areas mean that considerable pressure should be exerted on the economy to increase the growth rate, and to provide all South Africans, especially the rural poor, with access to economic opportunities.

Hence, any meaningful endeavour towards rural development should target the rural poor, with the hope-for outcomes of eradicating poverty and ignorance and achieving equity in the distribution of economic empowerment through agricultural development.

According to Cooke (1998), development should mean empowerment, capacity building, growth and equity, and should be self-sustaining.

The empowerment of rural women, by integrating them into agricultural development, has to be further enhanced by removing certain obstacles which presently stand in their way, such as security requirements by financial institutions when applying for credit facilities, and having to seek permission to occupy a piece of land. Women should also enjoy access to technology. Rural women need to be educated and to be made aware of their vital role in rural economic development or fight to conquer rural poverty. They should play a central role in overcoming low agricultural productivity caused by poor farming techniques by being taught effective farming methods. Women should be encouraged to discard retrogressive traditional attitudes regarding farming, choice of crops and gender roles. Uneven land distribution is one of the problems facing rural residents, and this needs to be addressed so as to achieve desirable equity in land distribution and ownership.

The goal should be optimal agricultural performance for poverty relief, food security, increased income and employment. Recognizing the contribution of these small-scale women farmers in agricultural development and helping them improve their farming methods, secure land and small loans would impact favourably on poverty alleviation in the rural areas. Hence, the aim of this study is to try to determine the major role played by small-scale women farmers in poverty alleviation.

1.1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Leedy (1989), a research problem constitutes the heart of the research project. This study identifies rural poverty and underdevelopment of rural areas as a problem, and the empowerment of rural women farmers as the solution.

Women, especially resource-poor rural women, are important stakeholders in rural development programs.

A scrutiny of rural women's activities reveals that their contribution in the agricultural sector far surpasses their reproductive role. Literature in most cases presents the opposite view, mostly due to the invisible character of women's productive roles. As invisible actors in development, their contribution to socio-economic development and poverty alleviation is poorly understood and most often deliberately under-estimated.

The key role played by women in agricultural production is not yet adequately reflected in national and international policies. Men receive most of the agricultural extension services, new technologies and credit, while in reality women are the caretakers of the food supply. If women were given the same opportunities and resources as men, developing rural areas such as the Northern Province would receive a significant boost in

their agricultural productivity. This would in turn constitute a major contribution to the alleviation of poverty.

Traditionally, it is the men who have access to land, technology and credit. There is rarely mention of protecting women's rights or empowering women in agriculture.

The law on land ownership is gender insensitive. In practice, the majority of rural women farmers have access to land; what they lack is control or ownership of it: that remains in the hands of male relatives. Therefore, unless the property rights are changed, South Africa risks a stagnant rural agricultural sector.

Together with the need for land security, there is need for appropriate agricultural technology, education, relevant agricultural information and credit, particularly for rural women farmers to enable them to prosper within the agricultural sector. On the other hand, under-investment in rural women farmers' technology has a high cost in terms of lost agricultural output and income.

Clearly, therefore, not involving or supporting women in the fight against rural poverty and underdevelopment is unrealistic as women, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI, 1998:1-48), are the main food-providers. Hence, on the international scene we often encounter the theme "Women Feed the World" (World Food Summit, Rome, 1996; International Conference for Women in Agriculture, USA, 1998). Also, in the Northern Province we had "Women's Week in Agriculture" (1998). These themes demonstrate that women play a vital role in national food security and in the fight against poverty.

Provision of credit is crucial for the purchase of land, equipment and agricultural input. It contributes to an increase in agricultural production and economic growth and

thus plays a role in poverty alleviation. We are therefore going to conduct research in three community projects in order to study the impact of small-scale women farmers in poverty alleviation.

1.1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

A research project should have a clear objective. A clear objective provides the basis for the design of the project, selection of the most appropriate methods and the management of the project once it has been begun. Therefore clearly defined objectives are the key to the success of the whole venture. The objectives of this study are to:

- a) determine the usage of appropriate agricultural technologies by rural women farmers;
- b) determine the accessibility to market places by rural women farmers;
- c) determine accessibility to credit facilities by women farmers; and
- d) to determine the land allocation system in the rural areas.

1.1.4 HYPOTHESES

According to Leedy (1989), a hypothesis is a logical supposition, a reasonable guess and an educated conjecture. It directs the thinking to the possible source of information that will aid in resolving the research problem through the resolution of each attendant sub-problem.

Our study posits the following hypotheses:

- i) the usage of appropriate agricultural technologies increases production;
- ii) accessibility to market places by women farmers can improve their economic situation;
- iii) accessibility to credit by women farmers can promote their ability to purchase farming equipment and agricultural inputs; and
- iv) extending land security rights to women farmers would reduce dependency, and thereby contribute to women empowerment.

1.1.5 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Agriculture: Involves the use of natural resources and other inputs for plant and/or animal production purposes, irrespective whether for own consumption or marketing.

Farmer: Irrespective of race, gender or scale of production, a farmer is a land user who engages productively in agriculture whether on a full or part time basis and despite whether his/her principal source of income is agriculture.

Rural population: From an agricultural perspective, rural population refers to those areas of the public where agricultural practices prevail.

Poverty: Condition where the level of consumption in the household is considered to be below the minimum standard of living; i.e. where the food intake or caloric consumption is below the accepted minimum level.

Smallholder: Farmer who practices agricultural activities on a piece of land of less than two hectares.

1.1.6 METHODOLOGY

1.1.6.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study will be exploratory since there are some smallholder women farmers in the rural areas engaged in agricultural activities.

1.1.6.2 STUDY POPULATION

The study population will cover 37 farmers at Ramatjowe, 28 at Sekakene and 35 at Benedict community projects, respectively. The study will cover about 100 farmers.

1.1.6.3 THE SAMPLE

Purposive sampling will be used for the study. Purposive sampling involves using the researcher's own judgement to choose, for a particular purpose, exactly who will be included in the sample. Secondly, the size of the study population determines the choice of sampling technique. It was envisaged that the study sample would be two hundred. However, the study population in the three smallholder community projects is less than 200; therefore, purposive sampling will be used. That means all farmers from these areas will be involved as the study population. Community leaders will also be targeted specifically on decision

making and ownership issues.

1.1.6.4 DATA COLLECTION

- i) Group interview
- ii) Personal interview
- iii) Observations
- iv) Questionnaire

1.1.6.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Data collected will be analysed by counting the answers of the respondents. The more the answers, which are in favour of the alleviation of poverty by smallholder farmers, the truer the study.

1.1.6.6 VALIDITY & RELIABILITY

In our study, to check reliability and validity we need to focus on poverty line standards as a measure to determine the state of poverty in an area. Poverty line standards determine the levels of income or expenditure below which a person is considered poor. Poverty line standards are a common approach for assessing the extent of poverty in a country. There are no uniformly agreed poverty line standards for South Africa. A commonly used method is by establishing the level of consumption below which households are considered to have less than a

'minimum' standard of living.

For example, the level of consumption consistent with a minimum level of food intake (caloric consumption) is often relevant in defining an 'absolute' poverty line. Therefore caloric consumption will be used as a more reliable instrument, which is also valid to measure the number of poor people in an area.

In order to confirm the importance of markets, we would investigate the total harvest per season and the total loss through rotting. The more post-harvest rot, the more serious is the issue of market availability.

1.1.7 PROVISIONAL STRUCTURE

CHAPTER 1: Introduction and background information

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

CHAPTER 3: Data Interpretation

CHAPTER 4: Recommendations and conclusion

APPENDIX

- References.
- Acknowledgements
- Questionnaires

1.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE STUDY AREAS

1.2.1 RAMATJOWE COMMUNITY PROJECT

1.2.1.1 Introduction

The project area is found in the northern part of Pietersburg. It has a village population of \pm 4920 (Batlokwa Tribal Authority Report, 1995). The project was established in 1995 by 18 women. They were given 0,5 ha. to produce vegetables by a nearby primary school in the village. Initially they used community or domestic water for irrigating their crops. Thereafter, in 1996, they received assistance from the Department of Agriculture and Environment through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Initially they used community or domestic water for irrigating their crops.

The programme fenced a 0,9 ha. area at a new site, composed of 28 plots of 300 square metres each. Presently, the project has 14 committed members, each occupying 2 plots as the rest of the project members withdrew. Some project members withdrew due to lack of commitment and others withdrew due to lack of capital to run their plots.

The Programme also drilled a borehole for irrigation purposes at the project site.

1.2.1.2. Resource Development

According to the report compiled by Africorn Group (made up of

engineering consultants. 1995), the following was stated:

1.2.1.2.1. Borehole

A successful borehole (no. A/C/10.2) was developed some 320 metres north-west of the vegetable project.

The drilled depth is 58 metres, with a pump setting at 54 metres below ground level. The maximum pumping duration per 24 hours is 8 hours.

1.2.1.2.2. Water

There is sustainable water for portable use. In terms of the South African Quality Guidelines for Domestic Use, the borehole water may be classified as class II. This implies that the water is suitable for short-term portable use only, and not for daily consumption.

The water indicates a low sodium and high salinity hazard. In view of these laboratory water tests, carried out by the government soil analysts, irrigation with water from the developed borehole will induce salinisation unless salts are leached and water-tables are kept low by adequate drainage. To this effect, crops are planted on ridges, with the downstream end of each formed furrow between ridges left open for natural discharge and drainage.

In order to correct salinity, surplus irrigation is recommended to leach some of the accumulated salt to below the

crop root zone.

Because of salinity, sensitive vegetable crops such as beans, carrots, onions, peas and parsnips should be avoided, as they will be of poor quality.

Tolerant vegetable crops such as courgette (small vegetable marrow), squash, beet, tomatoes, cabbage, spinach and green peppers should be considered instead (Results reported by the soil scientists from the Agricultural Research Council - ARC - institute in Potchefstroom in 1995).

1.2.1.2.3. Soils

The soils are uniform in nature, classified as shallow Hutton Portsmouth (ARC report, 1995). The soil is rather shallow and the soil texture is sandy loam. The low nutrient status of the soils would necessitate adequate fertilisation. Regular liming of the soil would be necessary to neutralize the acidifying effect of fertilisation.

1.2.1.4. **Operation, Maintenance and Repairs**

The members accepted responsibility for maintenance and operation procedures and costs. All operation and maintenance costs would be covered by internal levies and tariffs without any external subsidy.

The members accepted the fact that they were to operate and maintain the

project themselves.

The monthly fee requirement to operate and maintain the project satisfactorily is R58.00 per member - i.e. $14 \times 58 = R812.00$ - to cover the project's running and maintenance costs. This amount would be reviewed annually, in keeping with the provision made for escalation of costs.

1.2.1.4. Training

The Department of Agriculture and Environment conducted the following courses for the project members: Bookkeeping and Financial Control and Maintenance and Operational Aspects.

1.2.1.5. Costs

Drilling and testing	R19 703.00
Drilling and testing	R19 703.00
Mechanical and Civil installation	R80 995.00
Electrical installations	R35 689.00
Design and supervision	R71 764.00
Community Liaison	R1 048.00
Total Capital Cost (VAT Inclusive)	R209 199.00

1.2.2. SEKAKENE COMMUNITY PROJECT

1.2.2.1. Introduction

The Project was established in 1996 by eight (8) men and seven (7) women. They were given an area of about 1.4 ha. by the local tribal chief in order to produce vegetables. The project involves a village population of ± 5658 (Batlokwa Tribal Authority Report, 1995).

The area was divided into 30 plots of 300 square metres each.

Initially, the project had no irrigation water. The Department of Agriculture and Environment, through the Reconstruction and Development Programme, assisted in the development of the project by fencing the project site and drilling a borehole for irrigation purposes. Each member occupies two plots.

1.2.2.2. Resource Development

A report compiled by the Africorn Group of engineering consultants states the following:

1.2.2.2.1. Borehole

A functioning borehole (no. A/C/9.1) was successfully developed some 80 metres south-east of the project.

Its drilled depth is 46 metres, with a pump setting at 42 metres below ground level.

The maximum pumping duration per 24 hrs. is 8 hours.

1.2.2.2.2. Water

There is sustainable water for portable use. In terms of the South African Water Quality Guidelines for Domestic Use, the borehole water may be classified as Class II, which implies that the water is suitable for life time use. The water indicates a high sodium and high salinity hazard.

Irrigation from the development borehole may induce salinisation unless salts are leached regularly and water tables kept low by adequate drainage. Sensitive vegetable crops such as beans, celery and radish are avoided at all cost.

More tolerant vegetable crops such as squash, beet, carrot, tomatoes, cabbage, spinach and green peppers are mostly recommended (ARC report, 1995).

1.2.2.2.3. Soils

The soils are uniform in nature. It is rather shallow and its texture varies from loamy sand to sandy loam (ARC report, 1995).

The measured low nutrient status of the soils necessitates adequate fertilisation. Regular liming is recommended to neutralise the acidifying effect of fertilisation. Some corrective irrigation measures such as that practised at Ramatjowe Community Project should also be practised.

1.2.2.3. Operation, Maintenance and Repairs

The members accepted responsibility for maintenance and operation procedures and costs. All operation and maintenance costs are covered by internal levies and tariffs without any external subsidy.

Each project member pays R20.00 into a trust account, on a monthly basis, to cover the project's running and maintenance costs. The amount is reviewed annually, in order to make provision for escalation of costs.

1.2.2.4. Training

The project members received similar training as those of the Ramatjowe project. They were trained in Bookkeeping and Finance Control and also in maintenance and operational aspects in order to enhance their operational and maintenance knowledge.

1.2.2.5. Costs

Drilling and testing:	R20 184.00
Design and supervision:	R41 799.00
Community liaison:	R1 048.00
Grand total:	R63 031.00

1.2.3. BENEDICT COMMUNITY PROJECT

1.2.3.1. Introduction

The project, which covers a 2 ha. area, is situated in Quayle 180 KS farm, 20 km. south-east of Pietersburg, and it borders on a private farm. It is under the jurisdiction of Molepo Local Government at Laastehoop Village. With an estimated annual rainfall of 480 mm., the area is classified climatologically as semi-arid thornveld, dominated by Acacia bushes.

Frost occurrence is minimal and the maximum temperature is about 27 degrees C, with minimal hail hazard. The project has a village population of about 6000.

1.2.3.2. Resource Development

A borehole (no. A/C/3.1C) was developed some 120 metres south of the project. It has a drilled depth of 50 metres, with a pump setting at 45 metres below ground level. The project consists of 20 x 50 square metre plots, and the irrigation method used is furrow by dragline, fitted to the quick coupling hose outlet. The project members are sharing the dragline.

1.2.3.2.1. Water

In terms of the South African Water Quality Guidelines for Domestic Use, the borehole water is classified as class I (ARC, 1995). It implies that the water is suitable for lifetime portable use.

The water indicates a low sodium and medium salinity hazard. The

irrigators have to control the pumping themselves, as the water has to be carried by hand to various plots. Buckets are filled directly from the pump or from the reservoir.

1.2.3.3. Operation, Maintenance and Repairs

The running costs and maintenance of the project are the responsibility of the members themselves. The agreement stipulated by the members is similar to those of the other projects.

1.2.3.4. Training

The project members attended similar courses like those of Sekakene and Ramatjowe project members.

1.2.3.5. Costs

Reservoir:	R15 000.00
Engine:	R40 000.00
Pipes:	R15 000.00
Borehole:	R 8 000.00
TOTAL COST	R73 000.00

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

There are numerous researchers who have studied rural development as a means of addressing the poverty which is endemic in rural areas. One of these is rural development specialist, Robert Chambers (1997), who, in his book, *Rural Development: Putting the last first*, addresses his deliberations to the people who are concerned with rural poverty and rural development. In his book he explicitly spells out the way forward for all professionals by exposing prevalent perceptions and attitudes, and by prescribing new ways of thinking and behaviour about rural poverty. Reading his book is an enriching experience both for its informative content and the great effort that went into gathering such information.

According to my observation, Chambers' book is a valuable contribution in teaching other professionals about the nature of poverty. However, Chambers deals only with the fundamental issues of defining poverty without necessarily engaging himself deeply into the ways and means of its alleviation in the rural areas. Knowing about poverty and fighting poverty yield different results. Obviously, fighting poverty has more positive results. It is therefore the aim of this study to take over from where Chambers' book stops, by exploring the efforts and strategies of poverty alleviation.

Gender analysts in agriculture, Feldstein and Jiggins, in their book, *Tools for the Field: Methodologies Handbook for Gender Analysis in Agriculture*, focus particularly on the

use of research tools. The authors concentrate mainly on the 38 cases demonstrating the recently developed tools for rural development, also fashioned to suit the respective genders, which became the book's most dominant subject of exploration. The researchers argue that understanding gender differences is important in helping science to shape improved technologies to meet the needs and fit the circumstances of small farm households. However, the researchers have not extended their exploration to the issue of how these tools could help rural women in fighting or alleviating poverty. Our view, therefore, is that the book has limitations in that it does not address the challenges of rural women by suggesting the relevant tools for fighting poverty.

Senior Economist, Kathrine Saito, and Consultant in women development, Daphne Spurling, in their book, *Developing Agricultural Extension for Women Farmers* (1993), discuss the activities of women farmers and their production systems. They also provide a framework for analysing gender issues; more specifically, how they affect the women's role in agricultural production and the constraints faced by women farmers. Their book ranks among the best. This is especially so because of their obvious sympathetic treatment of women and their invisible position in the agricultural sphere. Their book has this limitation, however: the authors have not gone on to show how women, being considered poor, especially in the rural areas, could bail themselves out of poverty. Nor do they recognize the obvious link between women farmers and the eradication of poverty – although the two, according to my view, are linked.

Veldhuizen van Lourens and Ann Water-Bayer are authors of the book, *Developing Technology with farmers*. Their book focuses mainly on Participatory

Technology Development (PTD). PTD, according to the authors, is essentially a process of purposeful and creative interaction between rural people and outside facilitators. Technology development is geared not only towards solving current problems of usage of inappropriate technology, especially in the rural areas, but also towards developing sustainable agricultural practices which conserve and enhance the natural resources so that they can still be used by future generations.

The authors also explicitly indicate the importance of PTD in strengthening the capacity of farmers and rural communities to analyse the ongoing process of technological development. This is because PTD gives excellent guidance on technologies in agricultural production.

However, the book gives no clear guidelines for suitable technologies for rural women farmers to fight poverty.

Dr. Cooke (1995), in his CTA annual report of 1995, has cited information for agricultural and rural development. In his report, he regards rural development as a complex process. Yet he does not go far enough to explain how it can be tackled as it exists. According to my view, Dr Cooke could have explored some practical strategies in view of the havoc that poverty is causing in the rural areas. But his report offers no such strategies. Hence, it is this researcher's view that talking about poverty and not suggesting any practical solutions is a fruitless exercise.

It is the aim of this study, therefore, to identify strategies or ways and means of fighting poverty so as to save the rural poor.

Our standpoint in this study is that rural areas are mainly populated by women.

Therefore, one cannot usefully talk about rural development without correlating it with women's involvement. Rural women farmers, if well focused, could bring about change through development, which would eliminate poverty. Our study will try to fill the gap left by the other researchers who, as demonstrated above, have not targeted rural women farmers as the core actors in the fight against poverty.

The Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) and the South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE) have conducted many seminars, conferences and research projects addressing poverty alleviation in rural areas.

A conference held by SASAE (1997) at the Warmbaths Aventura Resort, in the Northern Province, dealt with several topics and, *inter alia*, the topic on development strategies, which addressed poverty in rural areas was strongly debated. Burger and Burger (SASAE, 1997:21-27) presented on strategies for addressing the basic needs and aspirations of rural communities. They argued that economic growth and poverty alleviation in the rural areas can only be achieved through the development of the human resource: training and educating rural women.

They further argued that agricultural extension and agricultural education should be blended together to create a formidable force through which not only knowledge and skills are transmitted, but also people's improved perception of themselves: Their inherent strengths and aspirations should be improved and enhanced.

Their argument was of paramount importance. They, however, limited themselves by not going beyond the development of human resources. Human resource development should not be considered a panacea for the rural poor. Other root causes of rural poverty,

together with strategies for eradicating them, should also be considered- such as lack of land, lack of credit and lack of markets. The study will investigate the importance of land, credit facilities, markets, and appropriate technology as a development package towards poverty alleviation.

A subsequent SASAE conference was held in 1998 in East London, Eastern Cape Province. Ferreira (SASAE, 1998:182-193) presented a case study of women's projects in community agricultural development in the Northern Province. This was on small-scale women agricultural farming production and the enhancement of the rural poor.

She elaborated much on the agricultural activities women are involved in, which constitute mainly production of vegetables, rearing of chickens, cultivating mixed crops and field crops. Ferreira's study had this limitation: She only indicated the types of agricultural projects women are engaged in and did not go on to evaluate their sustainability. She identified about 522 women-run agricultural projects in the Northern Province. She did not go on to find out about their impact on poverty alleviation nor if the projects were potentially self-sustaining, for it is possible that the 522 projects could exist for only a short term. This study will therefore investigate the sustainability of the women-run projects in the selected areas, and whether they have an impact on poverty alleviation or are just "white elephants". Their limitations will also be considered.

Journals, such as SASAE, which cover the role played by small scale-women farmers in poverty alleviation are playing an important role in bringing knowledge to all stakeholders.

Professor N.M. Mollel in the Department of Agricultural Extension, University of

the North, and B. Hedden Dunkhorst, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of the North, have published an informative paper in the SASAE journal of 1999 (Vol. 28, p 93-106). Their paper sheds some light on the situation of small-scale agriculture and support services. The researchers describe the different areas in the Province and conclude by offering suggestions for further improvement of the extension service for small-scale farmers in the Province. They selected three study areas for their survey, located in Bochum, Sekhukhuneland and Sekgosese District.

The focus of their paper was an extension, but it also looked at means of support through credit and grants, i.e. access to credit for farming and grants for agricultural inputs.

Their study concluded that there was lack of appropriate technologies offered to small-scale farmers, while their findings relating to the impact of credit or grants on crop production show that cash constraints limit agricultural productivity. Their paper bears more relevance to the topic of this study, with this difference only: their study is silent concerning the role played by small-scale women farmers in poverty alleviation. Their paper was on small-scale farmers in general. Lamentably, their otherwise fruitful discussion makes no mention of the constraints faced by small-scale women farmers.

Much could have been discovered had they extended their survey to the role played by small-scale women farmers in poverty alleviation. This study will therefore attempt to fill the gap left by these experts.

CHAPTER 3

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The study has indicated that the project farmers utilise three different types of ploughing equipment. They use their respective group's savings to hire a tractor to plough the whole project. Thereafter, the farmers level the soil clots using hand hoes. They then use spades to make irrigation furrows.

They do the ploughing communally because it is difficult for a tractor to plough for only one member in the community project as there are no access roads inside the project to allow the tractor ample movement space in-between individual plots. Ploughing is done once in the whole project; thereafter, each farmer prepares her plot for planting.

The majority of the farmers, according to the study, indicated that they used fertilisers in their projects to improve the soil fertility so as to boost their produce. They have to purchase the fertilisers from retailers more than 50 km. away from their residential areas, which indicates that access to agricultural inputs poses a problem. Hence, these small-scale farmers are faced with a double expenditure involving transport and buying costs - an uncomfortable situation for these cash-strapped farmers.

The study indicated that the farmers' production was low despite using fertilisers. Close observations of their activities indicated that the farmers are not following the correct fertilisation measurements and correct time frames. The use

of disease control measures seems to be done incorrectly, resulting in poor production.

These farmers had not received adequate training in essential management skills such as production management, financial management, book-keeping and project management. Their understanding of these skills seemed to be substantially very low, and this has a direct relation to their poor production rate.

The small-scale farmers' marketing strategy is not well formulated. Each farmer has the responsibility of selling her own products. Those farmers with cars are at a greater advantage because they are able to carry their products to the people more easily than those without cars.

Those who are immobile use wheel-barrow or have their children carry manageable head-loads in basins to sell around nearby villages. The system is, understandably, strenuous for such an immobile farmer as she has to repeatedly go back to the project to refill her container with her wares.

On the whole, the farmers seem to prefer on-site selling wherein the products are sold at the project site. The idea seems to be working successfully. However, disturbances are occasionally noticed when the nearby commercial farmer attracts the community with his low prices. For example, small-scale farmers sell their cabbages at three rand each while commercial farmers sell at one rand each. The difference in price disadvantages the small-scale farmers, and most of their produce end up rotting on their projects. This situation has a negative impact on their economic growth.

The study indicated that small-scale farmers have an interest in utilising formal markets. Formal markets are costly; firstly, because they are situated far away from the rural areas. Secondly, they have complex set standards which should be met by all those sending in their products. Thirdly, formal market prices are not stable. Ultimately, therefore, formal markets favour bulk producers or commercial farmers, with the small-scale farmer who produces less than five tonnes of products seemingly being unfit for this category of markets.

On the other hand, informal markets seem to suit the needs of the small-scale farmer. The prices of their products are fixed, there are no complex procedures to be followed, and the transport cost is reasonably affordable as the products are hawked locally, along the streets or door-to-door.

The study indicated that commercial farmers dominate the formal markets. This is so because they are in a better position to comply with most, if not all, of the requirements of these markets. In view of the numerous handicaps of small-scale farmers, their economical growth looks poor. Their marketing strategies are also poor. They appear not to be organised. Most of them are not members of any farmers' union and the contribution of those who are members is far from satisfactory.

Farmers' unions are necessary to share farming ideas with other experts in the farming world. The greatest problem of farmers' unions is the power struggle within the organisations, a situation which prevails in the Northern Province. The study did not cover this disturbing environment as it qualifies to be a study on its own.

The dissemination of written information to small-scale farmers is mainly through extension workers. A study, evaluating the effectiveness of extension services for small-scale farmers in the Sekgosese area, reveals a general lack of access to written information by extension workers. The study showed that only about one-third of field extension workers had access to written information on specific farming enterprises. This was particularly so in the areas of economics and farm management. It is clear from these findings that there is generally poor dissemination of reference material to extension staff serving the small-scale farming sector, which in turn affects the quality of their advice to these farmers.

The most essential need mentioned by the small-scale farmers was financial assistance. Financial institutions, such as the Land Bank, are available; small-scale women farmers, however, do not qualify because they do not meet the required standards and have no security. Yet these small-scale women farmers need financial assistance to enable them to buy agricultural inputs and tools, and to make some necessary improvements in the land they are using for agricultural purposes.

Rural women farmers are unable to save because they are too poor; therefore, subsidised credit is necessary in order to motivate them to apply new technologies. Access to new technology and current information would result in production growth.

Research is done on small-scale farmers without sharing the findings with them. This may be the reason why small-scale farmers are found not to be participating fully in their own development, and projects not seen as community-

driven, but as imposed by government officials.

Land tenure was also indicated by the study as a problem. Small-scale farmers regard guaranteed tenure, with all its attendant surety, as a major incentive for them to improve their agricultural land. This enables and inspires them to invest and grow enough to sell.

Credit and grants to purchase farming inputs are provided partly by the government through extension officers and partly by other organisations. The study indicated that there is a new extension approach that is being tested by the Department of Agriculture to identify appropriate technologies for small-scale farmers. The farmers are participating fully in the identification of an appropriate technology suitable to their farming system. The idea is to assist primarily small-scale farmers to use their limited resources most effectively.

The new approach is called the Participatory Extension Approach (PEA). The approach seems to be operating well as the farmers are involved in their own development. Its full results should be seen after three years as it is presently at the introductory stage. The task is done with external assistance, such as the German Technical Co-operation (GTZ). This is a giant step indeed taken by the government to promote the development of small-scale farmers.

In conclusion, the study indicated the two most important factors which could accelerate the growth of small-scale farmers. These are access to agricultural inputs and credit. The farmers indicated that they experienced problems with both the affordability and accessibility of agricultural inputs. They also experienced problems with transport and access to formal markets. The prevailing land tenure

system which favours men, mainly, was also cited as another impediment to success.

All these factors were discussed with the farmers during the study, together with several suggestions. These are highlighted in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Most development in African countries, South Africa inclusive, uses the top-down structural approach. This denies the recipients - farmers in our case - the opportunity of participating actively in decision-making on the development programmes which will be suitable for enhancing their own standard of living. In community development, the top-down structural approach *prescribes* the degree of individual and collective involvement of citizens in issues that affect them.

The study welcomes the move towards participatory research whose importance lies in the fact that it draws community members into participating in the analysis of their own reality, since both the process and the result are of immediate and direct benefit to them and their community. By creating interaction between communities and researchers, participatory research gives rise to dialogue and discussion. The local people thereby become more aware of the nature of their problems, needs, proposed solutions and take collective action. Participatory research is, therefore, of potentially great benefit to small-scale farmer development.

According to Cooke (1998), development should mean empowerment, capacity building, growth and equity, and it should be characterised by self-perpetuation, ecological harmony and a post-patriarchal culture. Real small-scale farmer development can be assessed by the criterion of active participation of farmers themselves at all levels of their development stages or phases.

There is usually a need to educate the small-scale women farmers and create awareness

in them to help them overcome low agricultural productivity resulting from poor techniques, negative or retrogressive attitudes, non-adoption of new methods due to ignorance, uneven land distribution or urban migration.

Empowerment of small-scale women farmers by integrating them into development activities which could result in poverty alleviation, can be achieved through non-formal educational activities and the through Participatory Extension Approach (PEA). This would emancipate the farmers and render them independent and self-sufficient.

Non-formal education constitutes a powerful instrument in the democratisation process since it aids rural farmers' development by extending skills and attitudes to the rural population. It can serve to transmit the necessary farming technologies to farmers irrespective of their literacy level.

In addition to better planning, more participation of the rural women farmers, adequate allocation and utilisation of resources coupled with government support; non-formal education can contribute to the achievement of good and sound economical goals. Non-formal educational programmes can raise the consciousness of rural women farmers and promote self-reliance in agricultural development.

The potential of smallholder agriculture to create employment, generate income and contribute to poverty alleviation and food security in the rural areas has been proven in many developing countries. This is recognised by the new South African Government and is reflected in the new Agricultural Policy (Ministry of Agriculture and Land Affairs, 1998). This policy is highly supportive to the small-scale farmers who were disadvantaged by the previous regime.

To promote development in small-scale agriculture, agricultural support services are

restructured and new programmes and projects are implemented. Agricultural research, extension services and finance institutions are today, to a much larger extent, targeting the small-scale farmers.

In South Africa's Northern Province, 88 percent of the population of 5.1 million people live in rural areas (Development Bank of Southern Africa, 1995). More than ninety percent of rural households are involved in agricultural activities (University of the North, Department of Agricultural Economics, 1996; and Statistics South Africa, 1999).

The statistics are far from perfect, but they show that poverty in the Northern Province is pervasive and predominantly rural. Policy makers will have to design aggressive approaches to fight the province's poverty.

The following approaches or strategies were discussed during the study:

There is urgent need to discourage the existing competition between the commercial farmers and the small-scale farmers. Commercial farmers should focus mainly on the formal market and give the small-scale farmers opportunity to dominate the local informal markets. This would result in the latter's economic growth, leading to alleviation of poverty. Such economic growth is fundamental in combating poverty. Standards of living cannot rise without new wealth being generated through economic activity, with agricultural activities being the most tenable for the rural dweller.

The provision of financial support services to the small-scale rural women farmers in the Northern Province has to be seen as of first priority, and should top the agenda of any discussions about the development of small-scale farmers. Luckily, the Reconstruction and Development Programme

tries to ensure access to financial services in rural areas. Financial systems serving the small-scale farmers should be accessible both in spatial distance and usage, by being nearby and having less sophisticated requirements so as not to baffle the rural farmer.

Financial institutions should formulate rules and regulations which will accommodate the category of small-scale women farmers. Financial assistance from the government is very inadequate as their budgets are often dominated by salaries and capital expenditures, with only a pittance allocated to helping the small-scale farmers. The availability of credit would enable the small-scale farmers to grow enough to sell. Microfinance institutions have shown that credit for the poor is viable and can be self-sustaining. Traditional institutions should also have a role to play in providing such credit. Insurance services can help offset the losses caused by accidents, illness or crop loss. Innovative inputs from the private sector are also required.

The Dissemination of written or printed materials directed at the small-scale farmers have had limited impact, communication has been of a top-down nature with little or no scientific planning of strategies. It is essential that there should be adequate structures and linkages in place to ensure effective transfer of information and technology from research, through extension workers, to small-scale farmers. Without an accepted policy and information transfer strategy at national and provincial level, linkages in the technology transfer process are unlikely to function effectively.

There is a need for a national research data base which can be accessed by provincial agricultural departments and other organisations which are responsible for technology transfer to farmers.

In order to ensure the effective flow of information, co-ordination mechanisms need to be

in place at research institutes and provincial agricultural departments.

Subject-matter-specialists play a key role in effective technology transfer systems by acting as a link between researchers and extension workers, thus promoting the quality of advice and information to the small-scale farmers.

It is a common misconception that only information and education are needed to change attitudes and behaviour. Even if the information received by the farmers is applicable, it cannot be used without access to farming inputs, credit, irrigation, markets and other essential support services. This reinforces the contention that effective communication needs to be integrated into an overall agricultural production strategy and programme.

Extension services need to be reoriented towards the small-scale farmers. They should focus on crops and livestock which are of interest to the poor and on bringing the poor into the market economy. Research efforts should be shifted onto the non-commercial crops grown by small-scale farmers and the results should be shared with them to encourage their participation and giving them a say in the direction of their agricultural development.

Governments can do much to help small-scale farmers to sell their surplus produce, by constructing farm-to-market roads and market infrastructures for the farmers.

Another suggestion is that the government could provide market information, by informing the farmers of current market prices so that they can better plan their planting and harvesting time in order to secure the best deals for selling their produce.

The historic dualistic South African agriculture and extension service, currently characterised by imbalances in favour of the commercial sector, calls for a major shift in focus. The challenge will be to find a service that will allow for uplifting of the small-scale farming

sector, which has to remain competitive in the international arena. The above scenario is underscored by the present Ministry of Agriculture's goal to focus attention on promoting small-scale farmers, especially women farmers.

Agricultural extension research and finance institutions should, to a larger extent than at present, target the small-scale farmers in order to promote development in small-scale agriculture. The rural farmer's system, wherein subsistence production is the major objective, should be transformed to becoming more like that of commercial farming by emphasising income generation to combat poverty.

Farmers' organisations play a significant role in supporting agricultural development. For the South African Farmers' Union, a good foundation was built to provide quality service to the commercial farming sector by means of financial support from the previous government.

The National African Farmers Union (NAFU), on the other hand, could not provide the much needed support to subsistence and emerging farmers because of a weak financial base, a fact which needs serious consideration by the policymakers if at all we want to promote development in small-scale agriculture.

The new extension approach, tested by the Department of Agriculture and Environment on the identification and development of appropriate technologies through farmer participation, is a giant step towards promoting the development of small-scale farmers. Were it to be complemented by a monitoring and evaluation component which would help in correcting and eliminating errors, the new approach would be complete and effective. The farmers' participation in the research, planning, identification and prioritisation of needs, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes provides them with organisational and research skills, thereby becoming

empowered to make their own decisions about their development (DBSA, 1995).

The concept of poverty is both old and new. It is old because it has always existed, and it is new in the sense that it was not commonly defined as a problem until recently (Lauer, 1995:30).

Since its being regarded as a problem world-wide, more especially in the developing countries, poverty reduction strategies have become of vital importance in rural Africa.

In 1998 in Wageningen, Netherlands, the European Union Member States and ACP (African Caribbean Pacific) Group of states met for three days in a workshop. The aim of the workshop was to explore conditions under which sector approaches in agriculture can best be used to reduce poverty, and not bypass substantial numbers of poor people to avoid disadvantaging them further. The workshop came up with measures for ensuring that any growth process undertaken by the ACP member states would be pro-poor, and that poor farmers would have access to production resources, markets and services- with the end-result that, the development of small-scale women farmers would cease to be a myth.

During the workshop deliberations, March 2000 was set as the target date on which all the arrangements would have been effected. There was hope and trust that the distilled thoughts during the workshop provided valuable ideas and guidance to those involved in poverty reduction policies, including the Northern Province.

There is an urgent call for a major rethinking of the prevalent anti-poverty strategies as poverty becomes more and more pervasive. Policy makers will have to design approaches which are pro-poor in outlook. Two vital elements which policy-makers need to consider in poverty reduction are: Growth and Distribution.

Growth is fundamental to combating poverty as the standard of living cannot rise without new wealth being generated through economic activity, specifically through agricultural activity as the central one for rural small-holder farmers.

Distribution is also the key. Wealth must not stay in the hands of a few. Policies must ensure that its benefits are distributed widely. Relevant policies include land reform, reform in taxation, infrastructure development and the provision of services. Once a broad anti-poverty strategy has been agreed upon, it will provide a vision and a framework for small-scale farmers' development.

Fighting poverty has long been found to be a mammoth task because of insufficient information on the extent and nature of poverty, and insufficient information on the views of the poor themselves, particularly in the case of women who form a disproportionate number of the poor and produce most of the rural food. Policies and services continue to favour men. Data that do exist about the nature of poverty are patchy and often poorly analysed. To compound matters, many policy-makers come from urban areas or have migrated to the cities; so they lack direct, in-depth experience of rural areas and conditions faced by rural people. Poverty assessment methods need to be improved to enhance the understanding of the poor and the design of interventions to combat poverty (DBSA, 1995).

In order for the small-scale women farmers to fight poverty effectively, limitations highlighted in this study should be considered of highest priority. Women should no longer be seen as the property or appendages of men, but should be heard and should liberate themselves from obsolete traditional belief systems which regard their place as being in the "kitchen". Women have the right to participate meaningfully in rural development in order to fight poverty.

In conclusion, the plight of small-scale women farmers needs no further emphasis. The following are points for consideration in developing small-scale women farmers. They are the ingredients of the cake of success of the small-scale farmers.

a) **Access to credit by small-scale farmers**

It will encourage farmers to seek alternative and effective means of increasing productivity.

b) **Provide appropriate technology**

Technology is a good investment only when the recipient actually receives the tangible benefits it promises.

c) **Provide a basic and reliable infrastructure**

A basic infrastructure is essential for rural and agricultural development; e.g. roads can enhance rural production capacity.

d) **Provide marketing information to farmers**

Farmers, like the rest of us, tend to be rational decision-makers when provided with useful information. Provision of relevant information could be of crucial importance to the farmers' achieving prosperity.

e) **Provide training to farmers**

Training farmers to grow valuable crops which have a sound market base can improve their productivity and commitment to farming. Back-up extension services should be based on the “farmer as king” approach. Visits to other projects may also motivate farmers to feel committed to farming through sharing information. The urge to compete healthily must be cultivated in farmers.

f) **Incorporate other crop regimes**

Such an approach will ensure diversification and promote initiative towards alternative agricultural projects for the farmers. Availability of marketing information will improve the economical status of farmers.

g) **Adopt flexible marketing policy and strategies**

In this era of deregulation and privatisation, marketing policies should be more flexible and should move away from the old forms of control. Marketing strategies should be undertaken under a more competitive and less restrictive business environment.

h) **Publish marketing arrangements in time**

Strategies and arrangements for the coming season should be outlined well in advance. This could pre-empt dissatisfaction and promote good relations

between farmers and agencies. It is best done by holding meetings with project participants and discovering their wishes and interests.

i) **Announce policy changes widely**

Policy changes should be announced as early as possible to all those likely to be affected. It is the duty of the skilled and the well-read to explain and convince and not to confuse the not-so-literate in matters that affect their well-being. The social dynamics of any community must be acknowledged if failure is to be avoided.

j) **Increase size of land units**

Farmers are forever voicing their dissatisfaction with the present land units. Fortunately, the Ministry of Agriculture is putting more effort into Land Reform matters. The process of giving land to farmers is on. The President of the country has appealed for the speeding up of the process in order to avoid the current situation in Zimbabwe where people are invading farms illegally.

It was a pleasure and honour to hear The Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs, Mrs. Thoko Didiza, in her budget speech of 2000, stating that one key initiative or strategy in agricultural reform would be to broaden access to agricultural services, especially for the previously disadvantaged.

She clearly mentioned that the Department had identified the constraints faced by previously disadvantaged farmers, and that they had developed new instruments for information dissemination among the farmers. The Minister also mentioned that the Government would need to ensure that resources are allocated accordingly, to enhance the capacity for the promotion of domestic markets and management of agricultural statistics; promote development of small-scale farmers and development of defensive trade measures, as well as promote international trade.

The Minister also pointed out that during the next five years a farmer-settlement programme specifically targeting young people and women as beneficiaries would be implemented.

The speech focused mainly on development and promoting the improvement of agricultural conditions of the previously disadvantaged people (especially women farmers). After five years, we hope and trust that the Minister's objectives of developing the poor will have been achieved, especially the development of the small-scale women farmers.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

THE ROLE OF FEMALE FARMER IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE : A CASE STUDY OF THREE COMMUNITY PROJECTS IN THE CENTRAL REGION – RAMATJOWE, SEKAKENE AND BENEDICT

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Please try to answer the questions as honestly as possible
2. All information will be treated as strictly confidential
3. Where you have to write an answer please print clearly
4. In most of the questions you will answer by putting "x" in the relevant square

1. Which agricultural implements are you using ?
- 1. Tractor
 - 2. Cattle span
 - 3. Hoe
 - 4. other (specify)
2. Do you use fertilizers ?
- 1. Yes
 - 2. No
3. Which fertilizers do you mostly use?
- a. 2:3:2
 - b. 3:2:1
 - c. lan
 - d. Kraal manure
 - e. No usage
 - f. Other (specify)
4. How is your production?
- 1. High
 - 2. Low

5. What type of irrigation system do you use ?

- 1. Springler
- 2. Drip
- 3. Furrow
- 4. Flood
- 5. Other (Specify)

6. Which agricultural control measures do you practice?

- 1. Pesticides
- 2. Fungicide
- 3. Weedcide
- 4. Hang hoeing
- 5. Other (specify)

7. Which management courses have you attended?

- 1. Production management
- 2. Financial management
- 3. Bookkeeping
- 4. None
- 5. Other (specify)

8. How do you dispatch your produce to the market place?

- 1. By transport
- 2. On land selling
- 3. Village selling
- 4. Other specify

9. Are there any other points you would like to make with regard to the usage of relevant agricultural technologies by women farmers.

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10. Why are you involved in agricultural activities?

- 1. Generating income
- 2. Consumptions
- 3. Sharing
- 4. Other (specify)

11. How do you sell your produce?

- 1. Market
- 2. Locally
- 3. No selling
- 4. Other (specify)

12. How far is distance for obtaining fertilizers?

- 1. 5 - 10km
- 2. 10km – 80km
- 3. Other (specify)

13. Who has access to formal markets?

- 1. Subsistence Farmers
- 2. Commercial Farmers
- 3. All
- 4. Other (Specify)

14. Did markets improves your economic situation?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Other (specify)

15. Are there any further points would like to make with regard to accessibility to market places by women farmers?

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16. How do you obtain agricultural inputs?

1. Donated/Given
2. Buy
3. Other (specify)

17. How is the price of agricultural inputs?

1. Affordable
2. Expensive

18. Where did you get financial assistance?

1. Land Bank
2. Department of Agriculture
3. ARDC
4. Own saving
5. Other (specify)

19. Who qualifies for credit facilities?

1. Men
2. Women
3. All
4. Others (specify)

20. Do you employ other people to help in the project?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

21. What other points would you like to make with regard to accessibility to credit by women farmers?

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22. What type of land allocation system has been applied in the land you are using?

- 1. Lease/Rental
- 2. Tribal land
- 3. Own Land
- 4. Other (specify)

23. Are you satisfied with the land allocation system used?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

24. Who qualifies to be granted permission to occupy the land you are using?

- 1. Men
- 2. Women
- 3. Sons

- 4. Daughters
- 5. Others (specify)

25. Who is the main decision maker on the land you are using?

- 1. Men
- 2. Women
- 3. Landlord
- 4. Tribal Authority
- 5. Other (specify)

26. Who is the chairperson of the project?

- 1. Men
- 2. Women
- 3. Other (specify)

27. Who are in majority in the project?

- 1. Men
- 2. Women
- 3. Other (specify)

28. Who are mostly employed to assist in the project?

- 1. Men
- 2. Women
- 3. Other (specify)

29. Can women be empowered by owning the land?

1. Yes

2. No

30. Can women be independent by owning the land?

1. Yes

2. No

31. Are there any further points you would like to make with regard to permission to occupy the land by female farmers?

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