

**An evaluation of the performance of the Department of
Agriculture in Limpopo Province in improving the
livelihood of smallholder farmers during the period
1994-2004, with special reference to the Vhembe
District**

Sitholimela Silas Ndwakhulu



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Supervisor: Prof. K. Muller

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:.....

Date: 01 November 2006

Abstract

This research work focuses on the role that the Department of Agriculture has played in the improvement of the livelihood of smallholder farmers in the Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, for the period 1994 to 2004. The research endeavours to determine what was done to improve the livelihood of smallholder farmers, and the extent to which smallholder farmers were developed. It determines the stage of development smallholder farmers are in after a decade of democracy. The study considers various variables that could be responsible for the good or bad performance of the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District.

The Vhembe District was chosen because it consists of varied ecological and climatic regions, making it possible for various farming enterprises to flourish in one area. The research links the role played by the Department of Agriculture with the level of development of smallholder farmers in the District. It investigates the support that the Department of Agriculture provided through various strategic programmes, such as the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme, the Revitalisation of Smallholder Irrigation Schemes, training and development, and poverty-alleviation programmes, aimed at kick-starting micro-enterprises.

The research identifies areas where the Department did not meet the expectations of the smallholder farmers regarding support. It outlines possible reasons for good and poor performance of the Department of Agriculture and its extension officers in the four local municipalities of the Vhembe District, namely Makhado, Musina, Mutale and Thulamela. This is based on data gathered through focus group discussions with various groups of farmers and extension officers.

The research reveals that the budget allocation for agricultural development has never been enough to address the pressing and varied needs of smallholder farmers in the Vhembe District. The conclusion is reached that the support provided by the Department of Agriculture to improve the livelihood of smallholder farmers was inadequate. Another

conclusion is that smallholder farmers are heavily reliant on the Department for almost all their farming needs. This dependency has led to many smallholder farmers not being able to creatively initiate any action that would ultimately empower them to become self-reliant. However, the research shows that a small percentage of farmers have realised the need to become independent in order to avoid lifelong dependency on the Department of Agriculture.

The researcher concludes that, after a decade of democracy, there is still a great need for the Department's support in order to improve the livelihood of smallholder farmers. There is also a need to conduct a skills audit, which will help the Department to place officials according to their areas of expertise, and to capacitate officials who may be lacking some skills through various capacity-building programmes. The research revealed that there may be officials who are morally corrupt in their behaviour and conduct. This has resulted in inefficiency and poor service delivery to farmers. On the other hand there are officials who perform exceptionally well and whose behaviour is beyond reproach. The researcher concludes that these exceptional performers should be recognised and rewarded for their good performance, while those with unsatisfactory performance should be dealt with according to the disciplinary code and procedures of the public service.

The need is identified to channel resources to smallholder farmers who will utilise them effectively. This would promote self-sufficiency in the long term. In channelling these resources, the Department should also consider the promises made, with the view to fulfil them as far as possible.

The researcher concludes that in order for smallholder farmers to realise their potential they have to change their lives through agriculture. They need to become more organised in order to speak with one voice. They also need to participate in secondary agriculture, where they are able to access more markets, not only as producers but as agro-processors as well.

With appropriate and consistent support by the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District, smallholder farmers' livelihood could be improved, which will lead to economic development of the local municipality, the district, the province and ultimately South Africa as a whole.

Opsomming

Hierdie navorsingstudie fokus op die rol wat die Departement Landbou gespeel het in die verbetering van die lewensbestaan van kleinboere in die Vhembe-distrik, Limpopo, vir die tydperk 1994 tot 2004. Die navorsing poog om te bepaal wat gedoen is om die lewensbestaan van kleinboere te verbeter, en in watter mate daar tot die ontwikkeling van kleinboere bygedra is. Daar word ook bepaal in watter ontwikkelingsfase kleinboere hulle ná 'n dekade van demokrasie bevind. Die studie ondersoek verskeie veranderlikes wat vir die goeie of swak prestasie van die Departement Landbou in die Vhembe-distrik verantwoordelik kan wees.

Die Vhembe-distrik is gekies omdat dit uit verskillende ekologiese en klimaatstreke bestaan, wat verskeie boerdery-ondernemings in staat stel om in een gebied te gedy. Die navorsing veronderstel 'n verband tussen die rol van die Departement Landbou en die ontwikkelingsvlak van kleinboere in die distrik. Dit ondersoek die steun wat die Departement Landbou deur middel van verskeie strategiese programme gebied het, soos die Program vir Omvattende Landbou-ondersteuning, die Opknapping van Kleinboerbesproeiingskemas, opleiding en ontwikkeling, en programme vir die verligting van armoede, wat daarop gemik is om stukrag aan mikro-ondernemings te verleen.

Die navorsing identifiseer gebiede waarop die Departement Landbou nie aan kleinboere se verwagtinge ten opsigte van steun voldoen het nie. Dit verskaf moontlike redes vir die goeie of swak prestasie van die Departement en sy voorligtingsbeamptes in die Vhembe-distrik se vier plaaslike munisipaliteite, naamlik Makhado, Musina, Mutale en Thulamela. Dit is gegrond op data wat deur middel van fokusgroep-besprekings met verskeie groepe boere en voorligtingsbeamptes verkry is.

Die navorsing toon dat die begrotingstoewysing vir landbou-ontwikkeling nog nooit genoeg was om aan die dringende en verskillende behoeftes van kleinboere in die Vhembe-distrik te voldoen nie. Die navorser maak die gevolgtrekking dat die steun van die Departement Landbou nie voldoende was om die lewensbestaan van kleinboere te

verbeter nie. 'n Verdere gevolgtrekking is dat kleinboere vir byna al hulle boerdery-behoefte van die departement afhanklik is. Hierdie afhanklikheid lei daartoe dat menige kleinboere nie in staat is om enige kreatiewe optrede te inisieer wat hulle eindelik sal bemagtig om selfstandig te word nie. Die navorsing toon egter dat 'n klein persentasie boere beseft het dat hulle onafhanklik moet word om lewenslange afhanklikheid van die Departement Landbou te vermy.

Die navorser kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat, ná 'n dekade van demokrasie, daar steeds 'n groot behoefte aan steun van die departement ten opsigte van die verbetering van kleinboere se lewensbestaan is. Daar is ook 'n behoefte aan 'n vaardighede-oudit wat die departement sal help om amptenare na gelang van hulle kundigheidsgebied te plaas, en om deur verskeie kapasiteitsbou-programme daardie amptenare wat sekere vaardighede kortkom, op te bou. Die navorsing het onthul dat daar moontlik amptenare is wat moreel korrup in gedrag en optrede is. Dit het ondoeltreffendheid en swak dienslewering aan boere tot gevolg. Tog is daar amptenare wat besonder goed presteer en wie se gedrag bo verdenking is. Die navorser is van mening dat hierdie goeie presteerders erkenning moet ontvang en vir hulle goeie prestasie beloon moet word, en dat diegene wat ontoereikend presteer ingevolge die staatsdiens se dissiplinêre kode en prosedures hanteer moet word.

Daar is 'n behoefte om hulpbronne te kanaliseer na kleinboere wat doeltreffend daarvan gebruik sal maak. Dit sal op die lang termyn selfvoorsiening bevorder. In hierdie opsig moet die departement poog om die beloftes wat hulle gemaak het, so ver moontlik na te kom.

Die navorser kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat, vir kleinboere om hulle potensiaal te verwesenlik, hulle hul lewens deur landbou moet verander. Hulle moet beter georganiseer wees sodat hulle uit een mond kan praat. Hulle moet ook by sekondêre landbou betrokke raak waar hulle toegang tot meer markte kan verkry; nie slegs as produsente nie, maar ook as agro-verwerkers.

Met die gepaste en konsekwente steun van die Departement Landbou in die Vhembe-distrik kan die lewensbestaan van kleinboere verbeter word, wat ekonomiese ontwikkeling van die plaaslike munisipaliteit, die distrik, die provinsie en eindelijk Suid-Afrika as geheel tot gevolg sal hê.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

The aim of this Chapter is to provide the background to and rationale for this study. It also outlines the background of South African agriculture as it relates to the Limpopo Province and the Vhembe District in particular. The Chapter outlines the study's focus and objectives. It also describes the point of departure for the study in an effort to link the research problem with the reality in which smallholder farmers find themselves. A concise description of the Vhembe District and its position in the Limpopo Province is provided. The Chapter further outlines the legislative mandate that allows the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District to meet the needs of its citizens. The Chapter also seeks to clarify the terminology used in the thesis in order to ensure uniform understanding by readers.

1.2. Background and rationale

The Department of Agriculture, like any other government department in Limpopo Province, is expected by the citizens of the Province to render services to address the needs and improve the livelihood of the people, in this case the farming communities and specifically smallholder farmers. The Department receives large allocations of the annual budget in order to render services to address the needs of the farming communities, and especially the previously disadvantaged smallholder farmers, who are the main focus of this research work.

Just as the other provinces in South Africa the Limpopo Province – and especially the Vhembe District, which is the focus of this study – has been characterised by two types of agriculture since the National Party came to power and instituted a system of apartheid which led to separate development in South Africa. These two types of agriculture were the more developed and commercial white agriculture under the former Republic of South Africa (RSA), and a poorly developed and subsistence black agriculture under the former Homelands. As a result of this system, white agriculture was developed at the expense and neglect of black agriculture.

The disparities between these two types of agriculture has had far reaching consequences in the development of smallholder farmers, who remained undeveloped, poor and neglected until the democratic dispensation in South Africa. The previous Government's obvious support of white agriculture is just one of the aspects to which the neglect of black smallholder farmers can be attributed. This study aims to reveal the other issues which could have contributed to smallholder farmers remaining undeveloped even in the new democratic dispensation.

The research focuses on the role played by the Department of Agriculture in uplifting smallholder farmers in the Vhembe District from 1994 to 2004. The neglect that the smallholder farmers were subjected to makes researching this role interesting.

According to Nesamvuni, Oni, Odhiambo and Nthakheni (2003:5), the smallholder farms are located in the former homeland areas and cover approximately 30% of the provincial land surface area. As a result farming under the smallholder system is characterised by a low level of production technology and the small size of farm holdings – approximately 1, 5 ha per farmer – with production mainly for subsistence and little marketable surplus. Nesamvuni et. al (2003:5) went further to state that a more recent estimate by Statistics South Africa indicates that in the year 2000, there were approximately 273 000 small-scale farmers operating in the former homeland areas of the Limpopo Province.

As a result of the previous Government's agricultural policies, these smallholder farmers were located in poverty-stricken homeland areas lacking adequate infrastructure and institutional support. The majority of these smallholder farmers are women who produce mainly for their family's subsistence. The low income and poor resource base of these smallholder farmers are the major problems facing agricultural growth and economic development of the Limpopo Province and the Vhembe District in particular.

The National Department of Agriculture (2001:1) indicate that there are 240 000 small farmers who provide a livelihood to more than 1 million of their family members and occasional employment to another 500 000 people. They supply local and regional markets where large numbers of informal traders make a living.

Furthermore, there are an estimated 3 million farmers, mostly in the communal areas of the former homelands, who produce food primarily to meet their family's needs.

According to the National Department of Agriculture (2002:2a) the vision of the strategic plan for South African agriculture is “a united and prosperous agricultural sector”. It implies all stakeholders' sustained profitable participation in the South African agricultural economy, and recognises the need to maintain and increase commercial production to build competitiveness and to address the historical legacies and biases that resulted in skewed access and representation.

The strategic goal of the Strategic plan is “to generate equitable access and participation in a globally competitive, profitable and sustainable agricultural sector contributing to a better life for all”. The main impediment to successful implementation of this strategy is the vast untapped potential that lies in its people and material resources, and the low profitability and competitiveness that constrain the participation of a full spectrum of people and economic entities.

The National Department of Agriculture (2001:2) identifies four challenges:

- Constrained competitiveness and low productivity
- Skewed participation
- Low investor confidence in agriculture
- Poor and unsustainable management of natural resources.

The strategic plan consists of core strategies and enabling or supporting strategies to address the challenges and achieve the vision. These strategies are:

- Enhance equitable access and participation in the agricultural sector
- Improve global competitiveness and profitability
- Ensure sustainable resource management
- Good governance
- Integrated and sustainable rural development
- Knowledge and innovation
- International cooperation
- Safety and security.

According to Motsoaledi (Limpopo Department of Agriculture, 2004:2), the national agricultural sector strategy alludes to the need to ensure full participation of black farmers in the development of agriculture to stimulate economic development and employment creation. In line with this understanding, the Limpopo Department of Agriculture developed programmes that will enable the realisation of these objectives.

The Department of Agriculture is mandated in terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) Act no 108 of 1996 (Schedules 4 and 5 and in accordance with Section 104(1) (b) to improve the livelihood of its citizens. The Department of Agriculture is entrusted with the responsibility to make use of the allocated funds to address the needs of farming communities. In doing so the Department of Agriculture, through the Member of the Executive Council (MEC), shall be accountable to the citizens in accordance to the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1993) (Sections 88 and 92). The Act, as applied at national level of government, provides that a Minister shall be accountable individually both to the President and to Parliament for the administration of the portfolio entrusted to him or her, and all members of the cabinet shall correspondingly be accountable collectively for the performance of the functions of the national government and for its policies.

1.3. Focus of the research

The research will endeavour to determine what was done by the Department of Agriculture to improve the livelihood of smallholder farmers. It will also consider possible reasons for underperformance and inefficiency in the Department of Agriculture and the underlying causes for such performance. The research aims to determine the various variables that could be responsible for good or bad performance by the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District.

1.4. Point of departure

The research has as point of departure the fact that, with appropriate and consistent support by the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District, the smallholder

farmer's livelihood could be improved, which will lead to economic development of the Local Municipality, the District, the Province and South Africa as a whole.

The smallholder farmers are farmers in their own right, although the scale of their farming enterprises seems to be one of the limiting factors to their improved livelihood. In order to realise the vision of sustainable and prosperous smallholder farming enterprises, the Department of Agriculture should play a bigger role, as will be demonstrated in the analysis of the data collected through focus group discussions.

A sustainable and prosperous rural livelihood is the means to end poverty, hunger and disease, and create employment opportunities for the rural masses. Rural areas of the Vhembe District depend entirely on the vibrant and developing agricultural sector to create economic conditions conducive to the improvement of smallholder farmers' livelihood.

Another point of departure for this research is the fact that sustainable rural livelihood, especially in the Vhembe District, is dependent on smallholder farmers practicing sustainable agriculture. The Vhembe District – and indeed all other districts in the Limpopo Province – is mainly rural in nature and the citizens are dependent on agriculture as the main economic activity to sustain and improve their livelihood.

The researcher therefore contends that through a better performing Department of Agriculture, the livelihood of smallholder farmers in the Vhembe District could be enhanced in the long term. It is the view of the researcher that through sustainable and affordable agriculture, smallholder farmers could generate income for household use and for reinvesting in agriculture towards commercial production.

The concepts of sustainable rural livelihood and sustainable agriculture are directly linked to the debate on sustainable development. It is not possible to talk about sustainable agriculture in isolation; the concept of sustainable development should be understood in order for sustainable agriculture and sustainable rural livelihood to be understood.

Jeppe and Van Baalen (1995:29) identify sustainable development as dealing with the triangular relationship between people, development and the environment. They describe sustainable development as a process whereby society (people) has the capacity to manage limited resources (environment) to fulfil present and future needs (development) indefinitely.

This relationship is represented in the following figure:

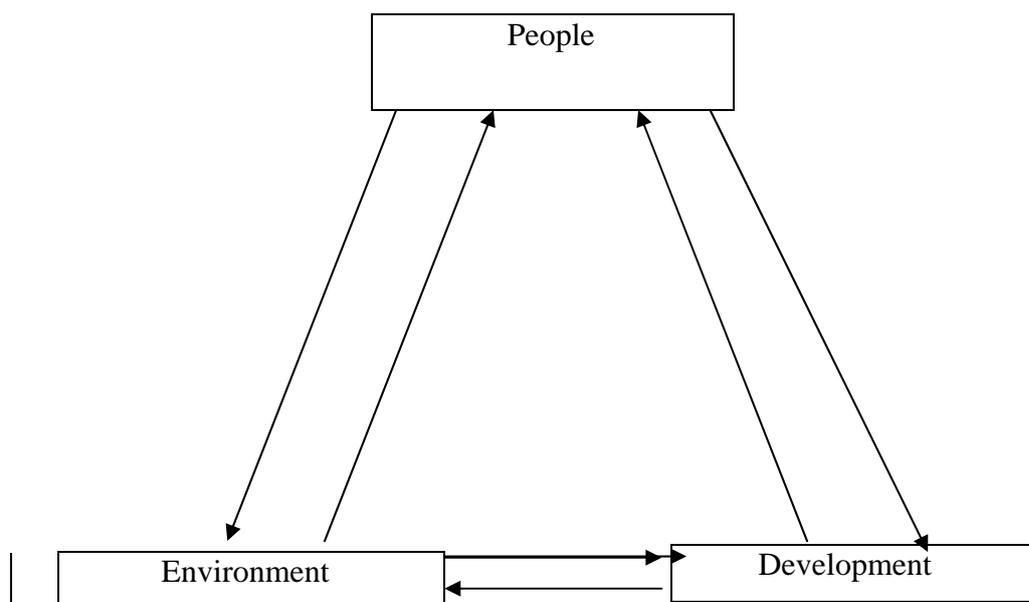


Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of sustainable development

Source: Jeppe & Van Baalen (1995:29)

The concept 'sustainable development' implies a symbiotic equilibrium in the relationship between people and their environment. As a country, South Africa is confronted with a daunting challenge to bring growing human numbers and their growing needs into balance with the natural resource base that underpins much of development. As a result the practise of sustainable farming by smallholder farmers will go a long way in ensuring that this challenge is addressed effectively from the lowest to the more advanced level of primary agricultural production.

The World Commission on Environment and Development (Treurnicht, 1997:85) describes sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

According to Treurnicht (1997:85), sustainable development is supposed to promote lifestyles and ethics that take the limits of natural environment into account.

As a sector that is fully dependent on the environment, agriculture is therefore directly affected by the sustainable development debate, and on its part influences the same debate. The more the environment is used, the more it gets damaged and as a result depletion of natural resources is increased as a result of practising agriculture whether on a small-scale or on a large scale.

1.5. Research problem and objectives

The study will be centred on those aspects of the Department of Agriculture's activity in the Vhembe District that either add value to or devalue the role played by the Department in addressing the needs and improving the livelihood of smallholder farmers.

It is the intention of the researcher to present all the relevant information in a way that is not biased towards the Department but fair and useful. This will be done to ensure that the millions of rand that are allocated to the Department of Agriculture are well utilised for the benefit of the clients the Department exists to serve, namely smallholder farmers.

Almost each year since 1994 the Department has been unable to spend its entire allocated budget for various reasons. Meanwhile smallholder farmers were waiting for service delivery that never reached them. This state of affairs indicates that there is no balance between service delivery and the way in which tax payers' money is expended by the Department of Agriculture. This is an indication that there are real problems which warrant investigation in order to understand the factors contributing to the situation.

In his State of the Nation address, the honourable Thabo Mbeki (2003) has expressed his deepest concern over departments returning millions of rand to treasury while communities are still in need of service delivery. He promised decisive action against such departments. He further stated that public officials who fail the people of South

Africa in terms of service delivery would be held accountable and will be dealt with in accordance to the provisions of the Public Finance Management Act (Act no 1 of 1999). According to the Act (RSA, 1999), failure to spend voted funds is as wrong as overspending the allocated budget.

The research objectives of this study are centred on the following important issues:

- The kind of support the Department of Agriculture has offered compared with the expectations of smallholder farmers.
- The level of development of smallholder farmers ten years after democracy. (How many have grown from being smallholder farmers to emerging commercial or commercial farmers?)
- The factors that lead to good or poor performance by the Department of Agriculture.
- Departmental strategic plans over the ten years of democracy.
- The role played by public officials in the good or poor performance of the Department of Agriculture.
- Public participation in the delivery of services by the Department of Agriculture. (How was the smallholder farmers involved in service delivery and what role did they play?)

1.6. Description of the Vhembe District

The Vhembe District is located at the far northern corner of the Limpopo Province. It shares its borders with Zimbabwe in the north, Botswana in the west and the Kruger National Park in the east, which then borders Mozambique in the far east. The district comprises the areas of the former homelands of Venda, Gazankulu, Lebowa, and the Transvaal Provincial Administration. The population is mainly made up of Venda, Shangaan, Sotho, Afrikaans and English people. The district is divided into four local municipalities, namely Makhado, Musina, Mutale and Thulamela.

The following map depicts the Limpopo Province and the blue colour on the map is the Vhembe District with its four local municipalities. The smallholder farmers who

are the main grouping of farmers are found in all the municipalities of Vhembe District.

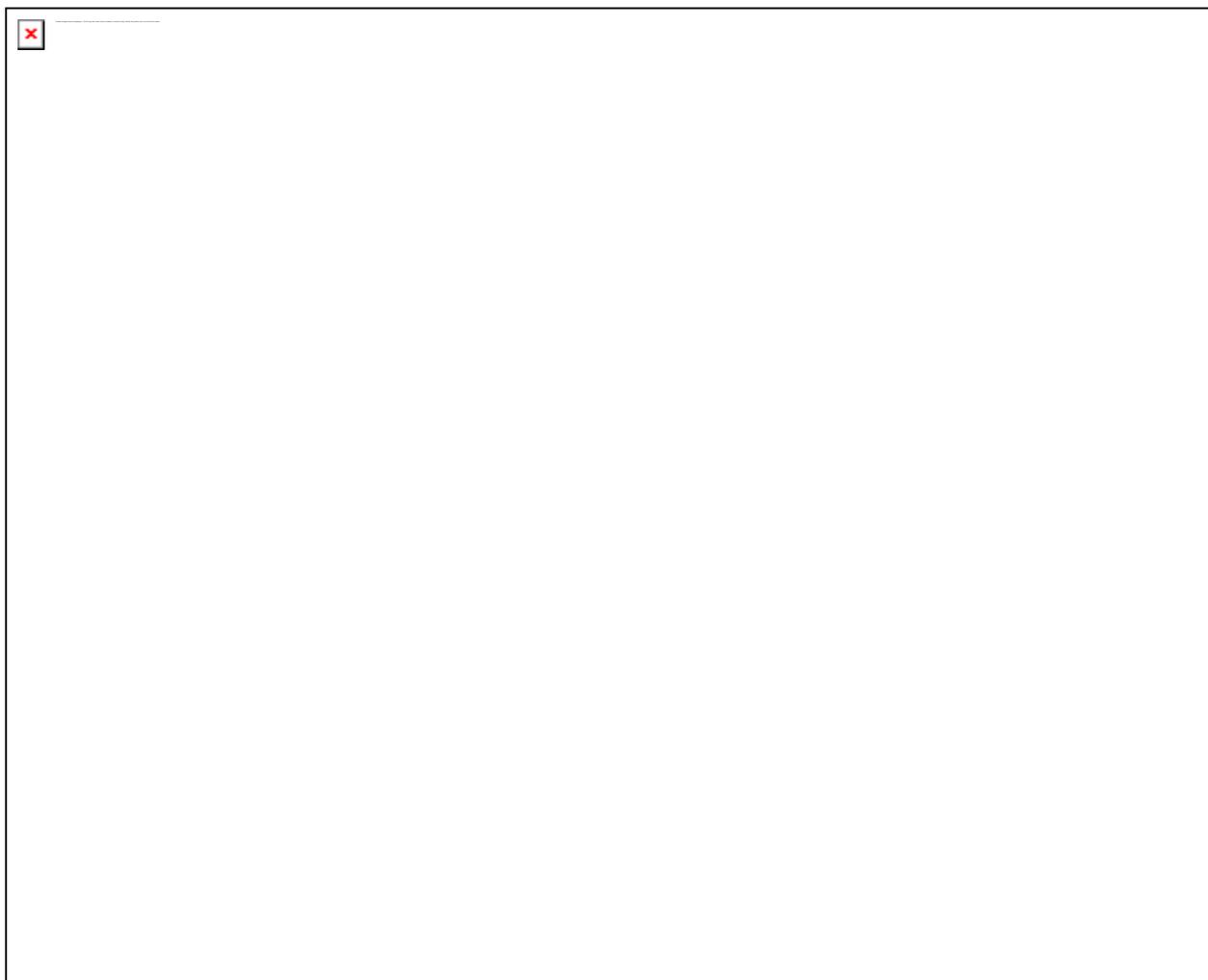


Figure 2: Limpopo Provincial Map

Source: Brinkmann (2005:10)

The district has 15 main commodities which smallholder farmers produce to improve their livelihoods. The commodities include tomato, mango, litchi, citrus, avocados, garlic, banana, macadamia, vegetable gardens, poultry, fish, guava, livestock (cattle, sheep and goats), pig and backyard vegetable producers.

The following table depicts the number of smallholder farmers per commodity group:

Table 1: Number of smallholder farmers in Vhembe District per main commodity group:

Commodity	No of Smallholder farmers
1. Avocado	644
2. Backyard gardens	409
3. Banana	16
4. Citrus	81
5. Fish	39
6. Garlic	128
7. Guava	4
8. Litchi	86
9. Livestock (cattle, sheep and goats)	15 646
10. Macadamia	512
11. Mango	758
12. Piggery	6
13. Poultry	992
14. Tomato	2015
15. Vegetable gardens	2300
Total	23 636

The number of smallholder farmers reflected in the table is based on the figure provided by the Vhembe District officials. It has taken into account only those smallholder farmers who are organised along the commodity groups. The number of those who are not organised has not been included in this statistics. This implies that the above commodities are those that are contributing to the economy of the Vhembe District and indeed the Limpopo Province in general.

The contribution of agriculture to the economy of the Limpopo Province has been summarised in the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) Report (1994) as quoted in Nesamvuni *et al.* (2003:7). In this report, agriculture was estimated to have contributed 15.7% of the province's gross geographic product (GGP) in 1991. The

report also revealed that agriculture was second only to government (public or community services) with regard to the highest contribution for that period.

In terms of employment, the DBSA report (1994) as quoted in Nesamvuni *et al.* (2003:7) reveals that agriculture employed 17,5% of the economically active population in the commercially farming sub sector and a further 25% in the informal or subsistence smallholder farming sub sector, thus making agriculture the most important provider of employment in the Limpopo Province.

The Limpopo Province is a mainly rural province with the majority of its citizens depending entirely on agriculture for their livelihood. The province is divided into six districts, namely Vhembe, Capricorn, Sekhukhune, Mopani, Bohlabela and Waterberg. The total area of the province is 12 460 000 ha (Limpopo Department of Agriculture, 2005) of which 10 548 290 ha (88,2%) constitute farm land, of which 14,7% and 14% constitute arable land and commercial agriculture respectively. The area under irrigation in the Limpopo Province is 135 000 ha (10,5% of the South African total). There are about 167 government initiated and developed irrigation schemes, serving mainly smallholder farmers and covering an area of 47 780 ha (Nesamvuni *et al.*, 2003:3).

1.7. Legislative and administrative mandate

The Department of Agriculture is an integral part of the South African public service established in terms of Chapter 10, Section 197 of the Constitution and read with Sections 7(1) and 7(2) of the Public Service Act of 1994. The Department of Agriculture at district level should be seen within the same context since there is no other mandate at local government level that provides a framework within which the Department of Agriculture must operate.

Section 197 of the Constitution (RSA, 1996) states the following:

- (1) Within the public administration there is a public service for the Republic, which must function, and be structured, in terms of national legislation, and which must loyally execute the lawful policies of the government of the day.

(2) The terms and conditions of employment in the public service must be regulated by national legislation.

(3) Provincial governments are responsible for the recruitment, appointment, promotion, transfer and dismissal of members of the public service in their administrations within a framework of uniform norms and standards applying to the public service.

The Department of Agriculture further derives its mandate from the provisions of Schedules 4 and 5 of the Constitution (RSA, 1996) and in accordance with Section 104(1)b of the same Constitution. The Department, as part of the system of concurrent governance, derives its administrative mandate from both the National Parliament and Provincial Legislatures as listed in Schedule 4 of the Constitution (RSA, 1996).

According to the strategic plan of the Limpopo Department of Agriculture (2004:9), the Department's mandate is currently vested in various statutes. Some of the Acts enacted from 1994 to 2004 that have relevance to the Department of Agriculture in carrying out its legislative and administrative mandate are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 2: Acts enacted from 1994 to 2004 and used by the Department in the execution of its mandate (Limpopo Department of Agriculture: Strategic Plan 2004-2005: 9)

A. Veterinary legislation	
Title	Description
Animal Health Act, Act 7 of 2002	It provides for control of animal diseases and parasites and for measures to promote animal health and related issues.
Meat Safety Act, Act 40 of 2000	It provides for the safety of meat and other animal products. It establishes and maintains national standards in respect to abattoirs, regulates importation and exportation of meat, etc.
Animal Improvement Act, Act 62 of 1998	It provides for the breeding, identification and utilisation of genetically superior

	animals in order to improve production and performance of animals.
South African Medicines and Medical Devices Regulatory Act, Act 132 of 1998	It provides for a regulatory authority to control registration and utilisation of medicines and medical devices.
Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement of the World Trade Organisation, 1995	It is aimed at minimising the negative effects of unjustified health barriers on international trade. It establishes health measures on the basis of international standards, guidelines and recommendations.
B. Plant- and crop-related legislation	
Genetically Modified Organisms Act, Act 15 of 1997	It provides for measures to promote the responsible development, production, use and application of genetically modified organisms.
C. Land-related legislation	
Land Reform Act, Act 3 of 1996	It provides for security of tenure of labour tenants and those persons occupying or using the land as a result of their association with labour tenants, to provide for the acquisition of land and rights in land by labour tenants, and to provide for matters connected therewith.
National Environmental Management Act, Act 107 of 1998	It provides for cooperative environmental governance by establishing principles for decision making on matters affecting the environment, institutions to promote cooperative governance and procedures for coordinating environmental functions exercised by organs of state, and provide for related matters.

D. Financial and administrative legislation	
Title	Description
Public Finance Management Act, Act 1 of 1999 (as amended by Act 29 of 1999)	The Act modernises the system of financial management. It enables managers to manage and to be accountable. It ensures timely provision of accurate and quality information. It also eliminates waste and corruption in the use of public assets. It further ensures adherence to principles of effective, efficient and economical actions.
Division of Revenue Act, Act 5 of 2004	The Act ensures equitable division of revenue between all spheres of government. It determines each Province's share of revenue. It also governs any conditional grants to all spheres of Government.
Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act, Act 5 of 2000	The Act ensures that equity prevails when awarding Government tenders. It ensures transparency in the awarding of tenders. It also provides a framework for the awarding of points to promote black economic empowerment.
Public Service Act, Act 103 of 1994	It regulates conditions of employment, terms of office, discipline, retirement, termination of service, and discharge of members of the public.
Employment Equity Act, Act 55 of 1998	It eliminates unfair discrimination in employment and provides for affirmative action to redress the imbalances of the past and create equity in employment.
Skills Development Act, Act 97 of 1998	It provides an institutional framework to devise and implement national, sector and

	workplace strategies to develop and improve the skills of the public servants.
Promotion of Access to Information Act, Act 2 of 2000	It ensures that information will be accessible to the public unless otherwise protected by law.

1.8. Definition of terms

In this research, unless otherwise specified, the following terms will have the following meanings:

- **Agricultural development:** The state of development a particular agricultural area is in at any given time, including the farming infrastructure provided.
- **Agricultural production:** The amount of agricultural products produced by farmers at a given time, be it livestock or crops.
- **Commercial farmer:** A farmer farming on a large scale and who is able to sustain himself/herself with little or no departmental support.
- **Communal Property Association (CPA):** A legal entity responsible for the coordination of activities and the entire management of the land acquired through the land reform programme called the Settlement Land Acquisition Grant.
- **Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP):** A programme of the Department of Agriculture for supporting farmers in the provision of infrastructure on their farms in order to support their productivity and sustainable farming.
- **Department:** A branch, especially of municipal or state administration. In this thesis it refers to the Limpopo Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District unless otherwise specified.
- **District:** Territory demarcated for administrative purposes. In this thesis it refers to the Vhembe District Department of Agriculture unless otherwise specified headed by the Senior Manager who could also be called District Director.
- **District municipality:** The local government institution responsible for the coordination of the provision of basic and other services to the communities by the local municipalities.

- Emerging farmer: A farmer who is at a transition stage from subsistence to commercial level of production and who still requires support to become self-sufficient.
- Farmers: According to Sykes (1976:377), the word refers to one who cultivates a farm. In general terms farmers could be smallholders, emerging, semi commercial, commercial and could also refer to black and white farmers. In this thesis it refers to smallholder farmers who are either farming with crops or livestock and whose income is less than R 500,00 per month unless otherwise specified.
- Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD): A land reform programme of the Department of Agriculture which provides support to previously disadvantaged farmers to purchase productive agricultural land through the provision of funds.
- Land restitution: The legal process of restoring land to their rightful owners spearheaded by the Department of Land Affairs and the Commission on Land Restitution.
- Livelihood: According to Sykes (1976:636) the word means living or sustenance. It is considered to consist of the assets, activities and entitlements that enable people to make a living.
- Local municipality: The local government institution closest to the people at grassroots level responsible for provision of basic services to the communities under its jurisdiction. In this thesis it also refers to the local offices of the Department of Agriculture and are headed by the Municipality Managers.
- Officers: All government employees, including extension staff, supervisors and managers of the Department of Agriculture at Provincial, District, Local Municipality offices, Service centres and Wards unless otherwise specified.
- Participatory extension approach: A methodology employed by extension services to involve the farmers in identifying their problems and ways to resolve them in a participatory manner.
- Revitalisation of Smallholder Irrigation Schemes (RESIS): A programme of the Department of Agriculture to revitalise irrigation schemes found in the rural areas of the Limpopo Province with the aim of making them profitable and sustainable.

- Service Centres: The divisions of the local municipality of the Department of Agriculture at the lower level responsible for a specific geographic area, made up of wards and they are headed by the Chief Agricultural Technicians.
- Smallholder farmer: A farmer who is still at subsistence level of farming and who farms on a small-scale of operation compared to emerging and commercial farmers.
- Sustainable agriculture: The integration of three main goals – environmental health, economic profitability, and social and economic equity.
- Sustainable development: Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- Wards: The divisions that makes up a Service Centre which are constituted by a number of villages and are headed by Local Extension Officers.

1.9. Chapter summary

This Chapter described in detail the reasons behind conducting this study in Vhembe District. It provided a snapshot of the Vhembe District and its position in relation to the rest of the country. It further described the place of agricultural development within the national perspective as outlined in the strategic plan for South African agriculture. The mandate for the Department of Agriculture as contained in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa has been clarified.

The point of departure for the study has been described as the proper provision of appropriate and consistent support by the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District which will improve and enhance the livelihood of smallholder farmers. The relationship between sustainable development and smallholder farmer development has been outlined.

The research problem and objectives, without which it would not be possible to collect data and continue with the thesis, have also been outlined. The Chapter further identified the legislative and administrative mandate for the Department of Agriculture to discharge its duties in meeting the needs of smallholder farmers. The Chapter finally described the terms to be used in the thesis to ensure uniform

understanding and to make it easier for the readers to understand and follow the researcher throughout the thesis.

This Chapter provides a good foundation for the literature review since the scope of work to be covered has been outlined. The role of smallholder farming in agricultural development will be outlined in the following chapter. It will be reviewed holistically and will not be limited to the Vhembe District.

CHAPTER 2: SMALL-SCALE AGRICULTURE AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Introduction

The literature review on the research topic is presented in this chapter. It is based on the work of various authors regarding the contribution of agriculture to development in general and to small-scale agriculture in particular. The Chapter aims to determine the reasons why governments become involved in agricultural development and reasons for their commitment to the development of the smallholder farming sector. It also intends to establish the importance of decentralisation of authority and responsibility as a means to empower local authorities to take charge of smallholder farmer development. It further aims to describe a self-sustaining smallholder farming sector in an effort to show that a smallholder farmer can become self-sufficient, no matter the scale of farming.

The Chapter further describes the role of technology in smallholder farmer development. It finally aims to describe and define participation by smallholder farmers in their own development and the rationale behind such participation.

2.2. Reasons for government involvement in agricultural development

Knutson, Penn and Boehm (1983:11) consider the question why governments choose to be involved in agricultural development, and provide an in-depth study of the reasons behind such involvement. The reasons for government involvement in agricultural development vary from one government to another. Some of the reasons are the following:

- Low farm income has traditionally been the primary justification for programmes that support farm prices and incomes.
- The need to stabilise farm prices and supplies in order to help stabilising prices during overproduction became a major justification for farm programmes in the 1970s.

- The importance of an adequate supply of food has historically been used to justify government programmes that expand farm production, such as irrigation projects, agricultural research, and extension.
- The safety of the food supply became an important issue once the ability of farmers to produce an adequate supply of food was demonstrated.
- Protecting the capacity of agriculture to produce in future generations has led to programmes that conserve the soil.

All of these explain the important role of the government intervention in agricultural development.

Okorie (1998), as quoted in Nesamvuni *et al.* (2003:3), states that the injection of capital is a precondition for a healthy development of any sector of the economy. Hence capital and investment funds are critical to the development and growth of agriculture.

Nesamvuni *et al.* (2003:16) present four ways in which a government participates in the funding and development of agriculture:

- Direct investment in agricultural production and marketing
- Development of physical, social and human capital infrastructure
- Development of agricultural human capital
- Provision of grants to smallholder and emerging farmers.

Knutson *et al.* (1983:21) state several problems that farmers have to contend with.

These are:

- The world food problem
- The farm problem
- The consumer problem
- The resource problem

These problems are interrelated and therefore have an overlapping effect since all problems affect farmers and the conditions under which food is produced, marketed and consumed.

2.3. Decentralisation of authority and responsibility

Metcalf and Richards (1990:77) state that decentralisation of authority and responsibility is one of the most common prescriptions for improving efficiency and effectiveness in large organisations, public or private. In the public sector, decentralisation is generally prescribed as a means of liberating managerial potential shackled by bureaucratic restrictions. Public organisations are regularly taken to task for having too many hierarchical levels and displaying a reluctance to delegate decision making down the line.

Metcalf and Richards (1990:77) further state that decentralisation in government is problematic: it prompts anxieties and scepticism when attention shifts from general principle to specific cases. Administrators at the top levels fear a loss of control. They perceive conflicts between the implications of increased delegation of authority and the requirements of public accountability. The inefficiencies resulting from excessive centralisation are often seen as the unavoidable price of public accountability.

Many of the criticisms of overcautious and defensive management in government have a substantial degree of validity. Poorly designed procedures and management systems produce duplication, overlap and confusion of responsibilities, or leave unrecognised loopholes. Staff are faced with too many unanswered questions, or given too little clear guidance to deal with the flow of work promptly and efficiently. Instead of clear delegation of responsibilities, answers frequently have to be sought by referring up the hierarchy (Metcalf & Richards, 1990:78).

Metcalf and Richards (1990:80) refer to three types of controls, serving different purposes, which have to be combined in order to make centralisation and decentralisation complementary components of an efficient organisation. Perrow (1977), as quoted in Metcalf and Richards (1990:80), refer to them as first order, second order and third order controls. First order controls are direct, detailed face-to-face requests and orders from superiors to subordinates, such as rules and regulations. Second order controls are needed when direct supervision and general rules are not up to the job. Examples are standardisation and specialisation. Third order controls are

needed to design, sustain and modify the operation of first and second order controls. The application of third order controls is especially important as a function of top management. The examples of third order controls are communication channels, corporate values and cultural norms about coordination, rewards and reinforcements, and feedback about performance.

2.4. A self-sustaining smallholder farming sector

In order for governments to succeed in their endeavour to improve the livelihood of smallholder farmers, it is necessary to assist a farming sector that will be self-sustaining in the long run. Smallholder farmers are also expected to be able to help themselves in a sustainable manner. In order for this to happen, it is necessary to ensure that smallholder farmers develop their farms from subsistence as family farms since this holds benefits for them. The saying “a journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step” also holds true for the development of smallholder farmers. The smallholder farmers have the capacity to look after their small family farms and the success will then lead to a self sustaining and successful farming enterprises. The farming scale for the majority of smallholder farmers is a minimum of one hectare. This limits their potential to grow quickly; therefore they can grow slowly and steadily until their farms are able to generate more profit.

Ilbery, Chiotti and Rickard (1997:61) provide a clear picture of a family farm. They state that the defining characteristic of the sustainable farm is greater reliance on agro-ecological forces rather than industrialised inputs. Family-based production offers important compatibilities. An owner-operator is more likely to have the motivation, knowledge and interest to undertake the more ecologically based production technologies.

Kloppenburg (1991) and Ehrenfeld (1987), as quoted in Ilbery *et al.* (1997:61), stress the importance of local knowledge as a key to the revitalisation of the family farming sector and the transition to more sustainable agriculture. Local knowledge is by no means a static tradition, but rather an actively constructed knowledge that is gained through experimentation, collaboration with neighbours and family members, and

intimate experience with the land. Family-based production can also better supply the disciplined, flexible labour necessary for reliance on ecological forces of production.

Smallholder farmers have indigenous knowledge which, if blended well with technological advancement, could be useful to sustain the smallholder farming sector.

2.5. Importance of modern technologies in smallholder farming

According to Pretty (1995:1), there is strong evidence that regenerative and resource-conserving technologies and practices can have both environmental and economical benefits for farmers, communities and nations in general. The best evidence comes from the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, where emerging concern is to increase food production in areas where farming has been largely untouched by modern, externally supplied technologies such as pesticides, fertilisers, machinery, and modern crops and livestock. Some farmers in these areas have adopted regenerative technologies and have substantially improved agricultural yield, often only using few or no external inputs.

However, modern technology is required if smallholder farmers are to compete with other farmers locally, nationally and internationally. Smallholder farmers should consider technology important for their farming enterprises. For example, the value of irrigation systems, the fight against pest, diseases and weeds, the harvesting, storage and marketing of products all require the use of technology.

According to Ficarelli, Manavhela and Molathlegi (2005:8), community emancipation can be achieved by fostering innovation and local organisational capacity. This can be done through a step-by-step approach as follows:

Step 1: Initiating change

- Building trustful relationship with the communities
- Identification of local organisations
- Identification of local innovations and innovators
- Sharing and reflecting with communities

Step 2: Searching for new ways

- Creating local ownership for problems and challenges
- Identifying and learning about service providers
- Identifying and exploring possible solutions to learn about:
 - change processes
 - external sources of innovations
 - experiences of local innovators
- Sharing and reflecting with communities

Step 3: Planning and strengthening local organisational capacity

- Developing community plans with local organisations
- Developing strategy for local organisational transformation
- Linking with identified sources of innovation
- Linking local organisations with service providers

Step 4: Experimentation while implementing action

- Enhancing creativity for experimentation
- Trying out new ideas

Step 5: Sharing of experiences

- Assessing innovations with wider community
- Village-to-village sharing of innovation process

Step 6: Reflecting on lessons learnt and re-planning

- Reviewing progress in organisational capacities and innovations
- Planning for next learning cycle based on experiences

At national level, sustainable community development is the mandate of the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (SRL) division of the Agricultural Research Council (ARC). According to the ARC Annual Report (2005:25), the SRL division exists to serve the resource-poor agricultural sector, by conducting research and transferring know-how and technology. The ARC therefore strives, through the SRL division, to

empower resource-poor and rural farmers. Helping smallholder farmers' move from subsistence production to commercial production is a priority of the ARC. In Limpopo and North West, the beef profit partnership project helped previously disadvantaged farmers to turn communal cattle operation into a lucrative beef enterprise.

2.6. Need for lower-cost technologies

The observations made by the researcher over a long association with smallholder farmers indicate that smallholder farmers are less likely to adopt technologies which are too expensive for them or beyond their reach. However, technologies which are less expensive and easily accessible are likely to be adopted by the majority of smallholder farmers.

According to De Vries, Acquay, Molden, Scherr, Valentin and Cofie (2002: 43), past technological developments have focussed primarily on ways to increase their use and output:

1. Higher crop yields and livestock head per unit of land and water (selection, breeding, biotechnology, resource management)
2. Replacement of human and animal labour by machines (e.g. tractors) allowing individuals to cultivate larger areas
3. Increases in the volume of accessible irrigation and drinking water (e.g. reservoirs, diversion structures, pumps)
4. Replacement of human observations by the readings of the instruments for more consistent management (e.g. soil probes that trigger irrigation when the soil is dry)
5. Refinement of management practices to produce the same output or more with less input and reduced risk (e.g. precision agriculture, drip irrigation, weather forecasts).

They stated that in the final analysis, technologies with the following characteristics are much more adoptable and acceptable:

- Low cost, particularly in terms of cash

- Familiar components
- Can be adopted incrementally (to allow for self-financing)
- Contribute demonstrably to increased yields or reduced costs within a period of one to three years.

Technology is one of the important smallholder farmer development tools which the Vhembe District has used which is proving to be beneficial to the farmers, the Department and all stakeholders.

2.7. Political commitment to development of smallholder farming

Benjamin (1981:41) states that the success of rural development programmes and projects requires first and foremost a strong political commitment on the part of government authorities. There must be an explicit will to confront squarely the question of rural poverty. He further states that the formulation of a specific rural development programme comprising a package of discrete projects requires the following:

- Organisational arrangements to ensure full participation of the development agencies involved in project execution
- Adoption of explicit criteria for the choice of benefiting micro-regions
- Guidelines relating to the investment mix of projects
- Arrangements for involving the beneficiaries in the planning.

Cloete (1996:18) also states that in a democratic state it is acceptable that the citizens, through their elected representatives, decide about the structure of public institutions and the activities to be performed by them. Citizens will expect the public institutions and functionaries employed in them to promote the general welfare – physical and social – of the people.

2.8. Link between strategic plans and development of smallholder farmers

The vision of the Strategic Plan for South African Agriculture is “a united and prosperous agricultural sector”. This vision implies sustained profitable participation

in the South African agricultural economy by all stakeholders, recognising the need to maintain and increase commercial production, to build international competitiveness and to address the historical legacies and biases that resulted in skewed access and representation (National Department of Agriculture, 2001:7).

2.9. Participation of smallholder farmers

The participation of smallholder farmers in their own development is of significant value, considering the fact that they are the direct beneficiaries of any development initiative by the various Departments, such as Public Works, Health and Welfare and Agriculture. They participate both as ordinary citizens and as recipients of service delivery by these Departments.

Section 152(1)(e) of the Constitution (RSA, 1996) states that one of local government's objectives is to encourage the involvement of local communities and community organisations in the matters of local government. This implies that the non-involvement of communities goes against the basic principles of participation provided for by the supreme law of the country.

According to Cashdan (2002:163), the Constitution further requires municipalities to develop Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), with spatial, institutional and financial components – including a needs assessment, prioritisation exercise, implementation programmes and monitoring systems. With the participation of poor communities, IDPs should help municipalities to develop a holistic strategy for poverty alleviation. This also implies that communities should actively participate in the process of local development.

Brown (1997:67-68) states that a project manager can no longer move into an area to execute a project according to a pre-conceived plan, with the clout of some governing agency behind him, and give instructions to the community in a top-down fashion. Consultation, feedback, participatory management and extended project scope formulation cycles are all new project execution skills on the horizon.

2.9.1. Citizen participation in government

Meyer, Cupido and Theron (2002:59), in their review of literature on citizen participation, conclude that the whole concept of citizen participation is not new. They cite literature on the subject by various authors such as Oakley (1991), Bekker (1996), Brynard (1996), Ismail (1997), Meyer and Theron (2000) and the Municipal Systems Act (RSA, 2000).

The participation of smallholder farmers in improving their own livelihood is intricately linked to the performance of the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District. In order for the Department to bring about effective, efficient and economic service delivery, it needs the participation of the recipients of such service, in this case smallholder farmers.

According to Brynard (1996), in Meyer *et al.* (2002:59), the term ‘citizens’ refer to the collective of those persons without paid office, wealth, special information or other formal power source beyond their own numbers. Meyer *et al.* (2002:59) define ‘citizens’ as those people who stand outside the formal public administration system and demand certain services from the government.

Lisk (1985), in Meyer *et al.* (2002:59), views participation as active involvement of people in the making and implementation of decisions at all levels and forms of political and socio-economic activities. Roodt (2001), also in Meyer *et al.* (2002:59), views participation as people involving themselves, to a greater or lesser degree, in organisations indirectly or directly concerned with the decision making about and implementation of development.

2.9.2. Rationale for citizen participation in government

The importance of smallholder farmers’ participation in the activities of the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District should not be underestimated, because if their needs aren’t properly identified and addressed there will be no need for the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District. This implies that the

existence of the Department of Agriculture in Vhembe District is intricately linked to the availability and participation of smallholder farmers and farmers in general.

A variety of authors have provided a rationale for citizen participation in government.

Ismail (1997), in Meyer *et al.* (2002:62), provides the following reasons:

- Participation is a way of receiving information about local issues, needs and attitudes.
- Participation provides affected communities an opportunity to express their views before policy decisions are taken.
- Public participation is a powerful tool to inform and educate citizens.
- Participation enhances the democratisation process.
- Participation promotes equality, fairness and reasonableness in the allocation and distribution of public resources.
- Participation balances the tension between democracy and bureaucracy.

The Ohio State University Fact Sheet (1998), in Meyer *et al.* (2002:62), cites the following advantages flowing from participation in community affairs:

- The citizen can bring about desired changes by expressing individual or collective views on issues of public interest.
- It promotes citizenship and teaches citizens to understand the needs and desires of other citizen groups in society.
- It teaches citizens how to resolve conflicts and how to promote collective welfare.
- It provides checks and balances for the political machinery of the state.

Meyer and Theron (2000) provide the following reasons for citizen participation in government:

- Citizen participation promotes dignity and self-sufficiency within the individual.
- It taps the energy or resources of individual citizens within the community.
- Citizen participation provides a source of special insight, information and knowledge that adds to the soundness of government policies.
- Participation ensures that citizens have access to the tools of democracy.

- It creates national dialogue on issues, particularly for previously disadvantaged citizens.

2.9.3. Goals of citizen participation

According to Meyer *et al.* (2002:63), the question “why do citizens participate?” can be answered in the following ways:

- Participation has a large cost for the poor and they will invest in it when they believe it will secure them valuable benefits.
- Citizen participation can be used as a strategy to reform governments.
- It is a worldwide movement away from centralised state control to regional and local governance.
- Citizen participation facilitates a strong civil society.
- It provides information to citizens.
- It improves the public policy process.
- It refocuses political power and community dynamics.
- It increases, but cannot guarantee, the chances that programmes and projects will receive acceptability.

2.9.4. Limitations of citizen participation in government

According to Brynard (1998), in Meyer *et al.* (2002:64), the following limitations of citizen participation present themselves:

- Even though participatory democracy encourages popular participation, reality shows that not every citizen is interested or has the capacity to participate in public affairs.
- Some activities of government are technical and may be in conflict with community values and preferences.
- Some decisions by government are symbolic and may not enjoy much public support, but have symbolic value for the nation.
- In developing countries experience has shown that participation is limited to the mere sanctioning of plans and policies. It has also been learnt through

experience that local authorities often has no interest in what local communities are saying.

- In conflict-ridden societies (those in which political intimidation, ethnic violence, gangsterism, etc. occur) citizen participation may be limited due to fear.
- The timing and venue for participation activities (for example community meetings) is crucial in order to reach communities. The venue for participation should preferably be within the areas of affected communities.
- Illiteracy is an inhibiting factor in the public participatory process. Illiterate people may be marginalised by professional and technical communication during such a process.
- A diversity of languages in a community can cause problems if, for example, interpreters communicate a wrong interpretation.
- Authentic, empowering participation has the possible effect that it slows down the planning and implementation processes of government.
- In the event that the needs and requests of citizens are not being addressed, reluctance to participate may result.
- Citizen participation has cost implications, as project management principles have revealed. If not budgeted for, it will impact negatively on logistical arrangements to facilitate participation.
- Project management principles further confirm that citizen participation has time constraints. Participation cannot proceed indefinitely because at some point decisions have to be taken.
- Bureaucracies in developing countries are not structured to facilitate citizen participation, which hampers constructive citizen input.

2.9.5. Approaches to citizen participation in local government

South Africa has gone a long way in promoting citizen participation in public administration. According to Meyer and Theron (2000:47), one of the avenues for citizen participation as part of the policy-making process is the system of public hearings. They also point out that although the public administration is genuine in its approach to formulating public policies through public input, the input is dominated

by a “special breed”, namely consultants, academics, NGOs, technocrats, the new black elite and white liberals. This implies that ordinary citizen participation could be overshadowed by the group, but on the other hand citizens’ needs could also be articulated by the group, as they are part of the community.

The following table lists the approaches to and appropriate strategies for enhancing citizen participation in local government.

Table 3: Approaches to citizen participation in local government

Approach	Strategy
1. Voters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Civic education• Ward-level activities• Creative electoral campaigning• Easy voting procedures
2. Policy influencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specific-issue forum• Involvement in council committees• Participatory budgeting initiatives• Participatory action research• Development associations
3. Consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consultation• Service standards• Access• Courtesy• Information• Openness and transparency• Redress• Value for money
4. Partners in resource mobilisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community development corporations• Public-private partnerships• Community consultation• Community resource centres• Training and capacity building initiatives

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social housing projects• Job-creation initiatives• Local economic development
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Source: Planact (1998), in Meyer *et al.* (2002:72)

These approaches require that local authorities transform from their top-down bureaucratic nature to developmental and entrepreneurial organisations.

2.9.6. Public participation in planning

Garson and Williams (1992), in Layman (1995:134), state that the forms of citizen involvement in administration do not usually extend to the politically powerless and economically deprived clientele of government programmes. The largest possible participation in public decision making can be secured by the acceptance of the ethical principle that all individual citizens of a country has the democratic right to participate in decision making in all those areas where their lives are being influenced, which include almost all government activities.

Citizen participation includes participation in the process of public policy making. More directly, citizens should be involved in the formulation, implementation and administration of programmes. Civics, trade unions, organised bodies (e.g. farmer organisations) as well as unorganised citizens must be consulted with regard to their participation in programmes of the public service. Fagence (1997) in Layman (1995:134) provides the following as a basis from where to explore the ramifications of citizen participation both as a concept and as a decision-making technique:

- Citizen participation could lead to a more democratic policy process that is more responsive and more representative.
- Participation could result in a broadening of programme planning (e.g. participation makes it possible to weigh citizen preferences against technical considerations).

- The broader the base of citizen participation in the planning process, the more influence the planner and citizens may bring to bear on public policies and plans.
- The broader the base of citizen participation, the more influence the planner may bring to bear on the social choices of the citizens.
- Local planning goals will be more congruent with community desires if discussed widely by participating groups and then communicated to the decision-making body.
- A one-way flow of objectives from a central decision-making body to a planning agency will tend to underrepresent the interests of some community groups.
- The more public consultation techniques are used, the more the planning programmes may attract public support.
- The more the planning process facilitates citizen participation, the more the community may become aware of the planning function as a democratic and community force.

2.10. Chapter summary

This Chapter provided the reasons behind government involvement in agricultural development. It outlined the role that decentralisation plays in effective governance at local level, where service delivery is closest to the beneficiaries of government support.

The Chapter further described smallholder farming as a sector as well as the importance of technology and the need for low-cost technology in the sector. It also outlined how smallholder farmer development is directly linked to political commitment by political office bearers.

The participation of smallholder farmers in their own development was analysed, together with the rationale for participation, the goals of participation, the limitations of participation and approaches to participation. The Chapter emphasised the need to include smallholder farmers when governments plan their development initiatives.

With the views gathered from the literature review as background, the next chapter provides an in-depth look at the Department of Agriculture in Limpopo and the Vhembe District in particular and how it is managed in order to support the development and the improvement of the livelihood of smallholder farmers.

CHAPTER 3: MANAGEMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT AND SUPPORT PROVIDED TO SMALLHOLDER FARMERS AT DISTRICT LEVEL

3.1. Introduction

This Chapter intends to present a detailed view of the Department of Agriculture at provincial, district as well as local level. This is done in order to understand how the Department is managed to support the development of smallholder farmers. The broader picture of management functions and management efficiency at all levels will be presented in order to understand the dynamics involved in the functioning of the Department of Agriculture. Performance management, as one of the tools used by the Department of Agriculture to assess the performance of all officials, will be dealt with thoroughly in this Chapter.

The Chapter will also present a close view of the transformation of the public service and the role of Batho Pele principles in service delivery at all levels. It also aims to present the various programmes of the Department of Agriculture aimed at supporting and improving the livelihood of smallholder farmers. The importance of government involvement in agricultural development and the role the MEC should play in supporting smallholder farmers are also outlined in this chapter.

The macro-economic indicators of the Vhembe District are presented in order to show the relationship between the agricultural sector and other sectors of the economy. Finally the Chapter addresses the interaction between the Department and important stakeholders, which is necessary if agricultural development is to be realised by all members of society.

3.2. Management of the Department of Agriculture at District level

The Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District Municipality is managed in accordance with the organisational arrangements of the Department at provincial level, as is the other districts in the Limpopo Province. The senior manager (also referred to as the district director) is in charge of all the agricultural activities at district level. He/she relies on the team of managers to ensure the smooth running of

the Department and effective service delivery in the District. The senior manager is accountable to the General Manager: District services who resides at Head office in Polokwane. The district organisational structure makes provision for the various managerial portfolios such as manager responsible for agricultural specialist services and is in charge of all the Agricultural Scientists at the District level, manager responsible for all human resource related matters, manager responsible for all financial matters as well as the managers responsible for agricultural service provision at Local municipality levels and are in charge of extension officers at the grassroots level.

Ledwaba and Lithole (2004:54-58 propose the following with regard to the organisational structure of the Department of Agriculture at district level:

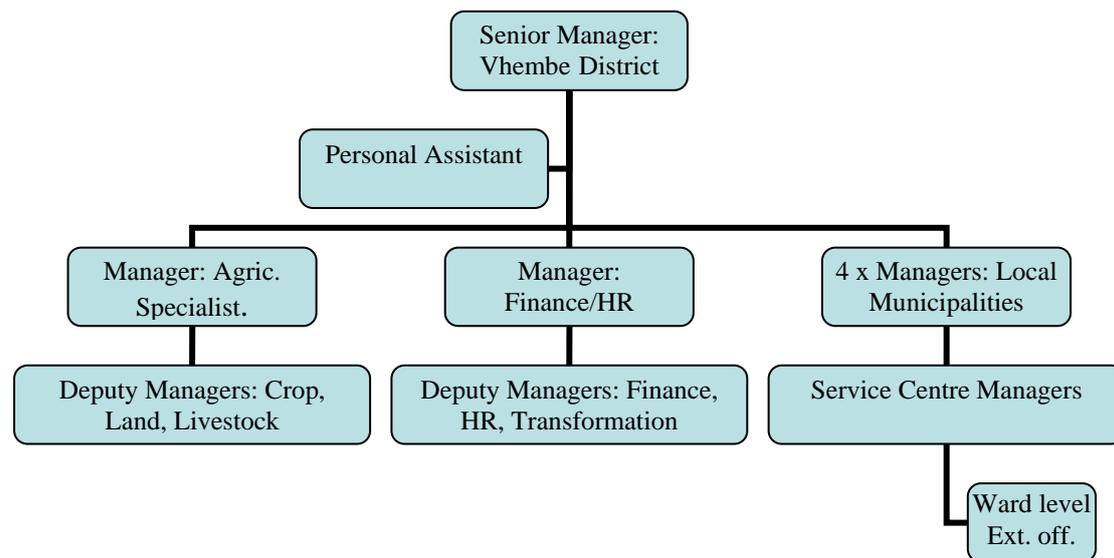


FIGURE 3: Organisational Structure at District level.

Source: Ledwaba , M.S & Lithole N.R., 2004

The following questions pertinent to effective management could be asked with regard to the structure of the Department at district level:

- How efficient and effective is the management of the Department in Vhembe District?
- What are the main management functions of District management?

- In comparison to the private sector, how is the performance of the managers at district level evaluated?
- What kind of leadership style is in place at Vhembe District and how effective is this leadership style?

In order to understand the management of the District, it is necessary to understand management itself. Thornhill and Hanekom (1995:11) explain the words 'management' and 'manager' as follow: A manager is one whose office is to manage a business establishment or a public institution, and management is the action or manner of managing, the application of skill or care in the manipulation, use, treatment, or control of things or persons or in the conduct of an enterprise, operation, etc.

Schoones (1950), in Thornhill and Hanekom (1995:12), contributes the following: Management means to give direction, lead, control, govern, rule over, whilst a manager is an official who manages or controls, a person who has in his hands the general leadership of an enterprise or a division. He is a supervisory person.

Thornhill and Hanekom (1995:12) further state that with regard to management in a public context, particular cognisance should be taken of the political environment in which public administration takes place, which inevitably results in management in general becoming public management in particular. Management is therefore not merely an art or skill in the handling of people, but rather purposeful action aimed at giving direction to the activities of employees towards goal achievement.

District management has an important role to play in ensuring that all resources entrusted to them are used effectively and efficiently in order to meet the needs of the smallholder farmers. These resources could be human, physical or financial. They have to be managed in such a way that the District is able to meet its service delivery targets from year to year. The local offices at municipality level are therefore responsible for the actual delivery of services to the smallholder farmers. It is at this level that if services are not rendered then the farmers has the legitimate claim to demand these services.

3.2.1. Management functions

Chorafas (2004:6) contends that no discussion on management performance and efficiency can be factual without first defining the functions of management. He states that management must perform, in the most able manner, six functions, namely:

- Forecasting
- Planning
- Organising
- Staffing
- Directing
- Controlling.

Cloete (1975), in Thornhill and Hanekom (1995:21), outlines three groups of activities which public administration and management consist of:

- (i) Enabling functions, such as:
 - policy making
 - organising
 - staffing
 - development of work procedures
 - exercising control
- (ii) Functional activities distinctive to the public institution performing the specific service, for example:
 - education
- (iii) Auxiliary functions which can be utilised in the execution of the generic administrative functions such as:
 - systems analysis
 - research.

The public manager – in this case the senior manager in Vhembe District – has to ensure that the various functions of management are properly carried out in order to

enable him/her to have total control of his/her sphere of influence. These management functions are interrelated and should be regarded as such, not in isolation.

All the management functions explored by the abovementioned authors are applicable at district level, with the exception of policy making. Policy making is the responsibility of the provincial level and the senior manager's role at District level is to implement the policies and to influence the policies to be relevant to his/her unique circumstances. This also implies that any locally developed operational policies should be consistent with those policies developed by the top management of the Department at provincial level.

3.2.2. Management efficiency

Smallholder farmers' development depends to a great extent on the efficiency of Departmental management. The manner in which the Department is managed can lead to either a successful smallholder farming sector or an unsuccessful one. Therefore it is essential that the management in Vhembe District is both effective and efficient.

Chorafas (2004:3) states that in the private sector, every company should be testing and grading the people entrusted with corporate governance, and therefore with the entity's survival and its profits. This is because in the private sector managers' success is measured by how much profit they generate in the shortest possible time.

The situation in the public sector differs from that in the private sector. In the public sector there is what one could call 'job protectionism', because managers know that their jobs are protected whether they have produced good results or not. However, with the introduction of a performance management system, the situation in the public sector is likely to improve. (This will be discussed further in Section 3.3.) Public servants are now aware that failure to meet their performance targets could lead to the non-renewal of their performance contracts, especially for levels 13 (senior managers and general managers) and above. For lower levels (managers and lower) it would mean no salary increase.

Chorafas (2004:3) emphasises that management of an enterprise is a complex operation which necessitates personnel to be well trained for the role of management. The same applies for the public sector, where effective and efficient service delivery depends on how well trained or informed the decision makers and change agents are. Management efficiency is directly linked to the level of training managers are exposed to and their knowledge of the particular subject for whom delivery of services is required.

3.3. Role of a performance management system in the management of the Vhembe District Department of Agriculture

In the quest to ensure better delivery of services by public servants to the citizenry of the Limpopo Province, the Limpopo Provincial Government commissioned Simeka Management Consulting to design, develop and implement a performance management system for the entire provincial government. The system is applicable to all Limpopo Provincial Departments as well as their offices at both District and municipality level.

According to Simeka (2004:9), the key objectives of the performance management system process were to:

- Contribute to other initiatives aimed at improving service delivery under the Integrated Provincial Support Programme (IPSP)
- Develop an overall framework for performance management, linked to other strategic objectives
- Link individual performance to organisational performance
- Provide easy-to-use tools to manage performance at all levels
- Meet the requirements of the Public Service Regulations of 2001
- Provide for employee training and development on the performance management system as well as performance improvement plans.

Simeka (2004:15) states that the design and implementation of the performance management system are based on the following key principles:

- The system is designed to improve departmental performance and hence render more effective service delivery to the citizens of the Province. It is not about assessing individual performance in isolation.
- The approach is based on developmental rather than punitive and static principles
- The framework sets out to create certainty about outcomes (recognition and corrective action) and to ensure transparency and equity.
- The system provides a tool to identify and reward good performance and also to address poor performance.
- Non-performance is addressed within existing labour relations framework.
- The system is applicable to all employees regardless of rank or position in the public sector.
- The system involves changing organisational culture and behaviour.

In a nutshell, the performance management framework is designed to address performance at departmental level (from both a strategic and an operational perspective), as well as at directorate, unit or team or section, and individual levels.

The performance of all departmental staff, including that of the senior manager for the Vhembe District, can therefore be enhanced by the use of the performance management system. At the same time the senior manager is able to monitor, control, evaluate and assess performance of his/her team through the use of the performance management system. The performance of the Vhembe District personnel is therefore harnessed; good performers are adequately rewarded, while poor performers are trained to perform better in future.

In order for the Department of Agriculture in Vhembe District to deliver efficient and effective services, the use of the performance management system is imperative. There should be a common understanding of the role of the performance management system by all staff in order to make the system work effectively. All staff members should understand the following: what performance management is, why it is necessary, what a performance management system does, what its main objectives are, and what its underlying principles are.

Simeka (2004:16) answers these important questions as follows:

(a) What is performance management?

Performance management is the process of harnessing all available resources in an organisation and ensuring that these perform to the maximum, in order to achieve the desired results. Performance management involves building processes, systems, culture and relationships that facilitate the achievement of organisational objectives.

(b) Why is a performance management system necessary?

A performance management system is necessary for the following reasons:

- Meeting the statutory and constitutional requirements in respect of service delivery.
- Addressing backlogs in a largely rural and underdeveloped Province.
- Implementing Limpopo's Provincial Growth and Development Strategy.
- Transforming an amalgamated public service from a rule-driven set of organisation into a developmental and transformative institution that promotes integration and cooperation at interdepartmental and intergovernmental levels.
- Re-engineering the public service to address changing needs and to ensure the government and the administration of service delivery are accessible to the people of the Province.

For maximum impact and optimal use of resources the Province and the departments must have the following elements in place (Simeka, 2004:27):

- A clear vision, mission and strategic goals indicating what the province and the departments need to achieve.
- Identified methods whereby the province and its departments will go about achieving the strategic goals.
- Clear plans for how human, financial and physical resources are to be used.
- Agreed upon quality assurance standards for all aspects of departmental functions.
- Highly skilled staff members who know what they should contribute to the success of their departments.

- An organisational culture that strives towards excellent performance and service delivery.

(c) What does a performance management system do?

At an individual staff member level, a performance management system allows for the following:

- Agreement to be reached on individual, team and departmental responsibilities and the linking of these with the overall goals of the province.
- Clear definition of areas of responsibility and the determination of indicators against which performance can be measured.
- Providing and receiving feedback on performance.
- Recognition and understanding of levels of performance.

For each department and the province as a whole it means the following:

- The drawing of clear links between what the department, teams and individuals do and the goals of the province as a whole.
- Recognition of good performance.
- Improvement of poor performance.

(d) What are the main objectives of a performance management system?

A performance management system aims to:

- Clarify and align broader organisational, departmental, team and individual efforts and expectations.
- Identify individuals' potentials, strengths and weaknesses and align these with provincial/departmental priorities.
- Ensure that the assessment process is fair and promotes equity and accountability in managing performance and implementing remuneration, affirmative action, employment equity and promotion of policies.
- Develop a results- and quality-oriented culture which ensures that provincial administration operates efficiently and effectively.
- Facilitate and build open communication in order to agree on the prioritisation and importance of job related activities.
- Recognise and reward excellent performance and address non-performance.

(e) What are the underlying principles of a performance management system?

The performance management system is practised in such a way that it:

- Is developmental and not punitive in nature, as employees will be provided with career opportunities and allowed to be creative and innovative in improving their performance.
- Provides a clear and detailed framework for:
 - agreement on performance contracts
 - clear measures of agreed upon standards
 - a balance between organisational needs and employee rights.
- Allows for joint responsibility and accountability based on mutual trust and respect.
- Is cost effective and practical as it enhances improvements in quality.
- Allows honesty and transparency in application.
- Provides clear linkages between performance and recognition.
- Focus on critical work activities.

(f) Challenges of a Performance Management System

The performance management system as presented above is not without its shortcomings. The researcher has identified the following challenges for the management of Vhembe District in the implementation of the performance management system:

(i) Ceiling for rewarding good performance

The Department of Public Service and Administration has decided that the payment of reward to employees should not exceed 1,5% of the personnel expenditure. This means that if all personnel at Vhembe District have performed exceptionally well, there shall be no money to reward them for their good performance.

(ii) Biased assessment by managers at various levels

The system could be open to abuse by managers who are incompetent in their management style. If a manager has a group of people he/she is in favour of, he/she

could score them higher even if they are poor performers and vice versa. This unfortunately leads to demoralisation of those staff members who are good performers, which will result in overall poor performance.

(iii) Pressure from supervisees leading to management/supervisory fears

In most cases supervisees who are too vocal at the workplace are those who are underperformers. As a result of the pressure they exert on their immediate supervisors, a supervisor can compromise the performance management system by giving in to demands. Supervisors can be afraid to a certain extent of what could happen to them if they do not rate staff according to their demands.

(iv) Nepotism and corruption

Relationships in the workplace, mainly between males and females and between relatives working at the same workplace, leave the performance management system open to possible corrupt practices. For example, a manager/supervisor who has a romantic relationship with a staff member will not be objective when he/she assesses the performance of this individual. The same is true for people with close family ties.

(v) Poor handling of quarterly reviews

The performance management system emphasises the need to assess employee performance on a quarterly basis, and payment of a performance bonus or reward should not only be based on the last evaluation. However, the researcher has observed that managers and supervisors do not give these quarterly reviews the attention they deserve. In most cases quarterly reports are done just for formality and not as a serious tool to help employees in line with the objectives and principles of the performance management system. This leads to a poor final assessment based on poor quarterly reviews that have been given little or no attention at all.

(vi) Failure to implement performance management system in its entirety

The performance management system provides for a range of scores from 5 to 18 points, plus one or two notch increases, depending on the scores obtained through the assessment. Since the implementation of the system, the performance of certain individual staff members has been outstanding, which means that they deserved to score up to 18 points and two notch increases? However, they did not. These

individual staff members would usually have to be downgraded, since there is not enough money to pay them. On paper they have done well, but when judged on performance bonuses, this will not be reflected.

(vii) Delays in the processing of payment of performance bonuses

After the completion of the annual performance evaluations, it takes the Department of Agriculture's human resources division a long time to process the payment of performance bonuses. These delays can demoralise hardworking employees, which can lead to a decline in performance.

3.4. Transformation of the public service and service delivery

The apartheid regime had its own way of providing services to the citizenry of South Africa ever since the Union of South Africa came into being in 1910. The delivery of services was grafted along racial lines, which meant that different communities received different services from the same government. This was also the basis for the creation of black homelands: to cater for the needs of their own people through separate development. The government's policies on service delivery were to ensure that the privileges accorded to the white community were at the expense of the black majority. Services were not delivered equally under the apartheid system, and white farmers received the best service delivery.

Since the dawn of the democratic era in South Africa, the situation changed for the better for black smallholder farmers. In the foreword of the *White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery* (RSA, 1997) the former Minister of Public Service and Administration, Mr Zola Skweyiya, says the following:

[W]hen I was elected to this office, I knew that one of government's most important tasks is to build a public service capable of meeting the challenge of improving the delivery of public services to the citizens of South Africa. Access to decent public services is no longer a privilege to be enjoyed by a few, but it is now the rightful expectation of all citizens, especially those previously disadvantaged. Hence the guiding principle of public service transformation and reform is 'service to the people'.

The government, through the Department of Public Service and Administration, has adopted the slogan 'Batho Pele', people first. The eight Batho Pele principles for the transformation of service delivery are the following (RSA, 1997):

(a) Consultation

The first principle state that citizens should be consulted about the level and quality of public services they receive and, where possible, should be given a choice about the services that are offered. This implies that smallholder farmers should be asked for their views on existing public services offered by the Department of Agriculture and that they may suggest new basic services they desire.

(b) Service standards

The second principle states that citizens should be told what level and quality of public services they will receive so that they become aware of what to expect. This implies that the Department of Agriculture shall publish service standards for existing and new services so that smallholders may hold the Department accountable when the standards are not met.

(c) Access

The third principle states that all citizens should have equal access to the services to which they are entitled. This implies that none of the smallholder farmers should be discriminated against by public officials and that there shall be no favouritism in providing services to smallholder farmers.

(d) Courtesy

The fourth principle states that citizens should be treated with courtesy and consideration. This principle expects all government departments to set standards for the treatment of the public, which should be incorporated into the codes of conduct, values and training programmes. This implies that smallholder farmers should not be looked down upon because of their status in society. They should be treated the same as any other citizen would be treated, regardless of status.

(e) Information

The fifth principle states that citizens should be given full, accurate and up-to-date information about the public services they are entitled to receive. Information should be disseminated to the lowest level and local media and languages should be used to reach citizens. This implies that smallholder farmers should be provided with information they will be able to understand and use to better their livelihood through their farming businesses.

(f) Openness and transparency

The sixth principle states that citizens should be told how national and provincial departments are run, how much they cost, and who is in charge. This implies that citizens should also know how departments at district and local level are run, how much they cost and who is in charge. Smallholder farmers should know how the funds allocated to the district and local municipalities are being used. Budget speeches provide an avenue for smallholder farmers to know what to expect and what has been planned for their development.

(g) Redress

The seventh principle states that, if the promised standard of service is not delivered, citizens should be offered an apology, a full explanation and a speedy and effective remedy, and when complaints are made, citizens should receive a sympathetic and positive response. This implies that when smallholder farmers have raised their concerns, these should receive consideration by public officials and timely feedback should be given to the farmers.

(h) Value for money

The eighth principle states that public services should be provided economically and efficiently, in order to give citizens the best possible value for money. Citizens are the tax payers who finance the administration of the country and therefore have every right to know how the money is being used and to insist that the money be used as efficient and effective as possible. This implies that smallholder farmers also contribute to the functioning of the Department of Agriculture and therefore should receive the best possible service cost effectively.

These principles were based on Section 195(1) of the Constitution (RSA, 1996), which states that the public administration should adhere to a number of principles, including the following:

- A high standard of professional ethics should be promoted and maintained.
- Services should be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias.
- Resources should be utilised efficiently, economically and effectively.
- People's needs should be responded to.
- Administration should be accountable, transparent and development oriented.

The Limpopo Department of Agriculture has adopted its own departmental service standards, based on the national Batho Pele principles and developed by the Limpopo Provincial Government. These standards are applicable to all government departments and to all districts, including Vhembe. The standards are the following:

- The public will be given access to information, excluding information that is specifically protected by law.
- Employees allocated with official cellular phones shall be available after hours.
- Where appointments have been pre-arranged and meetings have been scheduled with clients, the starting time of the meeting is strictly adhered to by public servants.
- Where a scheduled meeting cannot be attended by public servants, a written apology is tendered or alternatively suitable arrangements to be represented or kept informed are made.
- The right of a client to seek a second opinion is respected.
- There is a mechanism in place for a speedy and full investigation, once a client has lodged a complaint.
- Any verbal query or message is responded to (even if only to acknowledge receipt of the query verbally) within two working days.
- Any correspondence is responded to within five working days (even if only to acknowledge receipt).
- Information on government activities is made available on request, within 14 working days.

- Allegations of corruption are investigated promptly and decisive action taken against any official found to be corrupt.
- Telephone calls at switchboards are answered within five rings and the operator identifies a suitable department or section in a friendly manner.
- Where a telephone is not answered within ten rings, a caller is diverted to another person or back to the switchboard to leave a message.
- There are relief staff at switchboard during lunch time, to take messages.
- All messages are written down in a duplicate message book and passed on to the relevant station.
- When something is promised to a customer, the promise is realistic, kept and any unforeseen and unavoidable delays are notified.
- When public servants 'inherit' errors that have been passed on from elsewhere in the organisation, it will not be passed on to others.
- All written work is clear and understandable.
- Public servants are informed and have received instruction on customers' rights.
- Customers' rights, which reflect their needs, are agreed on between management, staff and stakeholders.
- Where standards are not achievable, management produces a service delivery improvement plan with time scales, which are available to and agreed upon by the major stakeholders.
- Departmental standards are reviewed annually by major stakeholders.
- Public service institutions and departments are signposted with clear directions.
- Employees wear name tags while on duty.
- Interpreter services are made available and known to customers.

The delivery of services to smallholder farmers in the Vhembe District is therefore based on these principles. If any smallholder farmers have not been treated in accordance to these principles, they have the right to lodge their complaint in writing to the highest authority of the Department, either the Head of Department or the MEC, and in extreme cases to the Office of the Premier. All cases of non-compliance

with Batho Pele principles are thoroughly investigated and transgressors are dealt with accordingly, which might entail disciplinary action.

3.5. Support provided to smallholder farmers

According to Motsoaledi (2004a:6-9), the Department of Agriculture has provided smallholder farmers with various kinds of support since 1994. These include support in terms of poverty alleviation, micro-projects, farmer settlement, rehabilitation of irrigation schemes, the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme, land reform, communal farmer support and human resource development (training). The support provided also includes the provision of extension services, which is the main form of support provided to smallholder farmers by the Department. The support was provided by the Department itself or through partnerships and cooperation with foreign donor countries, such as Germany, Finland and Japan.

3.5.1. Poverty alleviation

The poverty alleviation programme was earmarked for beneficiaries/families who were destitute and who were interested in starting their own small farming enterprises, which could have the potential to become big enterprises in the long run. The programme was conceived as an approach to fight poverty and unemployment amongst the communities in the Limpopo Province and in the Vhembe District as well. The programme was divided into four main sub-programmes:

(a) Egg production

The aim of this programme has been to provide selected beneficiaries or families with a chicken cage, together with 18 to 36 chickens at laying stage plus feed, for the beneficiaries to start production right away. The intention was for the beneficiaries to be able to receive an average of 18 to 36 eggs per day, which should be used for consumption and the surplus for starting a small farming business with the potential to grow into a bigger business in the long run. The supply was regarded as start-up support for the beneficiaries to become smallholder farmers in their own right. This could be done through the formation of cooperatives to facilitate access to input and

sale of eggs. The target market for these cooperatives was government institutions such as hospitals and school feeding schemes.

The information received from the officials of the Department at Vhembe District revealed that there is a total of 1 032 beneficiaries/families which benefited from the programme. The success of the programme still needs to be investigated thoroughly to determine whether the Department should proceed with the programme or not. The implementation of the programme had its own challenges, such as inability to find chickens at the point of laying, families slaughtering the chickens and consuming them, inability by families to purchase more feed for the chickens, inability to form the envisaged cooperatives and inability to access envisaged markets for the surplus.

(b) Milk production

The aim of this programme was to provide selected beneficiaries/families with a dairy cow at the point of milking, i.e. after calving, in order for the beneficiaries to receive milk from day one of the programme. The beneficiaries were expected to receive 10 to 12 litres of milk per day. It was expected that, when the programme is running at full capacity the beneficiaries would receive 20 litres of milk per day. The Department has supplemented the dairy cows with milk goats to ensure the sustainability of the programme.

The intention was for the beneficiaries to consume some milk but to sell the surplus in order to generate income for the families. The beneficiaries were therefore expected to become smallholder dairy farmers in the long run through formation of cooperatives. As was the case with the egg production programme, this programme had its challenges, such as the inability to find dairy cows at the point of calving, inability by beneficiaries to purchase fodder for the dairy cows during droughts, inability to form the envisaged cooperatives, and inability to access envisaged markets for the surplus.

Statistics provided by officials in Vhembe District indicated that a total of 13 beneficiaries/families had benefited from the programme. The success of the programme still needs to be investigated thoroughly to determine whether the Department should proceed with the programme or not.

(c) Fish production

The aim of this programme was to provide selected beneficiaries/families with one aqua dam, six bags of fish feed, a thermometer, a bird net, a scoop net, and 100 fingerlings each. The beneficiaries were expected to raise the fish up to the point of harvesting, in which case they would consume a portion of the harvest and market the surplus to generate income. The fish production programme had its own challenges, such as access to water, fingerlings not readily available, families consuming all the fish without leaving any for sale, inability to purchase feed, and failure to access markets.

Departmental statistics provided by officials in Vhembe District indicated a total of 147 beneficiaries/families had indeed benefited from the programme. The success of the programme still needs to be investigated thoroughly to determine whether the Department should proceed with the programme or not.

(d) Homestead food production

The aim of this programme was to provide selected beneficiaries/families with a 200 litre drum, fertilisers and seeds in order for them to start vegetable production such as tomatoes, spinach, and cabbages in their backyards. The beneficiaries would be encouraged to store all the grey water in the drum, which would then be used to irrigate the vegetables. The programme intended beneficiaries to become smallholder farmers in vegetable production. This programme faced some challenges too, such as lack of water, and the unavailability of equipments and tools for tilling the land.

Departmental officials in Vhembe District provided statistics that indicated that a total of 1 579 beneficiaries/families had actually benefited from this programme. The success of the programme still needs to be investigated thoroughly to determine whether the Department should proceed with the programme or not.

3.5.2. Micro-projects through the Limpopo Agricultural Development Programme

Motsoaledi (2004a:10-11) states that since 1994 the nation has been hard at work to bring an end to poverty. Hence many poverty alleviation projects were established, in

the form of community gardens, poultry projects, piggery projects, brick making, micro-bakeries, stone crushing, and sewing. Ninety percent of all the micro-projects were agriculture-based, although they were started by various structures of government (e.g. Department of Health and Public Works), business (e.g. South African Breweries), churches, non-governmental organisations, foreign embassies, and parastatals (e.g. Eskom).

Motsoaledi (2004a: 10-11) went further to state that most of these projects have not been productive or sustainable because of various reasons, such as the number of beneficiaries being too large for the project to be able to sustain all of them, conflicts amongst beneficiaries, fraud, nepotism and corruption, and lack of expertise by some initiating organisations. As a result all projects to be coordinated by the Department of Agriculture were restructured. This would ensure proper monitoring and provision of expert advice by extension officers, which in turn would lead to sustainability of the projects. The Department prioritised the micro-projects and funded them accordingly in an effort to revive them and to make them more productive and sustainable.

The Finnish-funded programme called the Limpopo Agricultural Development Programme (LADEP) contributed immensely to the productivity and sustainability of identified micro-enterprises in Vhembe and in other districts of the Limpopo Province. The programme was begun in 2001, with the purpose of improving household livelihood through the development of micro-enterprises. The success of the micro-enterprises supported by the programme was as a result of the massive cash injection provided to kick start production at the various micro-enterprises.

3.5.3. Revitalisation of Smallholder Irrigation Schemes (RESIS)

The majority of smallholder farmers are found in areas where water is a limiting factor towards a sustainable rural livelihood. As a result the available water must be used to support sustainable food production and to enhance food security through sustainable irrigation agriculture. Irrigated agriculture should be promoted in all areas where it is viable, hence the revitalisation of smallholder irrigation schemes. According to the Limpopo Department of Agriculture (2004:32), there are 114 smallholder irrigation schemes in Limpopo, with a total irrigable area of 18 629 ha. In

Vhembe District there is a total of 47 irrigation schemes under revitalisation, covering 4 698 hectares and including 3 009 smallholder farmers.

The revitalisation process, which is farmer-led and departmentally facilitated and funded, can have a large impact on the improvement of the livelihood of smallholder farmers. The following services will be rendered to existing irrigation schemes, areas in their immediate vicinity, and neighbouring communities (Limpopo Department of Agriculture, 2004:33):

- Provision of bulk water supply to irrigation schemes
- Provision of infield irrigation systems
- Provision of access roads from schemes to main roads in each village
- Provision of rainwater harvesting for rain-fed farming
- Provision of livestock watering systems for communities
- Provision of dipping tanks for communities
- Provision of training and capacity building for farmers
- Provision of institutional arrangements and structures in the form of water users' associations in irrigation schemes
- Provision of rain-fed farming support to communities.

3.5.4. Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP)

The Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP) is a national programme announced by the President in his State of the Nation address (Mbeki, 2003) and initiated by the National Minister of Agriculture, Ms Thoko Didiza (2003), in her budget vote presentation, as a key deliverable for reversing the skewed participation in the sector and responding to the recommendations of the Strauss Commission Report.

According to the National Department of Agriculture (2002:7), the primary aim of the Department of Agriculture with CASP is to provide effective agricultural support and to streamline the provision of services to the four different targeted levels of clients within the farming continuum.

The need for CASP flows from the recommendations of 1996's Strauss Commission Report (National Department of Agriculture, 2002:7), which recommended financial 'sunrise' subsidies and the adoption of a 'sunrise' package of enabling conditions for beneficiaries of the land reform programme who require loan finance. The purpose of CASP is therefore to establish financing mechanisms, and to streamline and align service delivery within the three tiers of government by creating enabling conditions for beneficiaries.

The four different levels of clients within the farming continuum (National Department of Agriculture, 2002:8), are:

- The hungry: supported through advice and food emergencies provided through the agricultural food packs to deal with food prices.
- Subsistence and household food producers: supported through food production, including the special programme on food security and the Integrated Food and Nutrition Programme, where the provision of starter pack is made (production inputs provided by the Department of Agriculture at no cost).
- Farmers: supported through farm level support, including the beneficiaries of Land Reform for Agricultural Development (LRAD) and other strategic programmes, such as the Revitalisation of Smallholder Irrigation Schemes (RESIS).
- The general public: to ensure that business and the regulatory environment is conducive to agricultural development and food safety.

Clients are financed through the following six cost drivers:

- Information and knowledge management
- Technical and advisory assistance, and regulatory services
- Training and capacity building
- Marketing and business development
- On-farm and off-farm infrastructure and production inputs
- Financial assistance.

In Limpopo, CASP was initially intended to support livestock farmers in livestock improvement. CASP funds were earmarked to assist smallholder farmers and emerging farmers in the provision of the following infrastructural needs:

- Renovation of dipping tanks and buying dipping compounds
- Erection of crush pens and buying of mobile ones
- Construction of livestock watering systems in different municipalities
- Renovation of auction pens
- Construction of fences for grazing camps.

Although the programme started with the provision of infrastructure to livestock farmers, it has since been accessed by smallholder farmers across all areas of agricultural economic activity in the Province, including Vhembe District.

3.5.5. Land reform

The Department has worked well with the Office of the Land Claims Commissioner in Limpopo Province to speed up the land claims lodged with the Commissioner. In this regard the Department has seconded staff from all the districts, including Vhembe, to work on the validation and processing of claims.

The Department has spent a substantial amount on the upgrading of infrastructure on newly acquired farms in order to improve productivity and increase farm income for new landowners.

The Department also assisted communities in seeking strategic partners to assist them when agricultural projects required continued production and the community lacked the necessary expertise.

3.5.6. Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD)

According to the National Department of Agriculture (2003:1), LRAD was designed to help previously disadvantaged citizens from African, Coloured and Indian

communities to buy land or agricultural implements specifically for agricultural purposes. It was realised that the majority of the designated groups do not have sufficient funds to buy land for farming purposes. The programme therefore makes some money available to successful applicants to supplement what they already have for purchasing agricultural land. This is done through government grants, given according to certain criteria.

The National Department of Agriculture (2003: 2) further stated that in order to qualify for a grant, the applicant should make an own contribution to capital. The capital package is therefore made up of own contribution plus grant. The own contribution can be made in a number of ways:

- Cash contribution

The applicant contributes a minimum of R5 000, which will qualify for a grant amount of R20 000, up to a maximum of R400 000, which will qualify for a grant amount of R100 000.

- Contribution in kind

These include property, machinery, equipment and livestock. These are equated to their current cash value and the total amount is used as own contribution.

- Own labour

Any number of labour units will be equated to a maximum of R5 000 own contribution.

The Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District has provided assistance to both smallholder and emerging farmers in the LRAD programme. However, some of these farmers are struggling. The programme was meant to assist the farmers and not to overburden them with loans they may not be able to repay.

3.5.7. Communal farmer support

With this programme the Department's main aim was to assist smallholder farmers in communal areas with the provision of infrastructure which the community may not be able to provide for themselves, such as fencing of crop fields and grazing camps.

3.5.8. Human resource development

The Department has two agricultural Colleges – Madzivhandila, in the Vhembe District, and Tompi Seleka, in the Sekhukhune District – which contributes to capacity building and provision of skills for the youth as well as smallholder and emerging farmers. According to the Limpopo Department of Agriculture's (2002:2) concept plan to improve smallholder farmers' access to training, the Department has engaged itself in a process to build farmer training interventions into the curricula offered by the two Colleges, in order to broaden smallholder farmers' access to appropriate training.

Smallholder farmers have limited access to training, and the available training is focused almost exclusively on scaled down versions of high-cost, high-risk commercial production practices, which are largely inappropriate for food insecure households (Limpopo Department of Agriculture, 2002:2). The training offered also requires smallholder farmers to be away from their homes and farms for periods ranging from 3 days to several months, which becomes impossible for many to attend.

The two agricultural Colleges have been offering training exclusively to extension officers in the past, and it is gratifying to note that the Department has given them the mandate to train and develop smallholder and emerging farmers in various agriculture-related fields.

3.5.9. Broadening agricultural services and extension delivery (BASED)

The formalisation of the cooperation agreement between the governments of South Africa and Germany has led to technical support provided to the Limpopo Department of Agriculture through the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ). This led to

the introduction of the Participatory Extension Approach (PEA) adopted through the BASED programme, initially in the Vhembe and Capricorn Districts, followed by the other four districts of Mopani, Sekhukhune, Bohlabela and Waterberg.

Ficarelli *et al.* (2005:1) state that since 1998, the BASED programme focused on the development and testing of participatory approaches for the mobilisation and self-organisation of rural communities aimed at better articulating service demands and managing the institutional responses of public service organisations. The project was designed and subsequently implemented in the most challenging institutional and social transformation period of recent South African history, after the first democratic elections in 1994.

According to Ficarelli *et al.* (2005:1), rural services were very exclusive, unequal, disempowering and highly manipulative in apartheid South Africa. Agricultural projects were mainly aimed at providing free services and infrastructure to local elites and creating employment through the establishment of government-run commercial enterprises. Most of these projects have collapsed. The new government is redressing the situation by allocating substantial public funding for agricultural programmes and development of rural infrastructure. However, institutional systems in other departments other than the Department of Agriculture are not sufficiently developed to work together with other service providers and link with municipalities to ensure sustainability of public investments in rural development.

The BASED project focused on the following aspects necessary to empower smallholder farmers (Ficarelli *et al.*, 2005:1):

- Developing the individual and collective capacity of rural people to select and disseminate options to improve their livelihood by having access to suitable innovations
- Establishing representative and democratic community-based organisations capable of establishing permanent linkages with service providers and developing project proposals
- Piloting effective multi-stakeholder platforms for service delivery capable of responding to community demands

- Institutionalising PEA approaches into the service delivery systems of the Department
- Developing dissemination mechanisms for the adoption of project innovative components by other departments and other provinces.

3.5.10. Provision of extension services

The Department of Agriculture has a well trained cadre of extension officers appointed to give advice to farmers on an ongoing basis at the localities where the farmers are staying and practicing their farming ventures. The Department in Vhembe District is divided according to four local municipalities, namely Makhado, Musina, Mutale and Thulamela. These are further divided into service centres, and finally into wards. All these levels of the Department have dedicated teams of extension officers whose main mandate is to assist farmers to farm productively, cost effectively, profitably and sustainably. According to Nesamvuni *et al.* (2003:11), the District has a total of 162 extension officers employed by the Department of Agriculture. These officers service a total of 23 636 organised commodity groups' smallholder farmers in Vhembe District.

3.6. Limpopo Provincial Government's investment in agriculture

Okorie (1998), in Nesamvuni *et al.* (2003:3), states that the injection of capital is a precondition for a healthy development of any sector of the economy. Hence capital and investment funds are critical to the development and growth of agriculture in the Limpopo Province. A good measure of the provincial government's commitment to and investment in the agricultural sector is the annual budget. The Province's agricultural budgets for 1995 to 2002 are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 4: Limpopo's investment in agriculture (provincial budgets, 1995-2002)

Financial year	Total provincial budget (R)	Agricultural budget (R)	Agriculture as % of total
1995/96	9 424 950 000	498 756 000	5,29
1996/97	10 040 641 000	418 667 000	4,17

1997/98	10 856 478 000	487 075 000	4,49
1998/99	11 310 683 000	518 171 000	4,58
1999/00	11 993 410 000	553 571 000	4,45
2000/01	13 663 328 920	621 409 000	4,55
2001/02	15 463 920 000	621 409 000	4,55
2002/03	17 663 618 000	707 488 000	4,01

Source: Limpopo Department of Agriculture (2002) in Nesamvuni *et al.* (2003:4)

The nominal allocation to the agricultural sector increased from R498, 756 million in the 1995/96 financial year to R707, 488 million in the 2002/03 financial year. The figures represent an increase of R29, 819 million per annum on the average 5, 98% annual increase.

The Department of Agriculture in Vhembe District's share of the provincial budget allocation for the period 1999-2004 is reflected in Table 4.

Table 5: Annual budgets for Department of Agriculture in Vhembe District, 1999-2004

Financial Year	Allocated budget (R)
1999/2000	51 689 922
2000/2001	59 882 730
2001/2002	101 501 755
2002/2003	129 340 589
2003/2004	113 271 399
2004/2005	121 362 697

Source: Limpopo Department of Agriculture (1999-2004)

The Department of Agriculture's budget share at Vhembe District has increased during the period 1999 to 2004. This is an indication of the Department of Agriculture's commitment to the development of smallholder farmers in the Vhembe District. The question that should immediately come to mind is how much of this incremental budget allocations were used to benefit the smallholder and other farmers in the District? The observation made indicates that not all the allocated annual

budgets was utilised completely since some of the money was returned to Treasury. The focus group interviews will reveal if the financial resources were indeed utilised and helped the Department of Agriculture in Vhembe District to improve its performance in meeting the needs of the smallholder farmers.

3.7. Macro-economic indicators for Vhembe District

The following table indicates the net output levels of various economic sectors (agriculture, mining, manufacturing and government) in the Vhembe District:

Table 6: GGP per sector at factor prices for Vhembe District (R'm)

Sector	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Agriculture	202	224	288	261	331	323
Mining	384	405	439	550	632	713
Manufacturing	153	157	118	167	189	202
Government	1 113	1 126	1 199	1 631	1 854	1 972
Total	1 852	1 912	2 044	2 609	3 006	3 210

Source: BEPA, January 2002

The table indicates that the government is the largest contributor to the District's economy (35%), mostly through the payment of salaries to public servants. Agriculture experienced a steady increase throughout the period under review, performing better than the manufacturing sector but surpassed by the mining sector. The table further indicates that agriculture's contribution increased as a direct result of the sector's growth due to the role played by both smallholder farmers and other farmers.

Table 7: Employment by sector for Vhembe District

Sector	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Agriculture	18 954	19 595	23 263	22 707	25 933	24 099
Mining	2 104	2 076	2 096	2 309	2 184	2 309
Manufacturing	4 722	4 722	3 772	4 477	4 267	4 574
Government	49 241	51 642	54 212	49 527	46 034	41 369

Total	75 021	78 035	83 343	79 020	78 418	72 351
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Source: BEPA, January 2002

Employment creation has been almost stagnant for the reporting period. Unemployment has therefore risen and was at a level of 61% in 2002. Agriculture was leading mining and manufacturing but could not perform better than the government. The table further implies that the Agricultural sector is the major employer as compared to the other sectors such as mining and manufacturing. Agriculture has been identified by the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy as one of the economic drivers of the Limpopo Province. The more people are employed in the sector, the more their livelihoods shall increase and in turn the people spend money which then improves the economy of the Province, Districts and Local Municipalities.

Table 8: Capital expenditure in Vhembe District (R'000)

Sector	1998	1999	2000	2001*	2002*	2003*
Agriculture	11 849	138 137	152 889	70 093	157 861	188 678
Mining	98 726	110 593	62 960	62 899	43 838	65 275
Manufacturing	11 831	14 527	15 419	17 670	16 484	12 650
Government	86 535	147 698	195 384	193 576	190 482	190 725
Total	208 941	410 955	426 652	444 238	408 665	457 328

*Anticipated capital expenditure

Source: BEPA, September 2001

There are significant anticipated increases in capital expenditure in the agriculture sector (mostly for macadamia) and high levels of investment by government for infrastructure provision. This provides the opportunity for increased production levels. The more capital expenditure in the Agricultural sector, the more the smallholder farmers and other groups of farmers shall benefit due to improved infrastructure to be put in place as a result of this capital injection to Vhembe District. According to the above table, the capital expenditure in Agriculture is favourably compared to that of the Government. The other two sectors of the economy are lagging behind in terms of the capital expenditure mainly because they are more developed than the Agricultural sector.

Table 9: Provincial development project priorities in Vhembe District

Economic sector	Project name	Capital investment R'	Annual production R'	Employment
Agriculture	Beef production	20 000 000	15 000 000	100
Agriculture	Mutale	1 000 000	1 000 000	114
Agriculture	Tshiombo irrigation	16 000 000	10 000 000	1 031
Manufacturing	Fruit processing	25 000 000	35 000 000	150
Manufacturing	Avocado processing	20 000 000	30 000 000	50

Source: Limpopo Department of Finance and Economic Development, 2002

The Beef production value chain has the ability to create opportunities for feed production, abattoirs and meat processing as part of the manufacturing sector. The Department of Finance and Economic Development is managing the development process towards the achievement of Vision 2020. A provincial input-output model has been constructed for this purpose and potential development projects are being assessed against this model to determine their development impact.

In the period 1994 to 2004, Vhembe District has grown from strength to strength in terms of the investment in agriculture and other sectors, and also in terms of the economic development experienced by ordinary citizens, including smallholder farmers.

3.8. Responsibility of the MEC regarding development of smallholder farming

The Department of Agriculture's commitment to rendering good and efficient service to smallholder farmers comes from the responsibility placed upon the shoulders of the MEC for Agriculture by the Premier of the Province. The success of the Department relies largely on the strong political commitment made by the MEC for Agriculture to the electorate during the budget speech, in which the Department's commitments are outlined.

This implies that the MEC should at all time give account of the failures and successes of the Department to the people of the Limpopo Province, especially the farming communities. The senior manager (district director) of Agriculture in the Vhembe District should do the same in his/her jurisdiction, through the District Municipality Council, in which he/she gives an account of the performance of the Department.

The commitment by the Department of Agriculture in the Limpopo Province to revitalise the smallholder irrigation schemes, which would amount to R250 million over a period of five years (Limpopo Provincial Government, 2003:23) and rehabilitate access roads to the revitalised smallholder irrigation schemes – another R390 million – is a good indication that there is political will to develop smallholder farmers.

3.9. Smallholder farming and economic development

The Limpopo Provincial Government (1999:13) identifies agriculture, mining and tourism as the cornerstones of economic growth in the Limpopo Province. This implies that the development of smallholder farmers is essential if they are to participate in the growth of the Province's economy. Because the Department of Agriculture has an important role to play in development, millions of rand are allocated annually to the development of agriculture in the Province. This was indicated earlier in the Chapter where the Provincial investment in agriculture was clarified statistically.

3.10. Interaction between the Department and stakeholders

According to the Limpopo Department of Agriculture's (2005:7) strategic planning document for 2005/2006, and other strategic plan documents of the Department of Agriculture, the following stakeholders play a role in the advancement of the agricultural industry:

- Smallholder farmers (subsistence and small-scale farmers)
- Emerging and semi-commercial farmers

- Commercial farmers
- Parastatals, such as the Agricultural and Rural Development Corporation
- Farmer organisations
- Traditional leaders and their traditional authorities
- Councillors and their councils
- Agricultural industry.

Motsoaledi (2004b:5) states that all efforts of the Department could not be possible without the cooperation of farmers through organised agriculture, commodity groups and agribusinesses, which continue to share and exchange ideas with the Department. According to Motsoaledi (2004b:5), the Department values the partnership with its stakeholders and will continue to put its clients first, in the spirit of Batho Pele, in order to bring prosperity to the agricultural industry.

In the Vhembe District, the most prominent farmer groups are the Limpopo Red Meat Producers' Organisation, the Tomato Growers' Association, the Mango Growers' Association, the National Farmers' Union (NAFU), smallholder farmers' umbrella organisations and Agri Limpopo. These are the stakeholders that interact with the various levels of the Departmental officials at district, municipal and ward level. They are the mouthpiece of the farmers and ensure that farmers' concerns and problems are communicated to the Department.

The Vhembe District has held scheduled meetings with some of these stakeholders, especially the Limpopo Red Meat Producers' Organisation on a monthly basis. This has provided an avenue for departmental staff and farmers to interact and exchange views on a formal basis. The District has also provided avenues such as farmers' days, workshops, imbizos and campaigns, in order to reach smallholder farmers and gather their views on various departmental programmes.

3.11. Chapter summary

This Chapter described in detail the management of the Department of Agriculture at district and local levels and clarified the kind of management that must lead the

support for smallholder farmer development. The various management functions and styles were discussed and were related to that of the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District.

The Chapter also provided an in-depth description of a performance management system and how such a system is used by the Department of Agriculture to improve and enhance the performance of officials. The challenges that the system faces and how it could be manipulated by officials were all described.

The transformation of service delivery by the Department and its officials according to the Batho Pele principles were described. The discussion provided an opportunity to evaluate the success of the implementation of these principles by Departmental officials.

The various support programmes provided by the Department of Agriculture to advance the development of smallholder farmers were outlined. The focus was on those programmes implemented in the Vhembe District. The support included donor-funded programmes such as the BASED and LADEP programmes.

The importance of government involvement in agricultural development and the role of the MEC were described and related to smallholder farmer development. The Chapter presented the linkages between the agricultural sector and other sectors of the economy – as they affect the development of smallholder farmers – through an analysis of the macro-economic indicators for the Vhembe District.

The Chapter finally described the need for important role players to play their part in agricultural development, through organised bodies that are able to engage with the Department on issues of mutual concern.

The information presented in this chapter was gathered from documents of the Department of Agriculture, such as annual reports and strategic plans. Now it should be tested if the situation presented by the Department is indeed true at grass-roots level. An analysis of smallholder farmers' opinion of the Department of Agriculture is

presented in the following Chapter. The research design and methodology will first be discussed, and then the findings of the research will be presented.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS.

4.1. Introduction

The research design, methodology and findings made through the chosen design and methodology are the main focus of this Chapter. The aim of the Chapter is to outline the research design and methodology chosen for the research and the reasons for choosing them. The findings of the research will then be presented.

The researcher used the empirical research design to conduct evaluation research. The reason for this is that the researcher is analysing historical information pertaining to the Department of Agriculture in the Limpopo Province and specifically in the Vhembe District. It is easier to make use of data that was collected over a long period of time, such as the ten years between 1994 and 2004.

Focus group discussions were used to collect data for the research. This methodology was chosen because the majority of the smallholder farmers interviewed are not literate enough to complete questionnaires. This Chapter aims to clarify all the steps necessary for a proper research design and research methodology, so that when the researcher presents the findings, they will be based on the tested design and methodology.

The preparations made and process followed in the arrangements for the focus group discussions in the Vhembe District are also presented in this Chapter. It will clarify how the focus groups were formed and describe the assistance provided by the District office of the Department of Agriculture. The challenges that the researcher faced during the entire process of focus group discussions will also be presented.

The findings of the research are presented per local municipality, although there are some similarities between some of these local municipalities. This is done to ensure that the input received from participants in each local municipality are properly captured and presented under the municipality for which they were intended. Finally

the Chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the findings based on the focus group discussions per municipality.

4.2. Research design

According to Mouton (2001:49), the research design addresses the key question of what type of study will be undertaken in order to provide acceptable answers to the research problem or question. The researcher therefore indicates what type of research design will be followed in the study, why this research design was selected and what possible challenges or limitations in the design will require attention.

In order to effectively answer the research question, an empirical design was chosen for the study. An empirical study refers to a study based on observation, experience or experiment, and not based on theory. Amongst a long list of empirical designs, evaluation research was used because the research project is concerned with the assessing the performance of the Department of Agriculture in addressing the needs and improving the livelihood of smallholder farmers in Vhembe District. Mouton (2001:158) describes evaluation research (implementation evaluation research) as a research design aimed at answering the question of whether an intervention (programme, therapy, policy or strategy) has been properly implemented (process evaluation studies), whether the target group has been adequately covered and whether the intervention was implemented as designed.

The researcher made use of documentary analysis of the various legislations, reports and available statistical data to collect information to be used to arrive at conclusions which add value to the research.

In order to assess the performance of the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District, a wide range of people were consulted. This included Departmental officers, smallholder farmers and farmers' organisations in the District. The study was conducted in the four local municipalities of Makhado, Musina, Mutale and Thulamela, which provides a broad representation of the impact of the Department of Agriculture programmes in the District.

The study made use of various methods of data collection, which included less structured methods (such as focus group interviews, individual interviews, participation observation) as well as analysis of existing documentary sources (such as annual reports, field records, participation records).

The less structured focus group interviews were used as the main method of data collection amongst various groups, such as Departmental officers, representatives of farmers' organisations and associations, and smallholder farmers. This method of data collection was chosen because the majority of smallholder farmers in the District are illiterate.

The following challenges or limitations could have been faced during the course of the study:

- Access to records of the Department and smallholder farmers
- Cooperation of participants in providing sufficient information to enable the researcher to reach concrete conclusions
- The willingness of farmers to be interviewed, since they have been interviewed many times in the past
- The analysis of reports, especially where inaccurate records were provided
- Sufficient time to hold focus group interviews in all four municipalities.

4.3. Research methodology

Mouton (2001:56) states that research methodology focuses on the research process and the kind of tools and procedures to be used. It deals with the individual steps in the research process and the most objective, unbiased procedures to be employed.

According to Welman and Kruger (2001:253), research procedures by means of which a stated problem is to be investigated should be scientifically well founded and describe the following aspects:

- Population(s) from which participants are going to be obtained
- The manner in which, and how many, participants are going to be obtained
- The manner in which, and how many, groups are going to be formed

- The way in which the data are going to be collected and the specifications of any apparatus
- The measurement of the variables
- The statistical methods for processing and analysing the data obtained.

As the problem to be investigated is on the performance of the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District, participants were drawn from the four local municipalities in the District. The population was made up of government officers, smallholder farmers and representatives from farmers' organisations.

The intention was to have at least ten participants from each local municipality to participate in the research study. This number was made up of five Departmental officers and five representatives from farmers' organisations. A total of 40 participants were selected for the focus group discussions, made up of 20 officers and 20 representatives of farmers' organisations in the four local municipalities of the Vhembe District. The participants were selected according to the following criteria:

- Employed by the Department of Agriculture prior to 1994 to date
- Member of middle management and operational staff of the Department of Agriculture at district office or local level
- Current committee member of a recognised farmers' organisation in the District
- An active participant in agricultural development.

The participants representing the smallholder farmers were divided into four groups of ten people each, per local municipality. Four focus group interviews were held, with the purpose of getting unbiased information from each local municipality. The groups were selected according to the following criteria:

- Smallholder farmer since 1994 and still practicing active farming in 2004
- An emergent farmer who was a smallholder farmer in 1994
- Member of a recognised farmers' organisation.

Data was collected using various methods of data collection, which include less structured methods (focus group interviews) as well as analysis of existing documentary sources.

4.4. Organisational arrangements regarding the research

The data was collected through documentary analysis of the various documents available from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture, as well as through interaction with smallholder farmers in the focus group discussions. The researcher had to make certain arrangements before the focus group discussions could be conducted.

(a) Formal request to conduct research

A descriptive letter seeking approval to conduct focus group discussions in the Vhembe District Department of Agriculture was sent to the senior manager in charge. The letter followed after telephonic discussions in which the researcher stated the purpose for the group discussions and the benefits of these discussions for the District and the Limpopo Department of Agriculture. The senior manager was positive about the study and agreed that the study should contribute positively to the improvement of service delivery in the District. The senior manager then appointed one of his staff members to coordinate focus group discussions in the four local municipalities of the Vhembe District.

(b) Research objectives

The focus group discussions were based on the research objectives of the study, which centred on the following issues of importance:

- Analysis of the support offered by the Department of Agriculture, compared with the expectations of smallholder farmers
- Level of development of smallholder farmers after ten years of democracy
- Analysis of factors that lead to good or poor performance of the Department of Agriculture.
- Analysis of Departmental strategic plans over the ten years of democracy.
- Assessment of the role played by public officials in the good or poor performance of the Department of Agriculture.

- Public participation in the delivery of services by the Department of Agriculture.

(c) Focus group discussions

The focus group discussions were held in line with the formal letter written to the District Senior Manager requesting permission to conduct the study.

(i) Questions directing the focus group discussions

Based on the issues of importance listed in Section 4.4.(b), the researcher decided upon the following questions regarding the Department of Agriculture's performance to be raised during all focus group discussions:

- What kind of support was given by the Department to help smallholder farmers improve their livelihood, compared to their expectations?
- How many smallholder farmers have grown from being smallholders to being semi-commercial or commercial farmers?
- What were the factors which led to good or poor performance?
- What role was played by public officers in good or poor performance?
- How were farmers involved in the delivery of services?
- How would you rate the management of the Department?
- What have been the signs of transformation in the Department?
- How was the delivery of services by the Department?
- Did smallholder farmers do something to help themselves? If so, what did they do?
- Did technology play a role in the development of farmers?
- Did politics play a role in influencing the development of smallholder farmers?

(ii) Challenges faced by the researcher

The researcher anticipated the following challenges to be faced during the period of conducting focus group discussions:

- **Attendance of focus group discussions**

The attendance of the focus group discussions by farmer representatives and Departmental officers, except the extension officers, was just about 10 %. The researcher attributes this to failure by the coordinator to inform them. Those who actually attended were merged with the smallholder farmer groups. The smallholder farmer attendance was 90 % and as a result the researcher was satisfied.

- **Dissemination of information about focus group discussions**

The majority of the participants attending the focus groups indicated that they did not know exactly what the “meeting” was all about. They claim to have simply been informed that there is a “meeting” to be attended at a specific venue. The researcher had to explain in detail what the “meeting” was all about, and indicated that it was actually a focus group discussion whose purpose was to gather more information on the performance of the Department of Agriculture in helping smallholder farmers improve their livelihood. The researcher had also to explain that the focus group discussion was a tool used for collecting information to be used for research work that was being done at the Vhembe District Department of Agriculture.

- **Concern about the outcome of the focus group discussions**

Amongst the concerns raised by the participants in the focus group discussions, was the question of what would be done about the findings after the study was completed. Their concern was that they have been interviewed by many researchers in the past but they never received feedback from the researchers about what was done with the findings. Nothing had been done about the concerns they’ve raised before either. The researcher had to explain that the main purpose was to collect as much information as possible to complete his thesis at the University of Stellenbosch. However, the researcher indicated that he would submit copies of the completed thesis to the Department of Agriculture, both at district and provincial levels. The researcher was of the opinion that the authorities would study the findings and

implement measures regarding those aspects which have been found to be affecting the performance of smallholder farmers negatively.

4.5. Presentation of data collected per local municipality areas

At the end of the visits to all local municipalities' areas for data collection through focus group discussions, the researcher collated all the relevant information in order to present the status of each municipality separately.

4.5.1. Musina Local Municipality Area

The farmers in this municipality consisted of smallholder farmers and emerging farmers who are in the transition stage from smallholder to semi-commercial farming. The farmers with whom focus group discussion were held discussed the major issues raised for directing the discussions in an open and honest manner. The following information came out of the discussions:

A. Support provided by the Department

(i) Positive support provided

Farmers regarded the following support as positive towards the improvement of their livelihood:

- The Department provided assistance in liaising with the Department of Labour with the view to enable farmers to register foreign labourers on a twelve-month contract basis.
- Extension advice is good, though the extension officers' visits to the farmers are insufficient.
- There is a good working relationship between the farmers and the Department, although there are challenges such as failure by the Department to subsidise the farmers.
- Workshops on various aspects of production are held for capacity building of farmers.

(ii) Support expected but not provided

The farmers expected the Department to provide the following support, which was not provided:

- Subsidisation of expensive electricity bills for the farmers.
- Disaster relief, for example the flood damage in the year 2000 (support was promised but not provided).
- Lowering of rental fees on leased government land.
- Provision and facilitation of markets for farmers produce.
- Finances promised by the MEC during budget speeches are not easily accessible, and do not reach farmers.
- Subsidisation of the insurance of farmers' produce.

The reaction from the Departmental higher authorities could not be received since they did not take part in the focus group discussions.

(iii) Complaints raised with regard to support

- Promises made but not kept by the Department. For example, money intended for 2000 flood relief was never made available to farmers.
- Support in terms of production inputs such as fertilisers promised during various workshops never materialised.
- The Department's failure to intervene and provide expertise with regard to the Tiger Brand contract. The farmers had entered into a binding contract with a company (Tiger Brands) to supply tomatoes. In the final analysis the company did not honour its obligation and the farmers had no recourse to hold the company accountable.
- The Department do not take the concerns of smallholder farmers seriously.
- Shortage of drinking water. Especially farmers in the Nwanedi area are not allowed to drill boreholes on leased land.
- Livestock farmers are provided with subsidised fodder during droughts, while crop farmers receive nothing during droughts or other natural disasters.

B. Development of smallholder farmers

There has been some noticeable development, especially regarding crop farmers in the Nwanedi area, although no indication was given of how many farmers were involved.

The following practical examples were given:

- Farmers who used diesel engines are now using electricity.
- Farmers who used smaller water pumps are now using bigger pumps.
- Farmers who used buckets to irrigate are now using water pumps to irrigate.

This positive development is a result of farmers working closely with one another and with the Department of Agriculture.

C. Factors leading to good or poor performance

As a result of the change from conventional ways of farming to more modern ways, there will be uncertainty on what to do and how to do it. This leaves a gap between theory and practice. Some of the Department's officers lack practical skills, and in some instances more experienced farmers provide alternative solutions to officers' suggestions.

Amongst the factors leading to poor performance of the Department, the following were mentioned by the participants of the focus group discussion:

- Inadequate resources, such as computer and telephones at local offices.
- Lack of a hall to accommodate farmers so that meetings could still be held on rainy days.
- Shortages of extension staff. Those available are overworked. They cannot attend to all the problems presented by the farmers in the time expected.

D. Role played by public officers

Public officers play a positive role in the following ways, which leads to good performance of the Department:

- Local extension officers are competent in the performance of their work.
- Good cooperation exists between farmers and extension officers.

- Officers call farmers to meetings to discuss issues/problems in order to work together harmoniously.
- Officers facilitate grouping of farmers into organisations/associations.
- Officers assist with transportation of farmers.

Participants identified the following ways in which public officers play a negative role:

- The number of officers is not sufficient and at times they come only when they have been invited by the farmers. This has been attributed to limited staff within the local offices.
- At times meetings organised by extension officers are too long and they do not even provide any refreshments, while meetings organised by farmers are catered for by themselves.

E. Public participation

The smallholder farmers are participating well in the Department. The following serve as examples:

- Farmers are able to approach the Department to ask for whatever help they need.
- Farmers' associations or organisations interact with the Department on various issues on behalf of farmers.
- The Department is aware of farmers' problems as a result of working closely together.
- Farmers participate in the various meetings and workshops arranged by officers.
- The Department approaches farmers if there are issues to be discussed that affect the farmers such as new initiatives intended to help the farmers.

F. Management of the Department

The participants claimed that management still has to improve in order to deliver a dedicated service. The participants had the following concerns regarding management:

- Nepotism is practised. This meant that farmers are not treated equally. Only known farmers are given recognition and a platform, while the unknown ones are never given a platform to share their views.
- There is a lack of recognition of local office initiatives. The good practices such as negotiating with the Department of Labour for the formalisation of employment of foreign nationals at local level go unnoticed and are never mentioned by District officers.

G. Transformation of the Department

The most important indication of transformation of the Department of Agriculture at the District level according to the participants of the focus group discussion is the change regarding the position of the senior manager also called District Director. The District had three district directors from 1994 until 2004, the period under review for the research work. The appointment of sub district or municipality heads to be in charge of local agricultural issues is also a positive transformational indicator.

H. Service delivery

The participants indicated that the Department did not do well in terms of service delivery, since the majority of them are still in the same position as in 1994. The following were cited as examples of poor service delivery:

- Promises were made but not kept.
- Finances which should have been used to improve smallholder farming were never used but returned to the treasury instead.
- Although MECs made good budget speeches, there was poor delivery on implementation.

- The Department didn't employ more extension staff to relieve the existing staff of their heavy workload.
- The Department didn't intervene on behalf of farmers to stop the exploitation of previously disadvantaged farmers by Tiger Brands as explained earlier.

I. Role played by smallholder farmers in their own development

The participants indicated that smallholder farmers worked tirelessly to help themselves, no matter how difficult it has been. The fact that farmers are on the land without the various subsidies they expected from the Department is an indication of their dedication to be responsible for their own development. In spite and despite the support which was anticipated, the smallholder farmers continued to till the land and to raise their livestock.

J. Technology and smallholder farmer development

Participants agreed that technology has a role to play in the development of smallholder farmers. In fact, they welcome technology as a means to increase their profits. They cited the following as practical examples of the role of technology on their farms:

- Use of drip irrigation systems to save water and improve yields.
- Use of pesticides to protect their produce.
- Use of water pumps and electric motors to save time and improve efficiency of irrigation.
- Use of tractors to shorten time spent preparing the land.
- Research on the suitability of fertilisers and water to improve production.

However, participants agreed that technology is expensive. Farmers need more money to be able to afford it.

K. Influence of politics on smallholder farmer development

The participants held varying views with regard to the influence of politics on their development. At least 20% of the participants held the view that politics does have a direct influence on the smallholder farmer development while the remaining 80% did not hold the same view. However, the majority (80%) felt that politics and smallholder farmer development should be separated. They felt that any apparent political influence at local level will destroy smallholder farmers since they all come from different political backgrounds. Their view was based on the fact that any apparent attempt to promote party political agendas at local level shall have a negative influence on development which must be felt across the political spectrum.

Those who argued for the influence of politics argued that politics and development are intertwined. They referred to the following issues:

- Political leaders make policies consistent with the Constitution for officials to implement.
- If officers are not fully conversant with the various policies, they may not drive the process of smallholder farmer development properly.
- Certain farmer requests may only be addressed via the political route.

4.5.2. Makhado Municipality

At this municipality a focus group discussion was held with two groups, one of farmers and the other of farmers and public officials. The two groups responded as follows to the major issues discussed during the focus group discussion.

A. Support provided by the Department

(i) Positive support provided

- The provision of starter packs – in the form of machinery, equipments and finances – to the claimants of land whose land restitution process was successfully finalised.

- Individual farmers who applied for land through the LRAD programme were granted their land.
- Provision of technical advice through extension services has been good.
- Revitalisation of irrigation schemes continues to be handled successfully. All local municipalities have identified and prioritised irrigation schemes for revitalisation and at this municipality the participants were happy about the progress.

(ii) Support expected but not provided

- Machinery and implements provided to farmers at subsidised rates under the previous homeland system were taken away from the farmers when the democratic government came into power.
- Most of these machinery and implements were purchased by white farmers through auction sales, since the smallholder farmers did not have money to take part in such auction sales.
- Facilitation of markets for smallholder farmers is still a major challenge which the Department should take seriously.
- Formation of cooperatives which could have received machinery to be used for the benefit of smallholder farmers.
- Speedy resolution of pending land claims.
- Promises that were made but not kept, especially after the floods of 2000.
- The Department should have been providing farmers with initial start-up capital for a limited period of time and thereafter farmers would be able to run their own farm businesses with little or no support from the Department.
- Certain infrastructure could not be delivered, such as dams in some of the irrigation schemes to hold water for irrigation purposes.
- Water tariffs are exorbitant. Smallholder farmers are accumulating debts in the irrigation schemes. The Department is expected to intervene.

(iii) Complaints raised with regard to support

- Abrupt withdrawal of machinery and implements without informing and preparing the smallholder and emerging farmers beforehand. These groups depended on government subsidised machinery for their farming operations.

- Racial exclusion of smallholder farmers' produce from the market.
- In the Communal Property Association where starter packs were provided, most of the machinery and implements provided are no longer working. The Department failed in terms of monitoring the use and providing support where support was due. The Departmental officers should have monitored the use of such machinery and informed the higher authorities on the use or misuse.
- Besides starter packs, the land reform beneficiaries expected financial support to kick-start production. This was never provided since the beneficiaries were expected to seek for production loans from the financial institutions.
- There are some intertribal conflicts, especially between Shangaans and Vendas in and around Mavungeni, Ximange, Munzhedzi, and Vleifontein, which the Department is failing to resolve.
- The Department's failure to provide water for irrigation is leading to deforestation of mountains. Farmers opt to farm higher up the mountains, where light rain falls from time to time.

B. Development of smallholder farmers

The groups had varied responses regarding the development of smallholder farmers. Some utterly rejected the notion that there were smallholder farmers who were developed and were succeeding in their farming business. They felt that smallholder farmers' only aim is subsistence, since they are living on a hand-to-mouth basis.

However, there were those who felt that some farmers were successfully developed. The example was provided of a smallholder farmer who had been farming with a few goats and sheep and who has diversified his farming enterprises to include game farming.

C. Factors leading to good or poor performance

Amongst the factors leading to poor performance, the following were cited:

- The Department takes too long to respond to smallholder farmers' needs and concerns.

- The Department is good at promising farmers the support and funds spoken of in the MEC's budget speech, but these never reach the farmers.
- Smallholder farmers' applications for support may not be directed to the right recipient. There is usually no response to such applications, which could be a sign that the intended recipient did not receive the application.
- There is no one to follow up on the support provided so that the Department receives feedback and will know what to do.
- Extension officers have no will to help the farmers. They seem to be propagandistic; they only visit the farmers when they help political office bearers canvass for votes.
- Extension officers have too many programmes to coordinate – they are overstretched and overworked.
- The merging of the four previous administrations – Venda, Gazankulu, Lebowa and Transvaal Provincial Administration – has led to uncertainty and poor performance by the Department.

The following were cited as factors leading to good performance:

- Involving farmers by asking farmers to state their needs and problems.
- Provision of subsidised feed during times of drought.
- Provision of vouchers to crop farmers in 1995 to help farmers cope with the drought disaster.

D. Role played by public officers

The two groups had varied views regarding the role played by public officials. Some strongly felt that officers are not assisting smallholder farmers, while others were more positive about the role played by officers.

Those that said that public officers play a poor supporting role raised the following issues:

- Officers are mainly concerned with their salaries, not progress.
- Officials fail to submit requests made by farmers to their authorities.
- Officers have poor visitation schedules; they take too long to visit farmers.

- Some officers are not serious about their work and do not have time for farmers.
- Officers are incompetent. There is often poor planning of projects. An example is the many available resources not utilised, and which the District office doesn't even know about.
- Some officers display unbecoming behaviour at work, such as drinking and womanising.

Those that said that public officers play a good supporting role raised the following issues:

- Some officers train farmers to become self-sufficient, thereby reducing dependency on the Department.
- Officers provide farmers with good technical advice.
- They encouraging the formation of groups in order to access Departmental services.
- Officers play a positive role as role models.

In order for officers to play a meaningful role, the following suggestions were made:

- Farmers and officers should have good two-way communication. If farmers have a problem, they should feel free to approach officials for assistance.
- Officers should make use of social/traditional meetings to reach farmers.
- Suggestion boxes should be placed at service centres and wards so that farmers can inform the Department of unbecoming behaviour by officers, for example.

E. Public participation

Some farmers felt that the Department is allowing them space to participate. They felt that they are involved and consulted if there are issues of common concern and interest. Their participation takes place through their representation in the form of meetings held with the Department's officers.

However, some farmers felt otherwise. They claimed that participation is mainly on an ad hoc basis. They felt that they are only informed that there is something to attend, such as the current focus group discussion. They also felt that, when officers have a wide area to cover, it becomes difficult for them to consult and involve farmers in what the Department is doing.

F. Management of the Department

There is a lack of consultative meetings held by the Department's management at District level. The managers are not visiting farmers to listen to their concerns and problems firsthand. They rely on the reports provided by officers interacting with farmers on a daily basis. This means that management is not in touch with reality. This raises the concern whether management is doing what it is supposed to. The participants were of the opinion that if management is in touch with the farmers on the ground, they would be managing the affairs of the farmers differently.

G. Transformation of the Department

The only changes the farmers see at grassroots level is deployment and redeployment of public officers, and at times good officers are replaced by bad officers. They cited incidences of where one of the officers who was dedicated to them was transferred from their municipal area to another.

H. Service delivery

Transformation was supposed to entail improved service delivery but services still leave much to be desired. There is no visible change in some officials; they still perceive their work in the same way as prior to 1994.

In addition, public officials are sometimes not accessible, which raises questions regarding Batho Pele principles.

I. Role played by smallholder farmers in their own development

The participants agreed that smallholder farmers are doing something to help themselves. Some smallholder farmers have shown initiative and are planning their activities accordingly. If there is need for financial assistance, they are able to ask for it. They are even able to ask for donations to help meet their needs in certain instances. Smallholder farmers are working hard, with the hope that one day they will be as successful as other farmers. They stated that some of them are able to provide their own input and resources required on the farm, such as repairing their own engines.

J. Technology and smallholder farmer development

The participants stated that use of technology is the way to a better livelihood for smallholder farmers. It definitely has a place in the development of smallholder farmers for example:

- Use of drip irrigation system saves labour, time and water.
- Use of modern communication (internet) to track how well the markets are doing in order to take advantage.

K. Influence of politics on smallholder farmer development

From the farmers' perspective, having union representation encourages laziness in the government service. Public officers are claiming their rights while farmers are suffering because they are not receiving services. The freedom that officials have is being abused because participation in political activities is given prominence at the expense of service delivery on the ground.

The farmers also felt that politics generally cannot be divorced from development, be it for smallholder farmers or any other.

4.5.3. Thulamela Municipality

The focus group discussion was held with two groups of participants, one consisting of smallholder farmers and the other of smallholder farmers and extension officers.

A. Support provided by the Department

(i) Positive support provided

- Fencing of crop fields and grazing camps.
- Agricultural development projects for the youth to encourage young South Africans to take agriculture seriously.
- Provision of technical support through extension advisers on a daily basis.
- Training of farmers has been stepped up to improve their knowledge and skills.

(ii) Support expected but not provided

- Machinery and equipment used to support farmers under the previous government should have been reintroduced under the new democratic government. Private hire of machinery is expensive, since it is not subsidised.
- Infrastructure support, such as roads, water reticulation systems, labour and electricity.
- Provision of start-up capital for emerging farmers.
- Support to individual emerging farmers was not provided; support shifted to group projects initiated by the Department such as broiler production and vegetable projects.
- Facilitation of markets in order to enable access to more markets. Depending on one processing plant leads to the monopolistic exploitation of farmers.
- Provision of alternative sources of finances to reduce dependency on government was not provided.

(iii) Complaints raised with regard to support

- CASP funding is not provided to all groups of farmers; only men with 10 ha and above and women with 5 ha and above are granted opportunities.

- Departmental support is usually heard of but not experienced. Farmers are told to complete forms for various types of support but nothing comes of it.
- Flood damage relief was promised but not provided. A certain farmer who was promised R7 000 received only R3 000, while the majority did not receive anything.
- Extension officers talk about money made available to farmers but nothing happens. For example, R2 500 000 was said to be available but because farmers were slow in completing forms, the money was returned. The farmers blamed the officers for bad faith while the officers blamed the farmers for not responding timeously.
- Delay in the payment of prize money for female farmer competition.

B. Development of smallholder farmers

There are not many smallholder farmers who have developed into full commercial farmers. In this regard the Department has failed in its endeavour to develop smallholder farmers. The only projects that seem to have been successfully developed are broiler production projects.

C. Factors leading to good or poor performance

The following factors leading to poor performance were cited:

- Political changes led to much uncertainty, which slowed down progress.
- Government machinery that assisted farmers were withdrawn and the Venda Agricultural Corporation (Agriven) ploughing unit was closed as a result of the closure of the operations of the Corporation due to political changes that took place from 1994.
- Promises that weren't kept led to the demoralisation of farmers. For example, farmers were trained and were promised chicks and feed, which was never received.
- Farmers are expected to raise funds to acquire various goods and services by themselves.

- Lack of finances keeps farmers in the same position, unable to help themselves.

D. Role played by public officers

- Visits by officers are not as before; they do not visit farmers at their farming units.
- Officers emphasised the need to visit farmers per invitation, since they are overstretched and have many programmes to run.
- In the past public figures such as Traditional Chiefs had authority, but not any longer. They cannot force compliance, for example telling farmers not to farm along the river banks. Every person has his/her own rights and do not want to be dictated to by anyone including the Chiefs.
- Officers prioritise their own needs first, and as a result, support intended for farmers is therefore less prioritised.
- Nepotism is practised. Known farmers receive better treatment than those that are unknown.
- Farmers suspect that there are officers who steal government money. For example, when they were promised R150 000, only R70 000 reached them. Where did the balance go?
- Batho Pele principles are not observed by some officers.
- Officers rarely visit orchard farmers.
- Farmers at times have to pressure officers to visit their farming units.
- Farmers do not attend meetings because they were not invited by the officers.
- Officers display the following unbecoming behaviour while on duty:
 - Disappearance from work, especially after pay day.
 - Drinking intoxicating drinks while on duty.
 - Having love affairs during or after working hours (with other officers or with farmers), which affects performance.

E. Public participation

There was general consensus that farmers are consulted regarding what is being done, what will be done in future, and their needs, concerns and problems. An example is the RESIS programme that is being implemented.

As a result of the Participatory Extension Approach (PEA), farmers are mobilised to take charge of their own affairs. Social mobilisation is done in order to get all relevant stakeholders involved. Awareness is therefore created and farmers' needs are identified and responded to. Farmers' associations and representatives, such as Water Users' Associations, are involved and consulted.

F. Management of the Department

Some smallholder farmers perceive the management of the District not to be good. For example, particular forms to be used by farmers are unavailable at certain offices. There is also a shortage of office equipment and resources such as photocopiers in the offices.

There are also intertribal conflict between Shangaans and Vendas in the Thulamela Municipality, because it is made up of areas of the former Venda and former Gazankulu. This conflict, which management is unable to resolve, leads to poor service delivery.

In terms of budget compilation, officers felt that District management does involve them and that the budget committee takes the needs expressed by officers seriously when they compile the budget.

G. Transformation of the Department

There is still a lot of mistrust and misunderstandings between the officers from the former Venda and Gazankulu administrations. There has been little amalgamation as a result of the transformation process. This is placing a severe strain on the delivery of

services. Little has been done to foster good working relationships between these officers.

H. Service delivery

The officers felt that they are doing their best under the conditions in which they operate, since they have few or no resources in some instances. The farmers on the other hand felt that delivery of services could be improved.

I. Role played by smallholder farmers in their own development

Farmers provided the following examples of their contribution to their own development:

- Farmers learnt that good planning and good management leads to success.
- Farmers are showing initiative; they are able to approach other people who could assist them in areas where they have a need.
- Farmers are diversifying production and including other enterprises such as livestock, bee farming, and non-agricultural enterprises such as brewing mageu.
- Farmers are consulting with experts in their field.

J. Technology and smallholder farmer development

Technology is regarded as a useful resource in the development of smallholder farmers. The groups agreed that the future of smallholder farmers lies in the adoption of various technologies. The following examples were cited:

- Information on various activities through the use of computers.
- Use of machinery for various activities.
- Use of automated drinkers for chickens.
- Use of water-saving technology such as drip irrigation.
- Use of pesticides and fertilisers.

Two concerns were raised: Firstly, technology is expensive, and secondly, there are health hazards associated with the use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers.

K. Influence of politics on smallholder farmer development

Politics play a role in smallholder farmers' development, since the farmers are expected to develop in a political environment. The following cases demonstrate how important politics are in development:

- Municipal Councillors are involved in the offering of sites for agricultural activities.
- Individual smallholder farmers are charged rates, while group projects are not charged, even in territorial council areas. This is done to encourage more people to be economically active by participating in group projects.
- Promises are not kept, for example Councillors promising things they cannot deliver such as promises for financial support which they have never managed to deliver to the smallholder farmers.

4.5.4. Mutale Municipality

A. Support provided by the Department

(i) Positive support provided

The following examples of positive support provided by the Department of Agriculture to smallholder farmers in the Vhembe District were cited:

- Extension advice is provided which has been good so far.
- Farmers are encouraged to change their approach in order to be self-reliant and work for themselves through the PEA.
- The successful maize seed production by black farmers has been applauded as the first of its kind in South Africa.
- Capacity building programmes for the provision of knowledge and skills are being conducted through various training programmes..
- Facilitation of markets is a positive sign, especially with the training in marketing for farmers.

- Establishment of the seed production cooperative.
- Projects such as community gardens, poultry and piggery projects were started and supported, even the similar ones that were transferred to the Department of Agriculture from the Departments of Health and Public Works.
- The Department provided starter packs to smallholder farmers to kick-start the production of various agricultural products.

(ii) Support expected but not provided

The farmers expected the following services, which were not provided:

- Support to agricultural cooperatives, as was done by the previous administration.
- Reintroduction of machinery for subsidised hire by smallholder farmers, since they cannot afford to buy expensive machinery for themselves since they do not have enough money to buy.
- Arrangements for more exposure visits for farmers to share information.
- Facilitation of access to markets, since farmers were politically deprived of knowledge about and access to markets.
- Furrow and flood irrigation systems were used for smallholder farmers, while drip irrigation and other water-saving technologies were used by white commercial farmers. These technologies could have also helped smallholder farmers.

(iii) Complaints raised with regard to support

Despite some support, some projects did not succeed. The services provided were either not sufficient or not relevant. The reference was made to mega projects that were started and failed because of various reasons some of which were mismanagement and some were lack of expertise.

B. Development of smallholder farmers

At this municipality, there are not many smallholder farmers who have developed. Those who did had other means of income generation. The majority of smallholder farmers are still at the subsistence level, as they were before 1994.

This means that there is no progression. Smallholder farmers are still using the same land and still practise the same methods of farming. At least the production of the Obatamba maize seed is a sign of progress.

Amongst the few emerging farmers, some started farming in the irrigation schemes but now they own big farms.

C. Factors leading to good or poor performance

Amongst the factors contributing to good performance by the Department, the following were specifically mentioned:

- Good working relations and cooperation exist between extension officers and farmers.
- Farmers have the right to choose the crops/livestock they wish to farm with.
- Farmers can sell their produce to the available market of their choice.

The group of extension officers mentioned the following factors contributing to poor performance by the Department:

- Overloading of extension officers, for example dealing with various projects at the same time. This forces extension officers to prioritise the tasks which are urgently required by their supervisors.
- Once officers are threatened with job losses/cuts, officers may no longer deliver services to the best of their ability.
- Organisational changes, such as transformation of the Department, result in extension officers being moved from one work station to another, or even from one district to another.
- Local extension officers stay in houses which do not have basic services, such as water and electricity, and they are expected to pay exorbitant rates for such houses. This is a demotivating factor. The houses of nurses in the same vicinity are provided with all these basic services by the Department of Health.
- Extension officers are generalists and do not specialise in a particular field. This limits the performance of extension officers.

- There are top managers who are unreasonable and unfair when dealing with extension officers, which lead to demotivation and poor performance.

D. Role played by Extension officers

Extension officers are regarded as an important resource in the development of farmers. Both farmers and extension officers cited the following aspects with regard to the good work that the officers are doing:

- Extension officers play a major role in the planning of projects, especially those that were transferred from the Department of Health.
- Officers give advice to the farmers. Because of the PEA methodology used by extension officers to mobilise farmers, farmers are able to be self reliant.
- Farmers are consulted whenever there is an issue that will affect them, which leads to a good working relationship between extension officers and smallholder farmers.
- Farmers are given the freedom of choice as far as what they want to do on their farms is concerned.
- Extension officers are assisting farmers more often regarding transportation to meetings and workshops.

E. Public participation

There is progress in this area. Although the Department at times acts without consulting the smallholder farmers, the smallholder farmers are satisfied that they are consulted and involved in most instances.

The introduction of the PEA has enabled extension officers to influence farmers to be involved and self-organised. It was unanimously agreed that farmers are participating in the programmes of the Department. Farmers are also able to articulate their needs, concerns and problems without fear of victimisation or isolation by extension officers.

F. Management of the Department

The management of the Department was regarded as not being good. The following issues were raised:

- Some of the agricultural projects are not given proper consideration by management.
- Extension officers are transferred without consulting the farmers who were working with the particular extension officer. The farmers were of the view that for proper working relationships, it is a human norm to consult them if there are major changes about to take place which will affect them.
- Activities in the District are not properly co-ordinated. Meetings are arranged haphazardly, for example. Even with these focus group discussions, some of the participants did not know what was going to be discussed.
- Organisational structure poses a strong challenge, since one still finds chief agricultural extension officer being supervised by other chief agricultural extension officer. District management seems to be doing nothing about the problem.
- Meetings are no longer held as it was the case in the past, and as a result there is no feedback culture. The lack of meetings is a sign of poor management.
- There is no coordination; no one knows what the other person is doing within the same office or municipality.

G. Transformation of the Department

The participants agreed that there has been transformation within the Department. The Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District is being headed by a female senior manager for the first time, which is seen as a sign of transformation. The fact that the Department listens to the pleas of the farmers is another sign of transformation.

H. Service delivery

Service delivery in the district is insufficient. Although the Department was able to meet some of the needs of the farmers, it could not always do so.

I. Role played by smallholder farmers in their own development

Smallholder farmers have done their best to stay in the farming business. Some of the smallholder farmers were able to expand their small plots into larger farming businesses. The effectiveness of the committees elected to represent the interests of the farmers, as well as the fact that farmers are able to create their own markets and share the few clients they have are good indications of the role they play in their own development.

J. Technology and smallholder farmer development

The fact that technology can play a positive developmental role in smallholder farms was unanimously agreed upon. The sentiments and practical examples were the same as those mentioned in the other three municipalities.

K. Influence of politics on smallholder farmer development

The groups pointed out the need for the municipality Councillors to be fully involved in agriculture, which is not the case at the moment. Municipal Councillors do not visit farmers to see farmers' circumstances for themselves and to listen to farmers' concerns. It is the view of the farmers that if Municipal Councillors knows what the smallholder farmers are faced with on a daily basis, then they would try to make by laws that will support agricultural development with regards to land, water and other services.

Other examples of the influence of politics are the following:

- As a result of democracy, some farmers consider it their right to cut down trees, although it leads to severe deforestation and is actually against the law.
- There has been an invasion of agricultural land by some communities in this municipal area but the municipality Councillors remains silent on this problem that threatens the livelihood of smallholder farmers.
- At times political statements by municipal Councillors are made to the effect that farmers will receive financial assistance but eventually these promises are

broken. The provision of finances for the farmers is mainly the function of the Department of Agriculture at both Provincial, District and Local level. However the Municipality Councillors can also budget to support some agricultural activities.

4.6. Analysis of findings per municipality

According to Mouton (2001:108), analysis involves breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships. The aim of analysis is to understand the various constitutive elements of one's data through an inspection of relationships between concepts, constructs or variables and to see whether there are any patterns or trends that can be identified or isolated or themes that can be established in the data.

Mouton (2001:109) describes interpretation as involving the synthesis of one's data into larger coherent wholes. Therefore one interprets (and explains) observations or data by formulating hypotheses or theories that account for observed patterns and trends in the data. Interpretation means relating one's results and findings to existing theoretical frameworks or models and showing whether these are supported or falsified by the new interpretation. It means taking into account rival explanations or interpretations of one's data and showing what levels of support the data provide for the preferred interpretation.

The researcher has from the data collected managed to synthesis the information collected from the focus group participants in order to arrive at particular trends in as far as the improvement of livelihoods of smallholder farmers is concerned. There is a correlation that has been discovered between the state of development of smallholder farmers and the role played by the Department of Agriculture.

4.6.1. Musina Municipality

A. Support provided by the Department of Agriculture

(i) Analysis of positive support provided

- **Permission to register foreign labourers**

The research revealed that the farmers were happy with the way the Department of Agriculture assisted them in discussions with the Department of Labour regarding the hiring of foreign nationals on term contracts to work on the farms. The tomato producing areas of this municipality, especially at Nwanedi, are mainly labour intensive and as result any assistance to enable the smallholder and emerging farmers to hire more affordable labour is welcome. Since the Musina Municipality shares a border with Zimbabwe, the majority of foreign nationals working as farm workers are Zimbabwean.

The employment of foreign nationals benefits the smallholder and emerging farmers because foreign nationals are not protected by the labour laws of the Republic of South Africa. As a result the farmers could pay them low wages, which of course is morally wrong. The subsequent reduction in labour costs will contribute to the realisation of more profit from seasonal production.

The argument advanced for the legal registration of foreign nationals on a twelve-month contract is that the majority of unemployed South African citizens are not keen to do hard labour on farms. This has persuaded the Minister of Labour to agree to a twelve-month term contract for any immigrant who is legally seeking work on the farms. However, this argument could be proved wrong, since there are many South African citizens employed by white commercial farmers.

The researcher's observation is that the farmers make more profit by paying immigrants low wages. The same tactic is used by white commercial farmers to cut down production costs and increase profits.

- **Provision of extension advice**

The Department of Agriculture has within its ranks a fully qualified team of agriculturalists in the form of agricultural extension officers or advisors, all of whom either have a diploma, a junior degree or a senior degree in agriculture. As

a result of these qualifications, it is easier for extension officers to integrate their knowledge with the practical skills demanded by their extension work.

However, extension officers fresh from the college, technikon or university lack practical exposure to real farming environments. New officers therefore require a mentor and an experienced supervisor to work with for a period of time. The current crop of extension officers employed by the Department of Agriculture are both qualified and experienced to provide farmers with the necessary advice to increase their productivity, which in turn will improve their livelihood.

The researcher's observation is that the human element is responsible for attitudes and behaviour, and that distinguishes the good extension officers from the bad. From the interaction with farmers during the focus group discussions, it was evident that the local office of the Department of Agriculture is endowed with extension officers who know their extension work.

- **Relationship between the Department of Agriculture and farmers**

Unless the Department and farmers agree on a particular course of action, the development of smallholder farmers may be difficult to realise.

In the past, Departmental officers imposed their programmes – often not based on reality or practicality – on farming communities. In development theory, this is referred to as the top-down approach to development. Development specialists, in this case the extension officers, would decide which programmes should be followed, which crops should be planted, when it should be planted, how it should be planted, and how many hectares should be planted. Farmers had no choice but to give in to these programmes designed with no input from farmers. However, as a result of the new dispensation which was ushered in by the new Constitution, farmers realised that they have the right to engage with the new government.

In 1999, the Department adopted a new approach to working with farmers, namely the Participatory Extension Approach (PEA), which was made possible by German donor funding. This approach entailed that the Department started to pay attention to the plight of farmers and that the problems raised by farmers were

properly addressed. Farmers were consulted, and contributed to the resolution of their problems.

Kotze and Kellermann (1997:36) state that participation by people in their own development has become increasingly important. They mention themes which include basic needs and a bottom-up approach to development, and which are parallel with participatory development.

The White Paper on Transforming Public Service (RSA, 1997) led to the introduction of Batho Pele principles to kick-start the transformation of service delivery. This was another major milestone towards addressing farmers' problems in a consultative manner.

- **Capacity building**

The various capacity-building initiatives – in the form of workshops, courses, farmers' days or information days – have become the main vehicles in the provision of knowledge and skills to smallholder farmers. Historically smallholder farmers have been practicing agriculture in traditional ways. This incorporated what is known today as organic farming – farming with no inorganic, synthetic inputs but relying on locally available organic inputs.

The modern ways of farming has caused technology to take centre stage in almost all agricultural activities. Farmers need to have knowledge and skills in order to take advantage of this technology. As a result, having farmers participate in exposure visits, courses at institutions of learning such as the Madzivhandila Agricultural Training Centre, and organising information days in which various suppliers display and share product information with farmers have all proved to be beneficial to farmers.

Some smallholder farmers now know what to do, without the presence of extension officers. This level of advancement is a positive contribution to the improvement of the livelihood of smallholder farmers in the Vhembe District, and specifically in the Musina Municipality.

(ii) Analysis of support expected but not provided

• **Subsidisation**

➤ Electricity bills

One of the biggest problems regarding input costs is high electricity bills for pumping irrigation water. All farmers who participated in the focus group discussions agreed that they need electricity because it simplifies the irrigation of their crops. However, the farmers unanimously agreed that the electricity is too expensive for them. The farmers expect the Department to subsidise them with regard to their electricity bills.

➤ Insurance

The farmers also unanimously agreed that it is important to insure their production in order to guard against natural and man-made disasters. However, most farmers considered it a good-to-have and not a must-have. The cost of insurance for agricultural production could not be ascertained, since none of the farmers participating in the focus group discussions had an insurance policy for his/her own production. They expected the Department to subsidise them in order for them to take up insurance policies for their production.

According to the researcher, subsidising farmers for their own direct production cost, whether it is for electricity or insurance, may not be possible now or in the future. The Department has so many clients and so many programmes to service on a limited budget. Though the Department may wish to subsidise farmers, there simply are no funds available for subsidisation.

• **Rental fees of state land**

The farmers who participated in the focus group discussions pointed out that under the Venda homeland government, the farmers were paying a rental fee R12 per hectare per annum for land leased from the Department of Agriculture. Under

the new administration, the farmers are expected to pay R12 per hectare on a monthly basis, which means that rental fees are 12 times higher.

The farmers expected the Department to reduce rental fees to even lower than under the previous administration. The researcher is of the opinion that this expectation should be guided by the statutes which govern the lease of state land, in which tariffs are prescribed for the entire country. Should the Department be willing to negotiate the reduction of fees, it should be to a level prescribed by the statutes.

With proper lobbying and negotiating by farmers' organisations and representatives, a compromise agreement could be reached which could lead to the reduction of rental fees. This would have to be according to legislative processes regarding the amendment of prescribed legislation.

- **Disaster relief**

In 2000, the Vhembe District experienced the worst floods in living memory. These floods caused untold damage to all economic sectors, especially the agricultural sector, in all four municipalities of the District. The Vhembe District was declared a disaster area. The flood damage was so severe that the Department of Agriculture realised the necessity to intervene in assisting farmers.

The Department went about assessing the damage and promising farmers assistance. However, according to farmers who participated in the focus group discussions some promises weren't kept by the Department. Some farmers are still waiting for the Department to deliver on its promises of financial assistance.

The researcher is of the opinion that if farmers were prepared for the disaster in the form of insurance, Departmental assistance would only have had to meet some of their needs while the insurance would have taken care of the rest. Since almost none of the farmers in the area had insurance, they all had to start afresh after the promise of financial assistance was not properly kept.

- **Financial support promised by MEC in budget speeches**

The farmers stated that they have realised that on an annual basis, during the presentation of the budget vote for the Department of Agriculture, specific funds are set aside to assist farmers. Examples are programmes such as CASP, MAFISA (micro-finance scheme of the Department), Land Care and RESIS. The farmers expected all these programmes to assist them, not to be targeted at specific areas.

The researcher has observed that, although these programmes are available in the Department, the Department seems to have adopted an approach whereby they start in certain areas and then flow to the rest of the District. In all probability it is not possible for the Department to start in all areas at the same time, because some of the programmes must be piloted before they are distributed to all areas.

- **Provision of markets**

One of the major problems facing farmers is availability of and access to reliable markets for their produce. The farmers expected the Department to provide them with reliable markets. In simpler terms, the farmers are saying that they will concentrate on production, and the Department must see to it that what has been produced find their way to the markets. However, the Department is of the opinion that this responsibility belongs to the farmers. As a result of this stalemate, the majority of farmers are experiencing heavy losses due to a lack of access to reliable markets.

The researcher's observation is that farmers are not concerned about simple marketing activities such as knowing their clients before they embark on production, and getting contracts to produce for a specific target market. It is the researcher's view that if farmers did market research, they would know the gaps in the market and they would produce their products in order to fill those gaps. The researcher is also of the opinion that the Department, on the other hand, should regard the marketing of farmers' produce as important. The farmers have to be aware of the importance of conducting market research in order to know whom they will be producing for. The role of the Department would therefore be to facilitate training on markets and marketing of agricultural products, facilitate

access to markets, and find markets which are out of the farmers' reach, such as international markets.

(iii) Analysis of complaints raised

• **Promises that weren't kept**

The farmers who participated in the focus group discussions alleged that the Department is good at making promises that are not kept. They cited as an example the flood relief funds that were promised by the Department. They also cited a specific incident where farmers at Madzivhandila Agricultural Training Centre were promised certain inputs to be received at the end of the training in order to practise what they have learnt.

The researcher's observation is that junior Departmental officers could make promises to farmers without consulting their higher authorities. These kinds of promises may not necessarily be supported by management, which means that the junior officials are to be blamed for this kind of promises. However, if the promises are made by the people with authority within the Department, such as the Department of Agriculture district senior manager or Local office managers, the Department could be blamed for failing to keep their promises. It is the researcher's point of view that management should take stock of all the promises made in order to check which of the promises could still be entertained and which could not.

• **Failure to intervene in the Tiger Brands contract**

The main vegetable crop produced by the smallholder and emerging farmers in the Nwanedi area is tomato. The tomato producing farmers in this area had, out of their own initiative, approached Tiger Brands with a view to get the company to be their main market outlet. The farmers' representatives entered into a contract with the company for Tiger Brands to receive tomatoes from the farmers.

The problem arose when Tiger Brands failed to collect the produce as agreed. However, it is alleged that the company was collecting tomatoes from white

commercial farmers in the Nwanedi area. The situation led to serious losses by the tomato producers from Nwanedi. The smallholder and emerging farmers felt that there was racial discrimination in the way in which the company did not honour its part of the contract.

The smallholder and emerging farmers blamed the Department of Agriculture for failing to provide the required expertise and guidance as far as contractual arrangements are concerned. The Department is also blamed for failing to intervene on behalf of the farmers to negotiate a settlement with Tiger Brands, which the farmers felt could have avoided the losses that were experienced.

The researcher is of the opinion that the initiative by the farmers was a step in the right direction, which shows that farmers are serious about their farming businesses and their future. Regarding the alleged failure by Tiger Brands to stick to the terms of the contract, the researcher's point of view is that the farmers should have involved the Department of Agriculture from the onset, in order for the Department to provide necessary expertise and guidance in negotiations. According to the extension officers present in the focus group discussions, the Department was not aware of the existence of this contract until the problem was reported to the Department. This left the Department with little to do to intervene on behalf of the farmers.

The researcher is also of the opinion that the farmers should have familiarised themselves with the terms of the contract. The legal expertise regarding the terms of the contract should have been sorted out by the farmers before they entered into the contract. This would have provided the farmers with the legal mandate to pursue the matter, even through the courts of law, to get compensation on the losses they suffered as a result of the Company not honouring its obligations according to the terms of the contract.

- **Shortage of drinking water**

The majority of farmers in the Musina Municipality are farming on land leased from the Department. According to the smallholder and emerging farmers who participated in the focus group discussions, the lease agreement does not allow

them to drill boreholes on leased land. These farmers stated that neither they nor their labourers have any drinking water. Drinking water has to be fetched from far away. This leads to a loss of man hours, which affects productivity on the farms.

However, the researcher observed that the lease agreement has a provision for new infrastructure to be developed on the leased land. The only condition attached to any development of new infrastructure is that the farmers should apply for such development in writing to the Department of Agriculture and that approval has to be received before such development is commenced (Naidoo, 2001:10). The researcher has concluded that the farmers are not aware of the contents of the lease agreements with the Department. The Department therefore has a role to play in advising the farmers about the contents of their lease agreements.

- **Subsidised fodder versus no subsidy for crop farmers**

One of the complaints levelled against the Department is the partiality allegedly shown towards livestock farmers. The crop farmers felt that the Department do not treat livestock farmers and crop farmers equally. The farmers cited the example of the Department providing fodder to livestock farmers at a subsidised tariff in severe drought. They claim that the same treatment is not extended to them when they suffer losses as a result of natural disasters, such as the floods of 2000.

The researcher observed that the livestock farmers are more organised and are able to speak with one voice through organisations such as LERPO (Limpopo Emergent Red Meat Producers' Organisation). On the other hand, the crop farmers are widely scattered and are not as organised. However, some crop farmers have organisations to act as a mouth piece, such as the Tomato Growers' Association.

The researcher's point of view is that farmers should be dealt with fairly, without favour and with absolute impartiality. What the Department does for livestock farmers must be seen to be done for crop producers as well.

B. Development of smallholder farmers

The smallholder farmers who participated in the focus group discussions indicated that there has been development as far as smallholder farmers are concerned. They pointed out the fact that some farmers have indeed developed as a result of the role played by the Department in improving the livelihood of smallholder farmers.

The observation of the researcher is that not many farmers have emerged since the dawn of democracy, although the Department has done much to improve the livelihood of smallholder farmers, this has not been enough and left much to be desired. This includes the role played by the development arm of the Department of Agriculture, the Agricultural and Rural Development Corporation (ARDC), formerly known as Agriven, the Venda Agricultural Corporation.

The ARDC was closed down in 1999. Its closure was mainly based on the fact that, despite millions of rand allocated annually, the ARDC could not provide sufficient examples of farmers who have emerged as a result of their operations and interventions since its formation in 1979. The farmers alleged that the closure of the ARDC was politically motivated, in order to destabilise the agricultural operations in the former Venda homeland.

However, the Department does not have many emergent farmers to show either. The number is still small, which means that more needs to be done to improve the livelihood of smallholder farmers in the Musina Municipality.

The researcher has found that the practical examples cited by the smallholder farmers of farmers who were successfully developed are true. Farmers who used traditional farming methods have, as a result of the role played by the Department, adopted modern, technologically advanced methods of farming.

It is the researcher's view that the closer farmers work with the Department, the more successful they will become and the more developed they will be, and that their livelihood will improve in the long term.

C. Factors leading to good or poor performance

The participants in the focus group discussion identified some factors leading to poor performance by the Department:

- **Lack of practical skills by some extension officers**

The farmers who participated in the focus group discussions claimed that there are instances where farmers have more practical experience in farming than extension officers. Should the farmer prove the extension officer wrong in a particular activity, it is apparent that such a farmer will lose confidence in the officer's knowledge.

The researcher's observation is that extension officers' knowledge of practical farming is based on their theoretical knowledge. Because of technological advances since officers received their training, officers have to keep abreast of changes in the agricultural field. This point emphasises the need for the Department to provide on-the-job training and exposure to practical scenarios inside and outside the Department. It should also be noted that since agriculture is a science, no extension officer could have the answers to all the farmers' questions; therefore officers should be afforded the opportunity to consult as widely as possible for solutions to the given problems.

- **Shortage of extension officers**

The farmers allege that there are only six extension officers to service hundreds of farmers throughout the municipality. The farmers perceive the shortage of extension officers as leading to poor performance, because the officers are overworked and overstretched and are expected to perform multiple tasks in the municipality. As a result officers are not able to attend to all the farmers' problems. The farmers summed up the shortage of officers with the Venda idiom "Munwe muthihi a u tusi mathuthu", which means that one finger cannot pick up a seed on the ground; it needs the assistance of the other fingers.

The researcher has observed that in many areas in the Vhembe District Department of Agriculture one extension officer is allocated an area which is too large for him/her to make an impact. This affects officers' performance, which in turn affects the performance of the Department. However, the Department is of the view that it has more extension officers than are necessary. This could be true for the other district offices in the Province and not for the local office under review. Almost all extension officers are generalists and therefore offer their services to all groupings of farmers. The researcher's point of view is that extension officers should be allowed to specialise in a particular field of farming enterprises in order for them to develop their knowledge and skills in a particular field. Extension officers will be able to improve their performance and the performance of the Department if they are allocated a sufficient workload in their particular field.

- **Inadequate resources**

The farmers identified the inadequacy of resources at the local offices of the Department of Agriculture as another cause of poor performance. They claim that the local offices could perform well if they were properly supplied with the necessary resources, such as computers, telephones and stationery. The shortage of essential equipment renders the offices of Musina local office inefficient and leads to underperformance. It can cause that extension officers can't communicate properly with farmers or capture the discussions and concerns of farmers in a form that could be easily transmitted to the district office.

The researcher has observed that the shortage of communication facilities in the local offices makes it difficult even to make appointments, such as those needed for the focus group discussions. The researcher had to rely on the private cell phones of the local officers to avoid failure to meet the smallholder farmers for the focus group discussions. This emphasised the inadequacy of communication at the offices. If offices are not adequately supplied with resources, it will adversely affect the performance of the local office, which will in turn affect the performance of the Department of Agriculture at local, district and provincial level.

D. Role played by Extension officers

All the farmers participating in the focus group discussions agreed that the role played by officers in the municipality is important if their livelihood is to be improved. They all agreed that the presence of public officials, especially the extension officers at their municipality, has been to their advantage and that their continued presence is highly valued. The following were cited as practical examples of the positive role played by officers:

- **Competence of extension officers**

Although the farmers participating in the focus group discussion had earlier indicated that officers lack practical skills, they acknowledged that the same officers are competent in other areas of their work such as organising smallholder farmers and assisting them with transport to attend important Departmental meetings. The competence of these officers makes the farmers realise the value of having them around on a daily basis. It has been mentioned earlier that almost all extension officers are well qualified to render extension advisory services to smallholder farmers.

The researcher has observed that some of the allegations levelled against the officers are not entirely true at this local office. One of these is the lack of practical experience, since almost all of them have been in the Department for more than ten years. The officers are also well qualified and competent and are able to provide technical advice to farmers with little or no support from senior officers.

- **Cooperation with farmers**

The main driving force behind successful agricultural development of smallholder farmers in this municipal area is the extent to which extension officers cooperate with smallholder farmers. According to the smallholder farmers, this has been an area in which the officers have best demonstrated their seriousness regarding the development of smallholder farmers. The smallholder farmers confirmed the good working relationships with their extension officers. As a result of the cooperation

the local office of the Department of Agriculture is aware of farmers' concerns and problems, and they can solve them or refer them to the Department of Agriculture at the district office.

The smallholder farmers also pointed out the role played by extension officers in the facilitation of the formation of farmers' organisations, associations and commodity groups. This organising role has been positively acknowledged by the farmers. They stated that by themselves they would not have been able to come together to form these various groupings.

Another area of cooperation pointed out by the farmers is the provision of transport for the farmers to attend various meetings, workshops and farmers' days. This assistance is considered essential by the farmers. Even the focus group discussion could not have materialised if the extension officers had not used their vehicles to transport some of the farmers to the venue.

The researcher has observed a strong unity between extension officers and smallholder farmers in this local municipal area. The fact that the local office has insufficient extension officers causes farmers to realise the importance of each available extension officer. The available officers have developed amongst the farmers a sense of responsibility in their day-to-day activities as people involved in the business of farming. The extension officers visit the farmers on an invitation basis, especially to help solve problems the farmers cannot solve by themselves. The researcher concurs with the arrangement of visiting the smallholder farmers per invitation and regards the opinion as a good arrangement to provide technical advice to farmers when there are limited numbers of extension officers at the local offices.

E. Public participation

According to the Constitution, Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996) and the document for integrated development planning methodology (RSA, 2001:7), all citizens have the right to participate in issues that directly or indirectly affect their lives. This means that opening up avenues for the participation of smallholder farmers in their own

development and improvement of their livelihood is in accordance with the supreme law of the Country.

The farmers cited the following examples of their participation in the various programmes and activities of the Department of Agriculture at local, district and provincial levels:

- The fact that farmers are able to approach the Department to ask for whatever assistance they need is reason enough for their participation in their own development. This type of approach allows farmers to participate in the resolution of their concerns and problems.
- The interaction between the Department and farmers' associations on various issues affecting the smallholder and emerging farmers indicates the importance of open lines of communications, which in turn promotes participation of farmers as organised entities. There could be no solution to the problems affecting farmers unless the solution is co-owned by the farmers as well.
- Smallholder and emerging farmers are also invited to participate in the various meetings and workshops organised by the extension officers, in order to exchange information as well as to create awareness on various issues of common interest. These interactions also point to the importance of participation of farmers in the various Departmental programmes.

The researcher has observed that the participation of smallholder and emerging farmers is necessary for successful service delivery by the Department of Agriculture. This also forms part of the first Batho Pele principle, which refers to consultation. The principle states that citizens will be asked for their views on existing public services and may also state what other new basic services they would like to have. The researcher is convinced that there is a high level of participation by farmers in the various departmental programmes in this municipal area.

F. Management of the Department

The participants in the focus group discussions had varying views on the management of the Department both at district and municipality levels. Some felt that the district and the municipality are performing well and did not have a specific concern regarding the management ability of Departmental staff. However, others felt that the management of the Department leaves much to be desired. They stated the following issues as their main points of discontent with regard to inefficient management of the Department:

- **Practice of nepotism:** The smallholder farmers claim that extension officers do not treat farmers equally and impartially. According to them only the powerful and the known are given recognition and a platform to state their views, while the weak and the unknown are suppressed and never given a platform to state their views. The researcher observed that some animosity between smallholder farmers and extension officers could contribute to this kind of sentiment. However, if this is true, Department of Agriculture officers at district and municipal levels should address this problem as a matter of urgency.
- **Lack of recognition of local office efforts:** The farmers felt that their local municipality has adopted certain good practices in dealing with agricultural development but that these efforts are not recognised by district officials. This is substantiated by the fact that these good practices aren't mentioned in print or electronic media or even at meetings.

The researcher has observed, however, that good works speak for themselves. The Musina local Municipal area is well known as the main tomato producing area and for its good game farms. It is the opinion of the researcher that management did all that was feasible to put the municipal area in the map of the Province and the whole Country at large. Therefore the two examples of inefficient management cited should be investigated by local and district officers to ascertain their truthfulness.

G. Transformation of the Department

According to the smallholder farmers, the main sign of transformation of the Department of Agriculture at district level is the fact that the District has had three different District managers up until 2004. The changes in management weren't regarded as either good or bad by the farmers, and the researcher is of the opinion that it did not compromise the delivery of services.

The smallholder farmers welcomed the appointment of local office heads to assume overall responsibility for local agricultural issues. They felt that their problems and concerns should be dealt with by someone on a day-to-day basis, and that they should be able to talk to him/her directly when he/she is not proactive enough.

The researcher concluded that local office heads should be empowered to take appropriate decisions at local level rather than to refer every problem to the Department of Agriculture at district office. This will help speed up the delivery of services and resolve farmers' problems in the shortest possible time.

H. Service delivery

As indicated earlier, the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (RSA, 1997), which led to the development of Batho Pele principles, is the guiding document as far as service delivery is concerned. The farmers who participated in the focus group discussions were measuring the performance of the Department according to Batho Pele principles. The delivery of services did not meet their expectations. The following examples of poor service delivery by the Department were provided:

- **Promises not kept**

Smallholder farmers are good listeners and sensitive when it comes to information. If an officer or a politician at local, district or provincial level promises them something, they mark that person's words and will always hold him/her accountable. According to the farmers there are times when especially politicians, Departmental officers would not keep their promises regarding

particular assistance, such as disaster relief funding for farmers. This becomes a real problem for the farmers, and is proof of poor service delivery by the Department.

- **Funds returned to treasury**

One of the major concerns that farmers have is hearing that the Department did not completely utilise allocated funds in a particular financial year. This does not make sense to the farmers, because there are many needs that should have been addressed by those funds. Farmers draw the conclusions that the Department does not care and that it is inefficient.

- **No implementation of budget speech promises**

The smallholder farmers are concerned about the fact that MECs usually present a promising budget speech to the Legislature although its implementation is a serious challenge to departmental officers. The Department at Provincial level is then blamed for poor service delivery. For example, the MEC would promise that a certain amount of fencing for grazing camps would be constructed to protect livestock from entering the farms and causing serious damage to crops but by the end of the financial year only half of the fence may have been constructed. The farmer's perception is that officers of the Department are inefficient, which leads to poor service delivery.

- **Shortage of extension officers**

Since the Department of Agriculture is considered to be the custodian of agricultural development, smallholder farmers felt that the failure to appoint more extension officers to this local office is due to management inefficiency. They believed that there is no valid reason for this shortage of staff, and felt that there can never be efficient service delivery if the municipality operates at only half of its capacity.

- **Inability to intervene in the Tiger Brands problem**

As a result of the massive losses suffered by the farmers through the Tiger Brands contract, the smallholder and emerging farmers were of the opinion that the

Department should have intervened. They questioned how the Department can decide not to intervene when farmers are exploited by large companies. According to them, this inability to intervene constitutes poor service delivery on the part of the Department.

The researcher has observed that some of the examples of poor service delivery were unfounded. For example, the last one was caused by the inability of the farmers to consult the Department before they entered into a contract. The Department should investigate these allegations and determine which are genuine and which are not.

The researcher is of the opinion that the Department should embark on a confidence-building exercise to regain the trust of smallholder farmers, since there seems to be animosity amongst the farmers.

I. Role played by smallholder farmers in their own development

The participants in the focus group discussions stated that they played an important role in their own development. They pointed out that the fact that they persisted despite challenges is an indication of their commitment to developing themselves. They also pointed out that the fact that they persisted even when they did not receive the expected subsidies from the democratic government speaks volumes with regard to working tirelessly in the harsh agricultural environment they find themselves in.

The researcher has observed that although the smallholder farmers were working on the land, the number of successful smallholder farmers is still insignificant compared to the majority of farmers who are still underdeveloped after a decade of democracy. There is a close correlation between the development of farmers and the amount of wealth or profit they are able to generate from their farming enterprises. The researcher observed that the farmers who participated in the focus group discussions were not necessarily well-off in terms of material possessions and therefore concluded that an improvement in development from 1994 to 2004 has not been evident in the lives of these farmers.

J. Technology and smallholder farmer development

The importance of technology in the lives of smallholder farmers was clearly described by the farmers, with practical examples that showed its benefits. All the farmers who participated in the focus group discussions agreed that without technology they would not have achieved the successes they did.

The smallholder farmers were able to link the use of technology to an increase in production as translated into profit. Technology is definitely a necessity for the future of any economic sector, including agriculture as pointed out by Pretty (1995:1).

The smallholder farmers were aware that some conventional farming methods were inefficient, for example the type of irrigation system used, because it was not possible to evenly distribute the water and was also wasteful. The farmers were aware that the conventional method of irrigation would lead to poor yields and poor profits. However, with modern farming methods, such as the use of a drip irrigation system, good yields and good profits could be realised. The farmers also understood that technological advancement is a result of research that is conducted to improve people's lives.

K. Influence of politics on smallholder farmer development

The farmers were divided on the role that politics play in the development of smallholder farmers. This was not surprising, since people's perceptions are mainly shaped by the political parties to which they belong. Political ideology plays an important role in shaping one's interpretation of the role of politics in any situation.

Some of the farmers participating in the focus group discussions felt that politics and smallholder farmer development should be separated. They pointed out that the more the politics take centre stage in development, the more smallholder farmers will be alienated and may not be developed appropriately.

The farmers who argued for the positive influence of politics on smallholder farmer development stated that politics and development can never be separated. This is

because the life of any human is shaped by politics in one way or another. According to them, politics and development are intertwined. This view is shared by the researcher. The following are examples of the positive role politics could play in the development of smallholder farmers:

- **Policies for smallholder farmer development**

In order for smallholder farmers to be developed, there is a need for policies with a special bias towards them. It takes a responsible political leader to ensure that policies are developed with special emphasis on redressing the imbalances caused by previous policies. The policies developed for smallholder farmer development should be consistent with the Constitution.

- **Understanding of politics by officers**

It is crucial that extension officers understand the political environment in which they operate. If not, they could make serious mistakes, such as promising farmers things that authorities could consider inappropriate. The implementation of the various Departmental programmes and projects is supported when officials understand in which direction the Department is heading.

- **Political lobbying**

At times there is need for smallholder farmers to lobby for support from politicians both at local, district and provincial levels in order to realise some of their developmental needs. Smallholder farmers would in most cases probably receive what they need if they start lobbying for support from the local councillor at ward level, the mayor at local municipal level, or the executive mayor at district municipal level.

The researcher has also observed that farmers' organisations such as the Tomato Growers' Association and LERPO have had a positive influence on the development of smallholder farmers in the District.

4.6.2. Makhado Municipality

A. Support provided by the Department of Agriculture

(i) Analysis of positive support provided

- **Provision of starter packs to land claimants**

In 2001, the Department of Agriculture in Limpopo Province provided starter packs to some of the beneficiaries of the land reform programme, including some in the Vhembe District. These starter packs were mainly machinery, such as tractors, implements and trailers, and money to kick-start production activities on farms. These were provided to those communities which benefited from the land restitution programme and were channelled to the communities through the Communal Property Association (CPA).

Some of the farmers who participated in the focus group discussions came from the restitution projects in the Mavungeni, Munzhedzi and Kranspoort communities. The smallholder farmers stated that the provision of such starter packs was the best form of assistance the Department could provide to resource-poor smallholder farmers to put them on track for successful farming businesses.

However, the researcher has observed that these starter packs were either abused or misused by the benefiting communities and as a result the majority of them are damaged or not being used. The researcher is of the opinion that this positive support provided by the Department unfortunately could not be maintained properly, possibly because of lack of leadership, conflict, lack of expertise, and lack of resources.

- **Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) programme**

The smallholder farmers in this municipality include farmers who benefited from the LRAD programme, which is also part of the land reform programme. The farmers hailed the LRAD programme as one of the best steps taken by the Department in improving the livelihood of previously disadvantaged farmers,

even though the programme is aimed at semi-commercial and commercial farmers and not at smallholder farmers. Participants gave examples of smallholder farmers who had nothing before and acquired land through the LRAD programme and whose livelihood had improved tremendously.

The researcher is of the opinion that the programme is indeed a necessity in redistributing agricultural land to previously disadvantaged and dispossessed farmers. However, the beneficiaries of the LRAD programme still encountered problems, because they had the land, infrastructure and will to work, but they lacked money for production, since they were already heavily indebted to the bank. This meant that they could not receive any meaningful production from their investment, which would be a recipe for failure. The LRAD programme is a good example of well intended support provided to semi commercial and commercial farmers which seems to pose serious challenges to the newly settled farmers.

- **Provision of technical advice**

The farmers in this municipality, like those in the Musina Municipality, were positive about the performance of extension officers. They commended them for the good technical advice they have been receiving since 1994.

The researcher has observed that there is a close relationship between farmers and extension officers. This should have led to success for the farmers. However, after a decade of democracy, the farmers are still not able to stand on their own feet. They still depend on the technical advice from extension officers. According to the researcher, this is not a good sign for the improvement of the livelihood of smallholder farmers.

- **Revitalisation of smallholder irrigation schemes (RESIS)**

The smallholder farmers who participated in the focus group discussions in this municipality were from areas where the government's RESIS programme has either been completed or was in the process of being completed. The farmers applauded the efforts of the Department to revitalise the infrastructure of the

irrigation schemes, most of which have been in existence since 1960. The programme includes rebuilding/repair of irrigation canals, fencing of irrigation schemes, revitalising earth dams and balancing dams – all of which are necessary infrastructure for the survival of the schemes and the improvement of smallholder farmers' livelihood. The floods of 2000 had damaged most of the infrastructure in the irrigation schemes, which meant that they were no longer functional and that no farming activities were possible. The farmers commended the Department for committing millions of rand for the revitalisation of the irrigation schemes. This has been regarded as a positive move in support of the improvement of the livelihood of smallholder farmers, which will ensure that farmers become self-sufficient, self-dependent and successful.

The researcher experienced that farmers had lost all hope that irrigated agriculture will ever be possible in their areas, but the commencement of the RESIS programme brought much needed relief to the lives of smallholder farmers. It is the view of the researcher that the revitalised schemes could become more productive with proper planning by both the Department of Agriculture officials and the smallholder farmers and those smallholder farmers could become more self-sufficient.

(ii) Analysis of support expected but not provided

• Provision of machinery and implements

The smallholder farmers who participated in the focus group discussion claimed that they benefited under the previous regime, when they were provided with machinery and implements at a subsidised rate. The machinery assisted farmers a great deal because even the poorest of the poor were able prepare their fields for planting. The farmers claimed that all machinery were taken away when the democratic government assumed power in 1994 as a result of political changes taking place and change in the Department of Agriculture approach. This left a vacuum in the lives of many smallholder farmers, whose livelihood was dependent on the piece of land that they used for their primary production. The farmers claimed that most of those machinery and implements were sold during auction sales and were purchased mainly by white commercial farmers. The

majority of smallholder farmers were previously disadvantaged and did not have the money to bid during the auction sales.

The researcher has observed that the machinery and implements are indeed no longer available for servicing the farmers. It is the view of the researcher that the situation could have been handled better: The machinery and implements could have been handed over to a group of farmers to form a business entity, such as a cooperative that would provide the necessary services to farmers. This view is also held by the farmers who participated in the focus group discussions.

- **Facilitation of markets**

The smallholder farmers who participated in the focus group discussions were concerned about the poor access to formal markets. They believed that the facilitation of markets is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District. They felt that the Department should do more to make sure that smallholders' produce gain access to markets.

However, the researcher is of the opinion that the Department's role should be to provide marketing information and not to literally negotiate access of smallholder farmers' produce to formal markets. The smallholder farmers should be made aware that farming, like any other business, requires smallholder farmers to become entrepreneurs who take their own business decisions. There is still need for campaigns, workshops, training, capacity-building programmes and raising awareness to make the smallholder farmers more business-minded and to be self-sufficient with good basic business, financial and marketing skills.

- **Speedy resolution of pending land claims**

The smallholder farmers participating in the focus group discussion raised the issue of the slow resolution of land claims lodged with the Land Claims Commissioner's office. The farmers feel that the speedy resolution of these land claims could give them more land on which to practise their farming, since the majority of them have been using small patches of land or irrigation schemes. It is

their belief that the Department should have been more proactive in facilitating the process of land claims.

However, the researcher has come to realise that the whole issue of the land claims does not reside with the Department of Agriculture but with the Land Claims Commissioner's office. The Department's only role in terms of land claims is the after-settlement support of land claimants. The farmers are incorrectly attributing this matter to the Department.

- **Promises not kept**

As in Musina Municipality, the farmers in this municipality were disappointed that promises were made to the farmers but never kept, especially with regard to natural disasters, such as the floods of 2000. Some smallholder farmers are still waiting for the Department to deliver on its promises of financial assistance.

The researcher is of the opinion that if farmers were prepared for the disaster in the form of insurance, Departmental assistance would only have had to meet some of their needs while the insurance would have taken care of the rest. Since almost none of the smallholder farmers in the area had insurance, they all had to start afresh after the promise of financial assistance was not kept by the Department.

- **Provision of start-up capital**

Smallholder farmers had expected that the Department of Agriculture would shift its focus to the provision of financial assistance to previously disadvantaged smallholder farmers. They argued that the previous apartheid regime gave white commercial farmers more money in order to help their farming businesses to be financially stable before the support was withdrawn. Because of this precedent, smallholder farmers expected the Department of Agriculture to do the same by granting all needy smallholder farmers start-up capital over a period, while the farmers build their financial resources. This did not happen. The smallholder farmers therefore felt that the Department has failed in its effort to develop them by not providing them with start-up capital.

The researcher has observed that the provision of start-up capital could have gone a long way in assisting the majority of poor farmers to restart their farming enterprises, which could have led to better opportunities for farmers. The Department may have had problems with the disbursement of start-up funding to almost 273 000 farmers.

- **Provision of infrastructure**

The smallholder farmers indicated the need for upgrading of infrastructure within their schemes and projects. Some smallholder farmers have been waiting for the building of earth dams for holding irrigation water in their various irrigation schemes. However, this was not as widespread in the Makhado Municipality as the other issues pointed out by farmers.

The researcher has observed that some of the infrastructure indeed required some repairs. The RESIS programme should address these infrastructural needs.

- **Intervention regarding high water tariffs**

As a result of the higher water tariffs, some of the newly revitalised irrigation schemes, such as the Capesthorne Irrigation Scheme, have not started functioning. The smallholder farmers stated that the water tariffs in the irrigation schemes are more than they could afford. They therefore expected the Department to intervene through the provision of subsidies to farmers. The smallholder farmers further stated that they are not necessarily opposing paying for the water they are using for irrigation, but they need the water tariffs to be fair and not too high.

The researcher has found that smallholder farmers weren't previously exposed to a situation where they had to pay for irrigation water. He observed that the new approach that the Department has introduced through RESIS is not yet receiving proper attention. The approach is not yet popular with smallholder farmers and raising awareness amongst them is essential.

(iii) Analysis of complaints raised

• **Abrupt withdrawal of machinery and implements**

The smallholder farmers pointed out that after the democratically elected government came to power in 1994, there were many changes, especially in the former homeland of Venda, which now constitutes the greater part of the Vhembe District. One of the changes which affected smallholder farmers was the abrupt withdrawal of Departmental tractors and implements which were available to them at affordable, subsidised rates during the previous era. The smallholder farmers claimed that after this machinery were withdrawn; the farmers were told to rent machinery from private owners who charged them high tariffs.

The researcher is of the opinion that the farmers' claims could be true, since there are currently not a substantial number of providers of machinery. The researcher observed that some smallholder farmers depend on their pension pay-out and even on money intended for the family sent by their children employed elsewhere. The researcher is of the opinion that an alternative arrangement such as bringing all departmental machinery under one roof to form a smallholder farmers cooperative to run the fleet of these tractors should have been made.

• **Racial exclusion of smallholder farmers from markets**

The smallholder farmers throughout the Vhembe District complained about the exclusion of their products from markets. The smallholder farmers' point of view is that their products are excluded from formal markets because of their race. This makes it difficult for them to compete fairly in markets.

However, the researcher observed that there are more factors involved in the marketing of products of smallholder farmers previously excluded from markets. According to the researcher, the exclusion of smallholder farmers from the markets could have been due to the following reasons:

- The quantity produced by smallholder farmers is too little to be considered seriously by marketing agents.

- The quality of products produced seems to have been below the acceptable standards of formal markets.
- Smallholder farmers lack knowledge regarding markets. Extension officers should have shared the necessary information with them.

- **Failure by the Department to monitor “starter packs” provided to Communal Property Associations**

The smallholder farmers who were from the restitution projects that received starter packs complained that after the Department gave them these starter packs (a package of production inputs and machinery and implements provided to kick start production) they never bothered to check whether these were properly utilised by the benefiting communities. The smallholder farmers claimed that even their own extension officers did not care whether these were taken care of or whether they were abused by the communities. As a result of this neglect, most of the machinery were stolen, damaged or destroyed.

The researcher has made the following observations with regard to the starter packs:

- The farmers should have been prepared before the starter packs were handed out. Awareness should have been raised with regard to ownership.
- The farmers should have been responsible enough to know that the starter packs were intended to help them.
- The Department should have assigned technical people to work closely with the recipients in an effort to ensure that the investment made in the restitution projects became a success. These people could also have played a monitoring role regarding the use or abuse of the machinery.

- **Failure to provide start-up capital for restitution projects**

The smallholder farmers from the restitution projects also complained that they expected the Department to provide them with capital to start with production activities on the farms. They felt that starter packs alone were not enough to help them become farmers who could contribute to the economic wellbeing of their various areas.

The researcher observed that there was a lack of unity among smallholder farmers in most of the restitution projects. The more influential smallholder farmers could have misused the money like they did with the starter packs. Although the provision of money could have made a positive contribution to the situation of smallholder farmers, money alone would not have solved the problem of unity in the community.

It is true that financial support is one of the things that smallholder farmers require in order to succeed in their farming enterprises. In the case of the restitution projects the challenge could have been how to provide this financial support to the CPAs. The CPAs consisted mainly of people who are not necessarily farmers but beneficiaries of the land reform programme. The poor people whose livelihood depended on farming were in the minority. It would have been difficult for the Department to provide finances to a group of people who are not farmers because of the danger that the money would not benefit the intended recipients.

- **Intertribal conflict between Shangaans and Vendas**

The smallholder farmers from this municipality indicated that the communities are made up of people with different tribal backgrounds. They claimed that there are tribal tension between Shangaans and Vendas, and that the Department is doing nothing to resolve the matter.

These allegations of tribal conflict could not be confirmed to be affecting service delivery by the Department of Agriculture. The researcher is of the opinion that the tribal tensions should not be resolved by the Department of Agriculture but by local stakeholders such as civic associations, councillors, tribal leaders, and the communities themselves.

- **Deforestation caused by ploughing on the mountains**

The smallholder farmers claimed that the failure to provide irrigation water in some areas has caused some smallholder farmers to start ploughing on the mountains, since they receive some water from the dew even though there are no

rains. They acknowledge that this is not good practice but circumstances force them to do so.

The researcher is of the opinion areas that cannot be provided with irrigation water should be designated as areas to be used for dryland production. It will be impractical for the Department to provide irrigation water to the entire municipality. However, designated irrigation schemes and sites should be utilised optimally.

B. Development of smallholder farmers

Based on the responses of the smallholder farmers that participated in the group discussions, it can be concluded that some farmers were developed but a substantial number were not. The same substantial number of smallholder farmers who were farming at subsistence level is still farming at subsistence level with little or no marketable surplus.

According to the researcher, the following are some of the reasons why smallholder farmers are still at subsistence level:

- The area of operation (farm size) is too small to make a meaningful contribution to their economic wellbeing.
- Farmers lack knowledge of the farming business.
- The Department is providing insufficient material and financial support.
- Farmers do not have the capacity to adopt technological changes and adapt it to their daily lives.

The researcher is of the opinion that the Department of Agriculture should address the land question in a manner that will benefit smallholder farmers in the long term. It will be necessary to ensure that the smallholder farmers could be provided with complete support in order to improve their livelihood to the point where they start to earn a living from agriculture.

The researcher has observed that the few smallholder farmers who were successfully developed had some form of income, either from their businesses or from salaries received from the government pensions or private sector. The Departmental role in developing this category of farmers is mainly providing technical advice, since these farmers are financially better off.

C. Factors leading to good or poor performance

The smallholder farmers participating in the focus group discussion referred to the following factors leading to good performance:

- **Involvement of farmers in needs and problem identification**

The smallholder farmers stated that they feel recognised when the Department asks them about their needs and the problems they encounter in their farming operations. This recognition gives the farmers some sense of belonging.

The researcher observed that farmers are continually asking extension officers to help them identify the best practices for their farming operations, which is commendable. They also help them to resolve the problems they encounter on a daily basis.

- **Provision of subsidised fodder during droughts**

The livestock smallholder farmers stated that if it hadn't been for the support they received from the Department during drought periods, most of them would not have been able to continue farming. The subsidised fodder enables them to feed their livestock until such time as the grazing normalises.

The researcher observed that, since drought-stricken areas are often declared natural disaster areas, the Department of Agriculture is able to source funds from disaster funds to help the farmers with subsidised fodder for livestock feeding.

- **Provision of vouchers to help crop farmers during disaster periods**

The smallholder farmers appreciated the support provided to them through vouchers, especially in 1995. They regarded this as a gesture of goodwill by the Department.

The researcher has observed that assistance to crop farmers has not been as forthcoming as assistance to livestock farmers. The researcher concurs with the farmers who stated that crop farmers are not as organised as livestock farmers. There is an urgent need for them to come together to form organisations that will be able to speak with one voice with regard to matters affecting them.

The smallholder farmers cited the following factors leading to poor performance by the Department:

- **Slow response to smallholder farmers' needs**

The smallholder farmers indicated bureaucratic red tape as one of the causes of poor performance by the Department. They stated that once a matter that requires action by the Department has been received by the local extension officers, it will take a long time to reach the office or person that should deal with it. The local extension officer submits the matter to his supervisor, who would be the service centre manager, who then submits it to the local municipality manager, who submits it to the senior district manager for decision making. If the matter cannot be handled at district level, it would be referred to the general manager responsible for district services at provincial level. If he cannot make a decision, the matter will finally be referred to the head of the Department.

The researcher is of the opinion that government unfortunately operates in a bureaucratic manner, for accountability purposes. However, the response time needs to be improved. The Batho Pele principles were introduced to guard against this bureaucratic tendency. The researcher has observed that most of the problems and concerns are resolved at local level. Only on rare occasions will problems be referred to higher authorities.

- **Empty promises, especially commitments made by the MEC**

Just as the smallholder farmers in Musina Municipality, the farmers felt that little is delivered by the officials of the Department of Agriculture in terms of promises made in budget speeches. The smallholder farmers were unsure though whether this failure should be blamed on the MEC or on the Departmental officers. They were of the opinion that the MEC would not lie to the citizens of the Limpopo Province, thus it must be the officials who fail to deliver on promises made.

The researcher is of the opinion that smallholder farmers are correct in blaming Departmental officers, based on the fact that funds are returned to the provincial treasury on an annual basis without having met the needs of smallholder farmers.

- **Poor monitoring and evaluation of the support provided**

The smallholder farmers felt that there is not enough monitoring and evaluation of the support provided to the smallholder farmers. This is based on the failure of the starter packs intended for the restitution projects.

It is the view of the researcher that the whole aspect of monitoring and evaluation has not been done properly though it forms part of extension officers' duties. This aspect should be taken seriously by Departmental officers if they want their efforts to develop farmers to be successful.

- **Public officers have many programmes to coordinate**

The participants in the focus group discussions have observed that the extension officers who are supposed to help them are at times not available as they are attending to other assignments assigned to them by their supervisors. This is blamed for poor service delivery, since it is presumed that one person cannot fully devote himself to multiple tasks. The result will be inefficiency.

The researcher is of the opinion that, although some officers have many programmes to coordinate, this was not supposed to lead to poor service delivery but rather to improved service delivery because of the knowledge gathered in many areas. In cases where the extension officer is overwhelmed by the work,

assistance from fellow officers should be sought. Officers should work as a team at all time.

- **Merging of the four previous administrations**

The municipality is one of those which are composed of the former homeland administrations of Venda, Gazankulu and Lebowa and the former Transvaal Provincial Administration. The participants were of the view that there has been poor service delivery as a result of language barriers and attitudes towards one another, among others.

The researcher has observed that when extension officers speak a different language than the one spoken by the local farming community, there are misunderstandings, distrust and sometimes a lack of cooperation. Although there has been progress in bringing the communities closer together since 1994, the problem still exists.

D. Role played by extension officers

Participants' opinions differed regarding the role that extension officers play in the improvement of livelihood for smallholder farmers. Some said they are not serving the interests of the smallholder farmers, and only collect their salaries at the end of the month without doing something constructive for the farmers. The farmers see them as stumbling blocks towards their development because they do not honour farmers' requests. Others felt that officials are rendering a good service to the smallholder farmers.

Extension officers were further accused of staying away from the farmers for far too long. The farmers also accused some of the officers for neglecting their responsibility while pursuing their personal agendas. Some officers also display unbecoming behaviour such as excessive drinking and womanising. These kinds of officials are regarded as contributing to poor service delivery by the Department of Agriculture.

According to the researcher, the vocal way in which the smallholder farmers accused the extension officers indicated the poor relationship between those farmers and their

extension officers. The researcher's view is that all these allegations are serious enough to warrant further investigation by the Department of Agriculture.

The group of participants that were positive about the role that extension officers are playing in the development of farmers commended officers for a job well done. They felt that officers are empowering the smallholder farmers to become self-sufficient, thereby reducing the dependency on the officers. They stated that a sign of development is when the farmers are able to practise various activities by themselves in the absence of extension officers. The participants felt that their extension officers play a major role in the provision of good technical advice to the farmers. The officers are also seen as playing a major role in organising farmers to work together and to form groups that would serve as their mouthpiece.

It was evident to the researcher that the smallholder farmers have good working relationships with their extension officers. This kind of cooperation between officers and farmers should be encouraged and used as examples for those extension officers who are not performing well with regard to development.

Participants agreed on how the role played by public officials could be enhanced for better service delivery.

- Mutual respect and two-way communication between extension officers and farmers. This will allow for discussion of issues affecting them in a atmosphere of tolerance, patience and common understanding.
- In the rural areas the officers should resort to meeting farmers in their traditional meetings, especially if there are farmers who cannot be reached on their farms. Traditional leadership could play an important role in ensuring development in their areas; therefore officers should develop a good working relationship with these authorities to assist them.
- The use of suggestion boxes to report officers who display unbecoming behaviour, so that they can be thoroughly investigated and, if found guilty, be dealt with accordingly by Departmental authorities.

The researcher agrees with the participants' suggestions for improving the role of the public officials in the development of smallholder farmers.

E. Public participation

The participants again had contrasting views with regard to the involvement of the farmers in Departmental programmes. One group of smallholder farmers argued that extension officers allow them to participate in the various programmes aimed at the development of the smallholder farmers. The various forms of participation include participation in the meetings organised by the extension officers, consultation whenever there are issues affecting the farmers, and representatives from the farmers interacting with the Department at various levels.

Another group of smallholder farmers was adamant that the Department is doing little in terms of allowing them room to freely participate in the various Departmental programmes. They claimed that participation only takes place on an ad hoc basis and is never planned properly. They stated that farmers are not properly consulted and are simply told to attend certain meetings. Sometimes they are informed of meetings late, without regard for what they could be busy with on their farms.

The researcher is of the opinion that both views had some substance. This is because some smallholder farmers were informed properly about the focus group discussion, although they did not know what specifically the discussion was about. They were able to deliberate on the various issues raised during the focus group discussions. Other smallholder farmers were only told to come to the municipality office on the identified date to meet someone from the Department of Agriculture. The researcher's observation is that the failure by the extension officers to effectively communicate the information to the smallholder farmers meant that there was no proper consultation or information provided to them. The researcher was nevertheless impressed with the interaction of some of the participants, which made the focus group discussion exciting and informative.

F. Management of the Department of Agriculture at District level

With regard to the management of the Department of Agriculture at Vhembe District, smallholder farmers were concerned about the fact that there is not enough consultation by District management with the smallholder farmers at municipality level. This raised the question of whether District management responds only to extension officers' written reports or also to their verbal reports.

According to the researcher, it is not necessary for District management to always visit the local municipality because this will cause management at municipality level to be redundant. It may be necessary for District management to visit the local municipality at regular intervals to observe the progress or lack thereof and to interact with farmers at grass-roots level. The researcher has observed that this is how the Department is being managed, through empowering different levels of management to take charge of attending to farmers' needs, concerns and problems. The researcher has also observed that farmers assume that if they have reported their concerns to local management their concerns are not reported to District management. Hence trust is lost in the process. Once trust and confidence in the local officials is lost, it becomes difficult for extension officers to contribute to meaningful development of smallholder farmers in their respective areas of operation.

G. Transformation of the Department

According to the participants, the only visible sign of transformation in the Department of Agriculture at this municipality is the redeployment of good extension officers in other areas within the Province and their replacement by non-performing extension officers. This meant that farmers experienced transformation of the Department in a negative way.

However, the participants have previously stated that officers who spoke a language different from that of the farmers were considered undesirable. This might have been a reason for redeployment. Some officers could also have moved to other areas through promotion or because the Department realised that their skills could better be utilised once they were given other responsibilities.

H. Service delivery

The smallholder farmers pointed out that they expected improved service delivery after 1994. However, some of the extension officers are still performing their work in the same way as they did prior to 1994. Farmers do not see how such officers could make service delivery a reality. The farmers expected a real change of attitudes, behaviour and approach to work by the extension officers but this is not what they have experienced since 1994.

The researcher has observed that some extension officers realise the importance of changing their attitudes about their work and to perform to the best of their ability. The Department has improved their working conditions and the majority of them now have subsidised vehicles, which means that they are able to visit their farmers on time. However, there are some extension officers who indeed have not changed significantly and who view improved service delivery to farmers as a burden. A possible reason for their attitude might be that some of them are not yet experiencing the same benefits as others, such as subsidised vehicles. The Department therefore needs to provide the same benefits to all extension officers so that none of them could blame the non-delivery of services on the unavailability of such benefits.

I. Role played by smallholder farmers in their own development

The smallholder farmers claimed that they are doing their best under difficult circumstances to help themselves. They stated that they are able to provide for some services required by them and therefore enable their farms to progress.

However, the researcher could not find proof that the farmers are able to do what they have claimed they are doing. Their claims in this regard need to be investigated further. The researcher also realises that, because of human nature, people will always have something good to say about themselves.

The researcher is of the view that if some smallholder farmers were able to help themselves, there would be no need to complain about extension officers and the Department. The fact that they still complain about the Department is an indication

that they are still need development to be provided by the Department and its officials.

J. Technology and smallholder farmer development

The smallholder farmers in the Makhado Municipality regarded technology as the way of approaching modern agriculture. The importance of technology in the lives of smallholder farmers was clearly described by the farmers, with relevant and practical examples that indicated the benefits. All the farmers who participated in the focus group discussions agreed that without technology they would not have achieved the successes they did.

The farmers were able to link the use of technology to an increase in production as translated into profit. Technology is definitely a necessity for the future of any economic sector, including agriculture.

K. Influence of politics on smallholder farmer development

The participants were unanimous in stating that politics cannot be divorced from the development of smallholder farmers. They understand that life is influenced by politics, either directly or indirectly. The researcher has also observed that many of the participants' negative responses could have been caused by the politics behind the issue of the development of smallholder farmers.

A concern which was raised regarding the influence of politics was the rights that officers have as a result of the democratic dispensation. Some smallholder farmers felt that officers are abusing their rights by not working productively in their work environment but staying away from their work while attending to their political or union activities. This is done in order to cover their incompetence with regard to the performance of their duties.

The researcher is of the opinion that although officers have the right to belong to the labour movement of their choice, that right is not supposed to be used to deny farmers their right to proper development and access to better service delivery.

4.6.3. Thulamela Municipality

A. Support provided by the Department of Agriculture

(i) Analysis of positive support provided

Both groups of participants indicated that the support provided by the Department with regard to the fencing of crop fields and grazing camps was a positive move towards improving the farming conditions of smallholder farmers. Hence this contributed greatly to the improvement of their livelihood.

The commencement of agricultural development projects aimed at the youth was seen as a positive move towards encouraging the youth to take part in agricultural economic activities. This assists the Department in raising awareness amongst the youth of the importance of agriculture as a form of economic activity that can improve one's livelihood and create wealth.

As was the case in the other local municipalities, the extension officers were praised for providing technical advice to smallholder farmers. The participants stated that farmers still desperately need technical information in order to be productive and competitive in their farming businesses. Participants viewed the training and development of previously disadvantaged smallholder farmers as a major step towards the improvement of smallholder farmers' livelihood. The training programmes are developed through the cooperation of extension officers at district and local municipalities, farmers and training staff from the Madzivhandila Agricultural Training Centre.

The researcher has observed that in some of the areas of this municipality there have been substantial developments aimed at the improvement of smallholder farmers. The Thulamela Municipality's performance is also evident in the number of accolades won by smallholder farmers at various competitions held at provincial and national level, notably the best smallholder maize seed producers' award awarded to smallholder farmers in the Mbahela irrigation schemes. The researcher has also

observed that the municipality has the comparative advantage of the best agro-climatic conditions in the District.

(ii) Analysis of support expected but not provided

The participants referred to unfulfilled expectations similar to those mentioned by participants in the other local municipalities. The analysis of support with regard to the support expected but not provided such as machinery, finances and markets have been substantially covered under both the Musina and Makhado Municipalities.

The researcher has observed that the majority of individual farmers are in transition from being smallholders to being semi-commercial and commercial farmers, since the majority of them own 5 hectares or more of land. They are also well off in terms of their status in society. However, the researcher is of the opinion that support to individual smallholder farmers could have had a positive impact in improving their livelihood and those of the people they could afford to employ.

(iii) Analysis of complaints raised

The participants also raised some of the complaints that were raised by participants in the other municipalities, such as the promises of various kinds of support by the Department that were not kept, which seemed to indicate that the Department does not care about the wellbeing of smallholder farmers.

The participants in this municipality also raised the following complaints about services they expected but which were never delivered:

- **CASP funding inaccessible**

The participants complained about the unfairness of the criteria for support through CASP. The participants were of the opinion that the support was supposed to be open to all farmers who needed it and not only a select few. The majority of smallholder farmers are in the category that would never receive CASP funding because the amount of land they own is less than the criteria stipulated earlier under the discussions on CASP support.

The researcher has found that CASP funding is a facility available to all farmers who meet the set qualifying criteria and as result farmers were not supposed to complain about such a criteria. The researcher has also observed that the Department follows a particular procedure to provide CASP assistance. This is because it is not possible for the Department to provide this kind of support to all farmers at once. Farmers should be aware that they are still responsible for supporting themselves, since the farming businesses does not belong to the Department but to the smallholder farmers themselves.

- **Prize money for female farmer competition takes too long to be paid**

The female farmer of the year competition encourages women farmers to be more productive and efficient. The participants complained that, though the competition is a good initiative, the delay in the payment of prize money demoralises entrants.

The researcher realised that the concern seems to be genuine, since the winners do not receive their prize money immediately after the various stages of the competition have been completed. The Department is in a position to turn this around and pay the prize money when the competition is completed.

B. Development of smallholder farmers

The participants contended that there are not many smallholder farmers who were developed and became commercial farmers. In this regard the participants consider the Department as having failed in its endeavour to develop smallholder farmers. The participants were of the view that there should have been at least some successful farmers since 1994 that the Department could showcase as success stories. The participants at least pointed to the success of the broiler production projects as a positive development.

The researcher is of the opinion that the few cases of successful smallholder farmers indicate that the success of farmers is not only the Department's responsibility but the farmers' as well. The successful broiler production projects serve as a practical example of a business enterprise that has benefited the project members and

individual farmers in the same enterprise. The lessons that are being learnt in this enterprise should be used to develop other farming enterprises.

C. Factors leading to good or poor performance

The participants raised the following factors that led to good or poor performance by the Department:

- **Political changes**

The political changes that swept the country in 1994 brought with it much uncertainty because the people involved in development were uncertain about their positions under the new democratic government. The participants claimed that progress in the development of farmers was delayed while people were recovering from the transition. Unfortunately there seems to be some who, even ten years later, still do not know precisely what they should do to assist farmers.

The researcher is of the opinion that the dawn of democracy was an opportunity for all in the District to look to the fruits of democracy with optimism. The most unfortunate part of transition was that some used the phase as an excuse for not doing their work, for cheating and stealing from the Department. The researcher believes that the 'transitional shock' was supposed to last only for a relatively short period of time. Everything should have stabilised after a while so that services could be delivered efficiently.

- **Withdrawal of government-owned machinery**

The issue of the withdrawal of government-owned machinery has been thoroughly analysed in Sections 4.6.1 and 4.6.2. The same analysis applies here.

- **Promises not kept**

The promises that were not kept by the Department have also been covered in Sections 4.6.1 and 4.6.2, and the same analysis applies here.

- **Farmers expected to put money together to acquire goods and services**

The participants stated that the Department expects them to pool their money to access the goods and services they need, which they felt is asking too much of them. They claimed that they do not have money and they are working on individual plots; therefore putting money together could pose a serious challenge.

The researcher's observation is that the farmers expect the Department to do everything for them, as if the Department should take over the running of the farmers' enterprises. The farmers should be able to mobilise support amongst them in order to access various goods and services which individually can be difficult to get. The farmers are expected to organise themselves in a manner that shows their commitment to their farming businesses.

- **Lack of provision of finances**

The participants cited the lack of provision of finances as a major stumbling block leading to poor performance. The Department is not expected to perform well if the farmers they exist to serve are not provided with access to finances. The smallholder farmers' development status is unchanged, and the participants are of the view that not much will change unless the Department does something about it.

However, the researcher found that the provision of access to finance is not entirely within the Departmental mandate, except for various financial packages that the Department has budgeted for. The researcher is of the opinion that the Department can play a role in creating conditions conducive for financial institutions to support smallholder farmers.

- **Top-down approach**

The participants saw the Department as taking a top-down approach to decisions on implementing particular programmes in one area and not in others. They claimed that the Department should first consult the farmers as to their opinions with regard to the implementation of particular initiatives. The participants believed that failure to consult would lead to the failure of the proposed initiatives.

The researcher is of the opinion that it is possible to consult with and inform farmers through their representatives regarding new initiatives intended to help them. According to Kotze and Kellermann (1997:38), the success of development initiatives is best achieved with the effective involvement and participation of beneficiaries.

D. Role played by extension officers

The role played by extension officers was both positive and negative in the eyes of the smallholder farmers. The smallholder farmers stated the following aspects which are a cause of concern to them:

- **Visitation to the smallholder farmers**

The smallholder farmers taking part in the focus group discussions complained that extension officers are no longer visiting the farmers as often as they used to prior to 1994. At times farmers claimed that they use pressure to get extension officers to visit them on their farms. On the other hand the extension officers participating in the focus group discussion stated that because of their heavy workload they can no longer visit the farmers as they did before. They would prefer to visit farmers on an invitational basis. This state of affairs affects the farmers negatively, and as a result the farmers blame the extension officers for playing a negative role in their development.

The researcher observed that the farmers still depend heavily on the extension officers for success in their farming units. There are apparently still some farmers who cannot do anything without the extension officers. This kind of dependency is leading to an endless reliance on the extension officers by the smallholder farmers.

- **Self-interest of extension officers**

The smallholder farmers accused the extension officers of looking after their own interests at the expense of assisting farmers. The support that should go to the farmers does not reach them because extension officers would be running their own errands instead of being fully occupied with their official engagements.

The researcher is of the opinion that the few extension officers who might be engaged in the above behaviour unfortunately spoil the good work that other extension officers are doing. There are indeed extension officers who are doing a good job but the actions of the few overshadow this.

- **Nepotism**

The issue of nepotism was thoroughly analysed in Section 4.6.1. The problem could negatively affect the efforts of the Department to reach out to its clients. The researcher's observation through interaction with extension officers confirms that there are officers who provide selective assistance to farmers, which damages the image of the Department. The Department should therefore identify such officers and deal with them.

- **Alleged theft of funds**

The smallholder farmers claimed that there are times when funds promised by the Department do not reach them. They suspect foul play by Departmental managers and officers, i.e. those officers are committing theft of money intended for helping smallholder farmers.

It is difficult for the smallholder farmers who do not know how the Department operates and how funds are allocated to be convinced that promised funds could be reduced or increased depending on various budgetary processes. The researcher could not ascertain if the specific amounts that were mentioned by the farmers were reduced as alleged. The researcher could confirm that the manner in which funds are allocated could be altered by Departmental authorities. It is therefore essential that whenever there are developments which could impact negatively on the delivery of particular services to farmers it is communicated well in advance

to the farmers. This will prevent allegations of mismanagement of funds and promote a good working relationship between farmers and officers.

- **Failure to implement Batho Pele principles**

Extension officers being accused of not implementing Batho Pele principles should be regarded as a serious problem.

The researcher's observations are that public officials sometimes do not implement Batho Pele principles in totality, but partially. Examples are when officers fail to consult farmers or when they fail to wear the identification cards provided by the Department.

- **Unbecoming behaviour of extension officers**

Extension officers are accused of unbecoming behaviour, such as absence from work, especially on pay days, drunkenness while on duty, and love affairs in the workplace. This behaviour negatively affects and makes a mockery of the Department's efforts to deliver efficient services to farmers.

The researcher has observed that some extension officers indeed display such unbecoming behaviour. However, it will be wrong to assume that all extension officers are guilty of these accusations. Departmental authorities have a duty to expose those who display such unbecoming behaviour and deal with them.

E. Public participation

The participants in the focus group discussions unanimously agreed that smallholder farmers are consulted and involved in what the Department does and what it intends to do. The smallholder farmers were happy about the level of involvement of farmers in programmes such as RESIS. In mobilising farmers to find solutions to their problems, the participatory extension approach is a good way to give smallholder farmers an opportunity to take charge of their own destiny.

The researcher has observed that Departmental officials are effectively involving farmers as active and important stakeholders in their own development.

F. Management of the Department of Agriculture in Vhembe District

One concern that was raised by the participants of the focus group discussions was the failure of District management to provide resources for effective functioning of local offices. The shortage of office equipment makes it difficult for the local offices to work to their full capacity. The other concern was the failure of District management to manage the conflict between the Tsonga and Venda officials and farmers. The poor service delivery experienced in areas of the Thulamela Municipality is attributed to this conflict.

The researcher's opinion regarding the first concern is that the District Municipality is in a position to provide all required resources at the offices closest to the farmers. It takes proper planning to ensure that all offices are properly equipped in order to serve the farmers.

The conflict between the two tribes in this area is not a new problem. The researcher is of the opinion that there is not much current District management could do to resolve these differences completely. According to the researcher, farmers and officials should be encouraged not to allow the conflict to interfere with their work. This will not be an easy task for District management but in the long term these conflict can be dealt with successfully.

G. Transformation of the Department

The participants indicated that there is still mistrust and misunderstandings between the officers from the previous Venda and Gazankulu administrations. The participants claimed that there has been very little effort by the District to foster cooperation between officers from these two administrations.

The researcher is of the opinion that the mindset of officers needs to be changed. This can be done through workshops in which teams comprising officers from the two

previous administrations work together on various tasks. The long term strategy would be to remove people from their comfort zones to work stations that comprise people from both administrations. In this way the transformation of District officers will be attained in the shortest possible time.

H. Service delivery

The smallholder farmers who participated in the focus group discussions indicated that service delivery is not yet acceptable. They pointed out that much could still be done to improve the performance of the Department in order to deliver efficient and good quality services to their clients.

On the other hand the extension officers who participated in the focus group discussions stated that they are doing their best under difficult conditions, such as limited resources. However, they agreed with the farmers that it is possible for service delivery to be improved through continuous monitoring and evaluation by the Department..

The researcher is of the opinion that the Department still needs to encourage a culture of service delivery amongst all staff members. The Department should regard this as a process which will lead to improved service delivery in the long term. The improvement of service delivery is considered to be a compliance issue as far as the Department is concerned and therefore the implementation of Batho Pele principles is compulsory to all Departmental officers. The delivery of services to the farmers has to improve if the Department is serious about the implementation of these principles.

I. Role played by smallholder farmers in their own development

The smallholder farmers appreciated the fact that farmers should assume the responsibility of being active participants in their development. If not, they will be passive recipients of development initiatives. The smallholder farmers referred to their role in their own development, such as planning and managing their own enterprises, and seeking information and expertise to help them in their own operations.

The researcher is of the opinion that the smallholder farmers have not yet played a meaningful role in their own development. They still rely heavily on extension officers for various farming practices. The smallholder farmers agreed that they have to take charge of their own future and should reduce their dependence on extension officers over time.

J. Technology and smallholder farmer development

As in the other Municipalities, all the participants in the focus group discussion regarded technology as important in developing smallholder farmers. The more technology is recognised and adopted by smallholder farmers, the more their livelihood will be improved through increased production and income. The smallholder farmers demonstrated their understanding of the benefits of technology by citing relevant examples of how they have used it on their farms.

However, participants indicated that technology is expensive, which means that smallholder farmers cannot afford it. The participants also cited some side-effects of the use of technology, such as the effects of inorganic fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides on health and the environment.

The researcher observed throughout the District and particularly in this municipality that smallholder farmers are using basic technology such as drip irrigation systems, automated drinkers for chickens, inorganic fertilisers, and machinery. It is encouraging to see that even smallholder farmers value the importance of technology in helping them to better their lives by improving productivity.

K. Influence of politics on smallholder farmer development

All participants agreed that smallholder farmer development occurs in a political environment which could affect them either negatively or positively. Municipal councillors who were nominated by their political parties are involved in the development of agriculture within their areas of jurisdiction. Political decisions taken

by the MEC for Agriculture also have an effect on the development and improvement of smallholder farmers' livelihood.

The researcher agrees that decisions taken by political leaders, whether at local, municipal, district or provincial levels affect the wellbeing of smallholder farmers. Decisions regarding the development of farmers are made by political office bearers and administrative officers of the Department of Agriculture such as the Head of Department. For this reason politics and development cannot be separated.

4.6.4. Mutale Municipality

A. Support provided by the Department of Agriculture

(i) Analysis of positive support provided

This focus group was made up of farmers and extension officers. Only the examples of positive support provided by the Department that have not been discussed in the previous sections will be discussed here.

The adoption of the Participatory Extension Approach (PEA) by the Department has enabled smallholder farmers to adapt to the new ways of addressing their own problems. The participants are of the view that the approach should have been introduced a long time ago. Another example of positive support provided by the farmers was the establishment of the seed production cooperative. The provision of infrastructure for the establishment of the cooperative had benefited smallholder farmers in becoming successful entrepreneurs. Once the cooperative is operational, many smallholder farmers will benefit directly from it as it will serve as the main marketing outlet for their seed.

Further support is provided to the various smallholder development projects, such as community gardens and poultry and piggery projects. The decision by the Department of Agriculture at Provincial level for taking over similar projects from the Departments of Public Works and Health and Welfare has been a positive move. This

has enabled the Department of Agriculture's extension officers at district and local levels to provide the necessary expertise in supporting these projects.

The researcher has observed that in areas where the PEA has been used, farmers are better equipped to articulate their demands, to respond to the demand and to organise support in order to respond to the demand. This indicates that smallholder farmers are able to take care of their own livelihood when given an opportunity to do so.

The researcher has also observed that in the Vhembe District, there is no major business enterprise which belongs to smallholder farmers such as an envisaged seed cooperative. The researcher is of the view that any initiative aimed at developing smallholder farmers will in turn help the economy of the District to grow tremendously. The growth of the economy will in turn lead to the improvement of the livelihood of smallholder farmers.

(ii) Analysis of support expected but not provided

The participants stated that they expected the Department to provide various support mechanisms, which were never provided. Only the expected support not analysed in the previous sections will be discussed here.

The smallholder farmers expected that the Department will arrange more exposure visits for them to exchange knowledge and to learn new ways from farmers from other areas, which could have assisted them to improve their productivity.

The researcher has found that the Department has organised some exposure visits for farmers to other areas, within the country and also abroad. However, it has not been possible for the Department to organise such visits for all smallholder farmers in the District. It is acknowledged that increasing this kind of visits will help smallholder farmers to learn from others in order to improve their productivity.

(iii) Analysis of complaints raised

The participants stated that some agricultural projects have collapsed. This could have happened because the projects only received minimal support, or because support was not provided in time.

The researcher has observed that many projects aimed at improving the livelihood of smallholder farmers have collapsed. Their collapse has been attributed to various factors, such as the lack of information regarding markets, technical advice, and mismanagement. The infrastructure of such collapsed projects is currently not being used for any productive purpose.

B. Development of smallholder farmers

Not many farmers in this municipality have developed over the past ten years. The participants stated that those who developed were those who had other means of income to support their farming business. Smallholder farmers are still subsistence farmers, which meant that there was a lack of progress in developing smallholder farmers into semi-commercial and commercial farmers. The participants stated that the same constraints exist as prior to 1994 to hinder development, such as land size. Participants praised those who were subsistence farmers in 1994 who now own big pieces of land and have developed into commercial farmers.

The researcher's observation is that the majority of smallholder farmers are in the same position as prior to 1994. This could be attributed to several factors, such as lack of expertise, lack of markets and marketing information, the land tenure system, and access to finance. Although there are indications that the situation is gradually changing, it will take longer for smallholder farmers to develop into commercial farmers.

C. Factors leading to good or poor performance

The participants specifically mentioned the following factors contributing to good performance by the Department:

- **Good working relationships and cooperation between extension officers and smallholder farmers**

The cooperation between the smallholder farmers and extension officers has been explored in the focus group discussions held with the other municipalities. Because these participants expressed the same views as the previous participants, the researcher is of the opinion that this is a basic requirement for success in any development initiative.

- **Respect for smallholder farmers' choice of crops and livestock**

The participants emphasised the fact that smallholder farmers are given the right to choose the kind of enterprise they are interested in practising on their land. This gives them a sense of pride in and ownership of any development.

The researcher's observation is that in the past farmers were told by extension officers what to plant or what kind of livestock they should keep. This practice led to the demoralisation of smallholder farmers and the subsequent withdrawal of their efforts to succeed in their farming business.

- **Freedom to choose markets for their products**

The smallholder farmers stated that since they have the right to choose their farming enterprises, they also have the right to choose their markets. This gives them a sense of pride in what they are doing as farmers, and this freedom has led to some farmers becoming successful in their farming business.

The researcher is of the opinion that not many of the smallholder farmers are making use of this freedom, and hence they are not being successful. The more farmers are able to take charge of their own farming businesses, the better they would appreciate the support provided by the Department and the more successful they would be.

The extension officers who participated in the focus group discussions cited the following factors contributing to poor performance by the Department, some of which have already been discussed earlier:

- **Overloading of extension officers with multiple and varied tasks**

The overloading of officers is one of the factors contributing to poor performance referred to in all the municipalities, and is regarded as a major cause of inefficiency.

- **Threats of job cuts**

The participants stated that once extension officers have been threatened with job loss, their performance is adversely affected. This is because whatever they do, there is the fear of losing their job.

The researcher is of the opinion that this could have been an isolated incident, since there has never been any announcement from the Department, either at local, district and provincial level, of jobs cuts for extension officers. It can simply be used as an excuse by poor performers to deliver poor services to farmers.

- **Accommodation of local extension officers**

The participants indicated that local extension officers stay in houses provided by the Department of Agriculture with no basic services, such as water and electricity. However, they are expected to pay similar rates to those who are staying in houses with these basic services. The participants stated that the conditions under which extension officers are expected to live are demoralising. The houses of nurses in the same areas are provided with these basic services by the Department of Health. Extension officers regarded this as insensitive treatment by the Department of Agriculture, indicating that the Department doesn't care about the wellbeing of its extension officers.

The researcher has observed that the accommodation of some extension officers in deep rural areas indeed do not have basic services. The researcher's point of view is that the provision of basic services has an effect on the morale and performance of the extension officers.

- **Extension officers are generalists**

It has been stated that extension officers are generalists, which limits their impact in the provision of technical advices to smallholder farmers. The participants are of the view that extension officers should be placed according to their fields of interest and their fields of study.

The researcher's observation is that it is true that extension officers are expected to service all groups of farmers in his/her ward regardless of the various farming enterprises in that particular ward (area). It is also the researcher's view that the sooner the Department places extension officers according to their fields of interest or field of study, the better it will be for improved service delivery and the ultimate development of smallholder farmers.

- **Poor relations between managers at District and Local levels and extension officers**

The participants accused some of the managers at District and Local levels of having poor working relations with extension officers. It is alleged that these managers are waiting for the extension officers to make mistakes so that they can harass and embarrass them. These mistakes are then used as an excuse for not recognising the good work done by officers. They further allege that the managers have little regard for frontline extension officers, which is demoralising and affects the performance of the Department.

The researcher could not ascertain any incidences of heavy-handedness by managers. It could have been isolated cases. The researcher's view is that such incidences should be dealt with by the Department with the cooperation of extension officers, who should report such incidences through the suggestion boxes placed at various work stations.

D. Role played by extension officers

All participants were in agreement that extension officers play a major role in the development of smallholder farmers. They indicated that the closer smallholder

farmers and extension officers are, the better they work together. The provision of technical advice, the planning of various farmer projects, and the mobilisation of farmers through the PEA are just some of the examples demonstrating the willingness of extension officers to help the farmers.

The researcher's observation is that there seems to be good cooperation between officers and farmers in this municipality. They seem to be getting along well and the assistance provided by extension officers is well received by the farmers.

E. Public participation

The smallholder farmers participating in the focus group discussion stated that, although at times they are not consulted by the Department, in most cases they are satisfied about being consulted about and involved in what affects them. They praised the Department particularly for adopting the PEA because it teaches them to organise themselves. The fact that farmers are able to raise their concerns and that these are taken seriously by the Department is a good indication of their participation.

The researcher's observation is that officers do whatever is necessary and possible to ensure the participation of farmers. There may be some instances where farmers are left out. For example, those who should have taken part in the focus group discussion but failed to attend may not have been informed.

F. Management of the Department

The participants were not satisfied with the management of the Department. The following issues were raised:

- **Transfers of staff done without consulting farmers working directly with those officers**

The participants were not happy about the way the Department go about the transferring of staff. The smallholder farmers' point of view is that it should be regarded as important to inform them of the pending transfer of an extension officer. Smallholder farmers shouldn't be surprised with a new extension officer

in their area. They want the opportunity to bid good officers farewell and acknowledge what they did for them.

- **Arrangement of meetings**

The arrangement of meetings is cited as another area that shows the inefficiency of management. The participants claimed that they are called for meetings without knowing what is going to be discussed, and used the focus group discussion as an example. This is regarded as poor organisation by officials.

- **Supervision of extension officers**

The participants, especially the extension officers, raised the concern that in terms of proper reporting, an officer is supposed to supervise colleagues who are lower than him/her in terms of rank. However, most of them are now at the same level that of chief agricultural technician, and are expected to supervise each other regardless of the fact that they share the same rank. This was cited as a clear indication of the poor management of the Department. The participants believe that the Department is in a position to resolve this matter but is doing nothing to address the problem.

- **Poor coordination of activities**

There is a clear lack of coordination by extension officers, which according to the participants, is resulting in poor management of Departmental activities. They allege that it seems as if no one knows what the other extension officers in the same area are doing, which results in confusion of the smallholder farmers. This could be avoided if extension officers share their programmes and activities.

The researcher's observations regarding the issues raised by the participants about the management of the Department are as follows:

- The Department transfers extension officers from one area to another in order to resolve immediate staff problems. According to the researcher, this should not be the criterion for the transfer of officers. The Department should address staff problems as they arise so that wrong behaviour could be corrected and

good extension officers are encouraged to do their best to render good quality service to the smallholder farmers.

- With regard to coordination and clarification of activities, the researcher observed that officers at times fail to communicate amongst themselves. This results in activities being planned haphazardly. As proposed earlier, there should be close cooperation, coordination and communication at local level to ensure smooth service delivery at municipal level.
- The researcher found the reporting line at municipal level to be wanting. The Department should address this state of affairs as a matter of urgency in order to empower those in supervisory positions and their supervisees, which would improve the management of the Department at all levels.

G. Transformation of the Department

The participants shared the sentiments raised by the other discussion groups that the appointment of a female senior manager is an indication of transformation in the Department of Agriculture at District level. The participants also mentioned that the previous administration did not listen to the concerns and needs of smallholder farmers but that the current government encourages smallholder farmers to participate and to state their concerns and needs without fear of victimisation.

The researcher is of the opinion that the Department is on the path of transformation. A variety of legislation has been implemented to transform the Department of Agriculture and other Departments, such as the Public Service Act, the Employment Equity Act, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Public Finance Management Act, and the Batho Pele principles.

H. Service delivery

The participants felt that, although the Department has delivered good services, these were insufficient. It is the view of the participants that the Department is in a position to do more in order to provide acceptable, efficient and effective services to farmers.

It is the researcher's opinion that the Department has been providing services to the smallholder farmers according to its mandate from the Limpopo Provincial Government. The researcher concedes that the services rendered by the Department could have been insufficient, but the Department, in its efforts to comply with Batho Pele principles, has improved service delivery to benefit smallholder farmers.

I. Role played by smallholder farmers in their own development

Like the smallholder farmers in the other discussion groups, these participants considered themselves as having done things to develop themselves and to stay in the farming business regardless of the challenges they faced. The fact that some smallholder farmers were able to expand their small plots into bigger farms which generate more money is an indication of their role in their own development. They also pointed out the way they are able to organise themselves through various committees.

It is the researcher's opinion that the practical examples of those who expanded their farming businesses illustrate the smallholder farmers' contribution to their own development. However, the number of farmers who were able to develop themselves in relation to those who could not concerns the researcher. The ratio could be as low as 1:100 farmers. The researcher is of the opinion that when smallholder farmers are able to form their own committees responsible for organising and controlling farmers, they would have reached a milestone in their development.

J. Technology and smallholder farmer development

As in the other municipalities, the participants unanimously agreed that technology has a role to play in their development. They see technology as a way to simplify their work and make it easier to accomplish in the desired time. The participants provided examples of the benefits of technology similar to those made by previous participants.

The researcher is of the opinion that the farmers have embraced technology and are making use of it in their farming businesses.

K. Influence of politics on smallholder farmer development

The participants contended that politicians should be involved in their affairs because some problems smallholder farmers face, such as land invasions, can only be resolved politically. The local councillors should therefore be seen to be doing more to assist the smallholder farmers whose livelihood depends on the land.

The researcher is of the opinion that smallholder farmers require all kinds of support they could receive from traditional authorities and local councillors in order to protect their interests especially with regards to land matters. It is the view of the researcher that local councillors should not only be seen interacting with smallholder farmers prior to or during elections but should continue to support them when farmers have problems which need political solutions.

4.7. Chapter summary

This chapter dealt with the research design that was chosen for this research. The chapter clarified that the empirical research design was chosen, which led to evaluative research. This was done because the thesis focuses on the past information regarding the performance of the Department of Agriculture for the period 1994 to 2004.

The chapter discussed the research methodology that was used to conduct the research. The researcher made use of focus group discussions to elicit information from the respondents, who were mainly smallholder farmers and extension officers from the local municipalities in the Vhembe District.

All the arrangements for conducting the research in the Vhembe District were highlighted, from requesting permission to conduct the research to the actual holding of focus group discussions. The role played by the officers in the Department of Agriculture at Vhembe District in the success of the research has been properly presented.

The findings from the focus group discussions have been presented per local municipality and present a fair assessment of the views that are held by the smallholder farmers.

The findings of the thesis led the researcher to make certain conclusions. The main conclusions and recommendations will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the main conclusions of the thesis arrived at based on the findings presented in the previous chapter. These conclusions will first be summarised in order to simplify their discussion. Each of these conclusions will then be discussed, followed by the interpretation of the conclusions. Finally recommendations for further research and policy review will be made.

5.2. Identification and summary of main conclusions

The following main conclusions have been identified and are summarised here for the purpose of this research:

1. Budget allocated for agricultural development is not fully utilised to satisfy the needs of the smallholder farmers.
2. The needs of smallholder farmers are many and varied and therefore require a concerted effort by the Department of Agriculture at Provincial, District and Local levels.
3. The support provided by the Department of Agriculture at District and Local levels is regarded by smallholder farmers as inadequate.
4. Smallholder farmers are heavily reliant on the Department of Agriculture at both District and Local levels for all their needs in terms of agricultural development.
5. There is a need for continued mechanisation support to smallholder farmers by the Department of Agriculture at Provincial, District and Local levels.
6. Smallholder farmers are realising that they should be in charge of their own farming operations and their own future.
7. Smallholder farmers still need support from the Department at all levels of governance in order to improve their livelihood in the short, medium and long term.

8. The Department of Agriculture at both District and Local levels needs to conduct an audit of the available skills amongst extension officers in order to redeploy them accordingly.
9. The Department Agriculture at both District and Local levels needs to identify and address corrupt and inefficient extension officers as well as identify and reward extension officers who are performing well.
10. The Department Agriculture at both District and Local levels needs to channel resources to properly identified smallholder farmers.
11. There is a need for redress, especially regarding smallholder farmers who were promised support they never received.
12. There is a need to identify and deal with tribal conflict amongst staff and farmers in affected municipalities.
13. Smallholder farmers need to be more organised in order to speak with one voice.
14. Facilitation of markets is one of the major roles to be played by the Department.
15. Smallholder farmers are mainly producers and do not add value to their produce to increase profits.

5.3. Discussion and Interpretation of main conclusions

5.3.1. Budget allocated for agricultural development is not fully utilised to satisfy the needs of the smallholder farmers.

The comparison of annual budget allocations for Vhembe District is an indication that the Department did not have enough money to be able to meet all the needs of smallholder farmers. Unfortunately even the budget allocated has not been fully utilised to satisfy the needs of the smallholder farmers. Various groupings of farmers always have multiple needs. Attending to one group's needs while neglecting the other groups needs is regarded as bias.

The complaints of crop farmers who feel neglected when compared to livestock farmers serve as an example. It is possible that the Department is not in a position to financially support all the smallholder crop farmers because of the large number of

smallholder crop farmers in the District. The number of livestock farmers is smaller, and they are more organised as well.

In addition, farmers not only have financial needs, but also needs in terms of infrastructure development, technology development, and capacity building.

As an area that previously formed part of the Venda homeland, the Vhembe District has a serious backlog with regard to general development but also specifically regarding agricultural development. The budget allocated on an annual basis by the Department of Agriculture has not managed to address the backlog completely. This is mainly because, besides addressing the backlog, there are immediate issues which the same budget is required to address on a yearly basis. On the other hand the budget provided was not fully utilised which then raises the question regarding the management of the funds by the officials of the Department of Agriculture at all levels of governance.

Infrastructural development is the main item in the budget and it will continue to be so for the next years, until such time that one could declare the District as having met its obligations in terms of agricultural development. This is because the majority of smallholder farmers are poor – which means that their scale of operations is still small – and poorly educated – so that they cannot take important decisions about their farming businesses. This severely affects any income and profit they could realise in their businesses.

5.3.2. The needs of smallholder farmers are many and varied and therefore require a concerted effort by the Department of Agriculture at Provincial, District and Local levels.

As a result of years of neglect under the previous government, the majority of smallholder farmers remained in their cycle of poverty. These years of neglect have left a huge backlog in terms of the level of development of smallholder farmers. The dawn of democracy in 1994 brought with it expectations regarding the redressing of the past imbalances.

The smallholder farmers have many and varied needs such as machinery, infrastructure development (roads, fences, holding dams, etc), land availability, which have not been met successfully by the Department. As a result the perception of the farmers is that the Department has failed the smallholder farmers. However, in practical terms the Department could only provide some of the support required by smallholder farmers. It is the researcher's view that the smallholder farmers could be assisted in improving their livelihood through strong cooperation among the Department of Agriculture at all levels of governance, the farmers and the private sector. On its own, the Department will take too long to realise this goal.

It has become difficult for the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District to meet all the needs of smallholder farmers. It is the researcher's opinion that important stakeholders, such as non-governmental organisations, the private sector, foreign governments as well as the national Department of Agriculture, should play a role in meeting these needs. The sourcing of funds from all of these stakeholders could go a long way in improving the livelihood of smallholder farmers.

5.3.3. The support provided by the Department of Agriculture at District and Local levels is regarded by smallholder farmers as inadequate

The researcher has concluded that the Department has done all it could possibly do with limited financial resources and incapacity to spend the limited budget provided by the Treasury, although in the eyes of the smallholder farmers who have been in need of services it is perceived as not enough. As a result of years of neglect and poverty experienced especially by smallholder farmers in the rural areas, it is almost impossible to provide enough support to seem sufficient.

Some smallholder farmers have acknowledged that the Department has done what it could – such as the provision of extension services and some infrastructure – with the resources at its disposal, for which they are appreciative.

In general the researcher has come to the conclusion that the Department has indeed provided some support to smallholder farmers but that this support was inadequate and did not meet with the expectations of the majority of the smallholder farmers.

There is still more support both financial and physical that needs to be provided if smallholder farmers' livelihood is to be improved.

In the eyes of the smallholder farmers, the Department did not meet their expectations in terms of agricultural development. The backlog that still exists after a decade of democracy is a testimony to the inadequacy of the support provided by the Department. A comparison, using the simple straight line method, of expectations versus the support provided produces a gap which, according to the researcher, quantifies the inability of the Department to meet the needs of smallholder farmers.

5.3.4. Smallholder farmers are heavily reliant on the Department at both District and Local levels for all their needs in terms of agricultural development

The researcher has concluded that the smallholder farmers have become heavily dependent on the Department at both District and local levels through the years, even for the kind of support that they should provide themselves. This has led the smallholder farmers to blame the Department sometimes unfairly for their failure to plan the production and marketing of their products effectively.

However, the researcher has concluded that this dependency was created because the previous administrations never consulted the smallholder farmers about the kind of services they need and the standard of these services. The present administration does consult with smallholder farmers, and the farmers are learning that even though the Department is aware of their needs, it cannot provide for all of them.

The farmers should therefore learn to organise themselves and their farming activities in such a manner that they become self-sufficient. They should realise that blaming the Department for their failure to plan and negotiate markets for their produce is counter-productive and will not help them if they are to become business-minded farmers.

The lack of ownership on the part of smallholder farmers of their own development initiatives shifts responsibility from the farmers to the Department. The heavy reliance

of farmers on the Department makes it impossible for positive development to take place because the perception is that nothing happens until the Department has done something.

It is the researcher's view that farmers must start assuming some responsibility for ensuring that they develop and that they succeed in their farming ventures. Once this happens, the path to total emancipation and development will be easier and rewarding.

5.3.5. There is a need for continued mechanisation support to smallholder farmers by the Department of Agriculture at Provincial, District and Local levels

The researcher has concluded that smallholder farmers require the provision of machinery for cultivating their farms. The majority of them can't afford the tariffs that the private contractors charge.

Smallholder farmers felt that the previous administrations were better than the present one because they made machinery and implements available to smallholder farmers at a subsidised rate. However, the researcher has concluded that the previous administrations' use of tractor fleets to service farmers were not sustainable because the government was assumed the responsibility for fuel, repairs and maintenance.

It is the view of the researcher that, where possible, the Department should make machinery available to smallholder farmers. This could be done through a once-off grant of machinery to smallholder farmers, whereby the farmers will become responsible for such machinery's fuel, maintenance and repairs. The recipients should therefore be instilled with a sense of ownership so that they will take good care of the machinery and implements.

The majority of smallholder farmers need support in terms of mechanisation because they cannot afford it without Departmental assistance. In most areas the few machinery owners and operators are taking advantage of the poor smallholder farmers by charging them high rates as compared to the Departmental tariffs they paid in the past for the provision of machinery.

The withdrawal of the Departmental machinery, in the eyes of the smallholder farmers was seen as a deliberate attempt to destroy their livelihood. According to the farmers, the Department knew that the smallholder farmers are not yet in a position to afford the provision of machinery in a competitive market because of their financial standing. As a result of this, the smallholder farmers will not cease to call upon the Department to revisit its decision regarding the withdrawal of machinery. The researcher is of the opinion that any reintroduction of machinery will have to be negotiated with clear terms, which will lead to proper utilisation.

5.3.6. Smallholder farmers are realising that they should be in charge their own farming operations and their own future

Based on the research findings it can be concluded that some smallholder farmers are willing to be in charge of their own destiny. In the past decade these farmers have managed their farms despite minimal or no support from the Department. They have done their best to grow their small farms into bigger units. These farmers provide hope for the future success of small farming enterprises in the Limpopo Province, and especially in the Vhembe District.

Unfortunately the majority of smallholder farmers seems helpless without greater support from the Department. Some even seem to feel that there is nothing they could do to help themselves. The sooner the majority of smallholder farmers realise that their future lies in their own hands and not in the Department's, the better it will be for the development of farmers in the district.

It is the researcher's conclusion that the Department should devote the limited resources to helping those farmers who only need minor support to succeed. They can then be used to illustrate that it is possible to become successful even though one is a smallholder farmer.

In all the local municipalities of Vhembe District, there are examples of smallholder farmers who have started to realise that in order to improve their livelihood, they need to become masters of their own destiny. The will to succeed in any given situation

surpasses any problems which could be encountered in reaching one's goals as long as one does not give up along the way.

The researcher's analysis is that the more smallholder farmers take responsibility for their own farming enterprises, the less dependent they will be on Departmental support, which at times may not even be forthcoming. This will also reduce the burden the Department has to carry regarding the development of smallholder farmers.

5.3.7. Smallholder farmers still need support from the Department at all levels of governance in order to improve their livelihood in the short, medium and long terms

As alluded to above, the majority of smallholder farmers still require substantial support in order to improve their livelihood. It will take years to properly reach the stage where the Department will be able to say that the majority of smallholder farmers have been successfully empowered and their livelihoods have substantially improved.

It has been pointed out in the research that there are reasons for governments' involvement in agricultural development. The Vhembe District is mainly rural and previously formed part of the homelands of Venda, Gazankulu and Lebowa, where proper services and infrastructure were not provided. The lack of resources is a major motivation for government involvement in the development of smallholder farmers.

The researcher has concluded as stated previously that there is still a major need for the injection of resources in order to improve the livelihood of the majority of smallholder farmers.

In a sharp contrast to the abovementioned analysis, the researcher has concluded that there is still a need for the Department to provide valuable support to smallholder farmers as alluded to earlier. This is because the majority of smallholder farmers still lack basic infrastructure which could enable them to be efficient and productive in their farming enterprises.

It is the researcher's opinion that the provision of basic infrastructure, such as bulk irrigation water supply, roads, electricity, fencing, machinery, boreholes, marketing infrastructure, vaccinations, still has to be made available to smallholder farmers as mentioned earlier. The provision of this infrastructural support will enable farmers to produce good quality farm produce which could fetch higher prices at market, thereby enabling farmers to make more profit, which in turn will help improve their livelihood.

5.3.8. The Department of Agriculture at both District and Local levels needs to conduct an audit of the available skills amongst extension officers in order to redeploy them accordingly

All the extension staff who participated raised the point of misplacement of extension officers. The researcher has concluded that a thorough audit of the available extension officers' skills should be conducted with a view to deploying officers according to their fields of specialisation and not to continue to work as generalists as mentioned earlier. It will be advisable for any skills gaps to be filled through training, workshops and the sharing of experiences.

The audit should identify available skills and any possible skills gaps. Once the audit is done, the Department will be able to redeploy officers to areas where their skills could be adequately utilised. The suggested redeployment will enhance the performance of those extension officers who were not properly utilised before, and will therefore improve the Department's performance. In cases where officers lack particular skills, these should be provided as a matter of priority through skills programmes, courses and various capacity building measures.

The researcher has established that there are extension officers who have been misplaced according to their skills and knowledge. This led the researcher to conclude that there is a need to conduct a skills audit which will help the Department determine the extent of the problem and take appropriate action.

The productivity of an individual is linked directly to his/her skills and knowledge in a particular field of study. A pilot could be an inefficient bus driver even though both

of them are used to carry passengers from one point to another. When skills and knowledge are sufficiently harnessed and properly channelled, an individual becomes dynamic and productive.

5.3.9. The Department Agriculture at both District and Local levels needs to identify and address corrupt and inefficient extension officers as well as identify and reward extension officers who are performing well

It was disheartening to hear the accusations that some extension officers are only concerned about their salaries while caring less about the farmers they exist to serve. The following examples of unbecoming behaviour and inefficiency were provided: some officers get drunk on duty or come to work drunk, some do not even know when last they visited farmers, some only work one or two days a week, some do not visit farmers at all, some use their subsidised vehicles for personal use, while some are known womanisers.

The conduct of such extension officers brings shame to the entire extension service and undermines the trust of farmers. There is no room for characters such as these in the extension service. The researcher's view is that district and municipality managers should eliminate such corrupt behaviour.

Fortunately there also are competent extension officers who are dedicated to their work and are prepared to go the extra mile in assisting smallholder farmers to develop. These are the examples the Department of Agriculture at both the District and Municipalities should identify, reward and make use of in correcting the corrupt behaviour of others.

Some extension officers display behaviour that can no longer be tolerated. It is in the best interest of the farmers and the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District to identify these officers and deal with them accordingly. Their continued stay in the Department is counter-productive.

It will be in the interest of the Department at both District and Local levels to undertake a survey to identify both these groups of extension officers. The aim of

such a survey should be to arrive at workable solutions and strategies which will enhance the productivity and efficiency of the extension staff of the Department.

5.3.10. The Department Agriculture at both District and Local levels needs to channel resources to properly identified smallholder farmers

The researcher concluded that smallholder farmers are all not at the same level of development. They could be loosely divided into three groups, namely those who are still very underdeveloped, those who have knowledge but are struggling to make ends meet, and those who need little support to change their status from smallholders to semi-commercial or even commercial farmers.

It is the researcher's opinion that the last group should be identified and sufficient resources channelled to assist them to develop in the shortest possible time. With the limited resources available to the District and municipality it is possible to ensure that this group of farmers become successful. The lessons learnt from experimenting with this group could lead to the development of case studies which could be used to further develop the other groups of farmers. The Department of Agriculture at the Vhembe District should carefully select the farmers who are at the threshold of successful farming careers in order to channel Department support effectively.

Although the Department's clients are all farmers across the entire spectrum of the farming community, smallholder farmers, as part of the previously disadvantaged group, deserve special attention and support from the Department. The researcher has also identified that amongst the smallholder farmers there are those who against all odds are doing their best to succeed. The researcher believes that these farmers should be properly identified in all municipalities of the Vhembe District, and that resources should be properly channelled for their development. They could then serve as examples of what all smallholder farmers could achieve if they work hard despite the various challenges confronting them.

The deployment of resources to assist these farmers may not go unchallenged by those who are not as successful. The Department will have to stand its ground and to put forth convincing arguments explaining the rationale behind such targeted support.

5.3.11. There is a need for redress, especially regarding smallholder farmers who were promised support they never received

One of the Batho Pele principles emphasises the need to redress past wrongs and imbalances. These exist as a result of the Department's failure to keep some promises made to farmers. The promise of financial assistance to smallholder farmers who suffered crop losses during the floods of 2000 should receive preference. It may be a difficult task because of the time lapse, but it is important to do so. In keeping their promises, the Department of Agriculture in Vhembe District will regain some credibility and regain farmers' trust.

It has become apparent that if nothing is done to address promises that weren't kept, smallholder farmers will still regard the Department as owing them the promised support. It is therefore in the best interest of both the Department and farmers to investigate all such promises to determine what support can still be provided.

The Department should engage with the farmers to whom such support was promised and verify to what extent, if any, these promises were kept. In cases where they haven't been kept, the Department should consult with the farmers regarding resolving the matter.

5.3.12. There is a need to identify and deal with tribal conflict amongst staff and farmers in affected municipalities

Tribal conflict slows down the developmental activities aimed at improving the livelihood of smallholder farmers. Instead of concentrating on developmental issues, officers and farmers spend their time attending to personal and group conflict. The Department cannot be expected to perform at its best under these circumstances.

It is the researcher's opinion that the Department should try to identify possible tribal conflicts such as looking down upon each other by Vendas and Shangaans and address it with the intention of reaching lasting solutions to the problem. In addressing

this conflict the Department must be firm, just and impartial. It must be seen to be an honest broker of peace in order to gain the trust of conflicting parties.

The researcher is aware that the responsibility for finding a solution to tribal conflict lies not only with the Department but with all relevant stakeholders affected by this conflict. The researcher suggests that the Department consult widely and identify the true causes of such conflict in order to deal not only with the symptoms but with the true cause.

It has been established that the local municipalities of Thulamela and Makhado are both populated by mainly Shangaan and Venda speaking communities. There is long-standing tension between these communities as a result of mistrust, superiority and the influence of separate development under the apartheid regime. The former homeland leaders orchestrated these tensions by inciting their people to look down upon one another.

As a result of tribal conflict, service delivery is hampered, which means that much needed development cannot be realised. Therefore it is in the interest of smallholder farmers that the Department identifies the extent of this tribal conflict and address it in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.

5.3.13. Smallholder farmers need to be more organised in order to speak with one voice

The researcher has concluded that there is a need for smallholder farmers, especially crop farmers, to be more organised and to form pressure groups that should be able to speak with one voice when they deal with the Department. Livestock farmers seem to be more organised and as a result their problems seem to be handled better by the Department.

The examples of promises that weren't kept by the Department of Agriculture at all levels of governance illustrate the poor organisation of farmers. If farmers were better organised, they would have taken a stance against the Department that must lead to the Department to account to the public why the promises weren't kept. It emphasises

the need for a strong farmers' organisation to engage the Department in discussions about farmers' concerns and problems.

It was discovered that smallholder farmers are not as well organised as semi-commercial and commercial farmers. The lack of properly organised smallholder farmers' organisations is counter-productive in a democratic country such as South Africa, where the Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of association.

It will be much easier for smallholder farmers to engage the Department in issues of concern when they are properly organised. The Department will be bound to listen and to respond positively to some of the demands. There is power in unity. It will also be easier for the Department to deal with smallholder farmers if there is an organised structure through which communication can take place. In this manner dialogue between farmers and the Department is also created.

5.3.14. Facilitation of markets is one of the major roles to be played by the Department

There is a need to create awareness amongst farmers of the fact that they are entrepreneurs who should take their farming seriously. They should not produce any agricultural produce without knowing where it will be marketed or who their customers are. It is usually too late to talk of markets when the produce is ready to be harvested.

The researcher therefore concluded that marketing and finding markets for farmers should be a priority in order to improve the livelihood of farmers. It is suggested that this should start with providing farmers with useful information about markets and helping farmers understand the concept of marketing.

Extension officers, agricultural economists, training staff and other relevant stakeholders should work hand in hand to ensure that smallholder farmers succeed in their farming businesses. This can be done through training of farmers on marketing and markets, exposure visits to successful farmers and national markets, capacity-

building workshops, and farmer-to-farmer interactions, where farmers can learn from one another.

One of the major factors in the success of smallholder farmers is the availability of markets for their produce. It was established that the farmers either do not have markets or are exploited by agents and the people with whom they do business. There is a need for the Department to at least play a significant role in the facilitation of markets by identifying the best markets, providing marketing information and negotiating with marketing agents who will be willing to assist smallholder farmers.

The implication of this kind of support is that the Department will negotiate on behalf of the farmers the best possible price for their produce and ensure that they are not taken advantage of. It is a logical assumption that farmers will be able to obtain the best possible business deals because the Department will be acting as overseer. However, this kind of support requires further discussions between the Department and the smallholder farmers involved.

5.3.15. Smallholder farmers are mainly producers and do not add value to their produce to increase profits

In any farming enterprise, more money is made by adding value to the agricultural product. Unfortunately the majority of smallholder farmers are only producers and therefore they realise less income from their produce. They do not know the benefits of adding value to products.

The researcher concluded that the Department should assist smallholder farmers with infrastructure that will assist them to add value to their produce in order to fetch higher prices at market. The setting up of such infrastructure should be viewed as positive support to improve the livelihood of smallholder farmers. This can also be done through public-private partnerships that should provide start-up capital for such developments.

It is the researcher's view that when this infrastructure is provided for by the Department in partnership with farmers and the private sector, farmers' livelihood will be improved tremendously.

Value addition leads to increased profits when it is done properly, regardless of the scale of operation. However, it has been established that smallholder farmers are mainly producers and therefore do not add value to their produce.

Adding value to agricultural produce through processing could assist smallholder farmers to improve their livelihood. The challenge facing the Department will be the provision of infrastructure. There is a need for massive infrastructural investment by the Department, since such infrastructure is beyond the reach of smallholder farmers. The question is how this infrastructure should be provided to multiple numbers of smallholders, what strategies could be used to ensure ownership of such a significant investment, and the sustainability of such infrastructure development.

5.4. Recommendations for further research and policy review

The research conducted on the performance of the Department of Agriculture in the Vhembe District regarding the improvement of the livelihood of smallholder farmers has culminated in the following recommendations for further research and policy review:

5.4.1. Further research

The researcher proposes further research on the following:

- (a) The quantification of actual support that still needs to be provided by the Department of Agriculture to improve the smallholder farmers' livelihood. This should include the extent of the support, how it should be provided, how it will differ from previous support, what strategies will be employed to make the support effective, how long it will take a smallholder to become self-sufficient, and the sustainability of the support.

- (b) The identification of the root causes of inefficiency and corrupt behaviour demonstrated by some extension officers and how to address them. This should include the quantification of the extent of the problem, the actual causes of the problem, the effect of the problem on the performance of the officers in particular and the Department in general, and solutions to the problem.
- (c) The quantification of the extent of tribal conflict in service delivery and development. This should include the identification of the origin of the conflict, the extent of the problem, and what needs to be done to resolve the conflict.

5.4.2. Policy review

The researcher proposes that the Department of Agriculture considers the following aspects which could lead to policy review:

- (a) The reintroduction of farm machinery and implements. The Department of Agriculture should reconsider carefully its position on the provision of machinery, in order to help address the dire need of smallholder farmers for farm machinery. The Department should consider the number of smallholder farmers to be assisted, the conditions under which the policy could be implemented, strategies to implement the policy, and possible implications of the policy shift for the Department of Agriculture.
- (b) The development of case studies to prove that smallholder farmers can be assisted to become emerging farmers and ultimately commercial farmers. The smallholder farmers in all local municipalities to be assisted should be identified, as well as the extent of support to be provided and the expectations of both the Department and farmers.
- (c) The provision of infrastructure for agricultural produce value addition. The Department of Agriculture should determine the value chain of various produce, and identify appropriate infrastructure to support the value chain,

conditions under which infrastructure could be provided, as well as the role of both the farmers and the Department.

5.5. Chapter summary

The chapter has identified and summarised the main conclusions and recommendations of the research based on the findings presented in the previous chapter. The conclusions were discussed and interpreted in order to clarify issues that were faced by smallholder farmers during the period 1994 to 2004.

The results of the analysis were used to make recommendations for future research and policy review by the Department of Agriculture. The researcher believes that the Department will consider the conclusions carefully and implement the recommendations for the improvement of the livelihood of smallholder farmers in the Vhembe District, and in the entire Limpopo Province.

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