

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND ADVISORY SERVICE: PEOPLE-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT POINT OF VIEW¹

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Agricultural extension institution dates back to 1870 (Brokensha & Hodge, 1969) with its primary aim of training people about new farming ideas in their own context (Bembridge, 1991) and transferring agricultural practice and technology, and later to promote self-help projects in rural communities (Conwell, 1986 as quoted by De Beer & Swanepoel, 1998). As a development concept, extension's spirit is to *inter alia* empower and transform people through information and technology transfer into self-sufficient farmers. Its philosophy is to *teach how to catch a fish* rather than to *give a fish*. This is therefore a process to *empower and let go* (Diale, 2011).

In other words, extension is a rural people-centered development process which is defined by Korten (1990) as “a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations”. Burkey (1993) agrees that people-centered development is a process by which an individual develops self-respect, and becomes more self-confident, self-reliant, cooperative and tolerant to others through becoming aware of his/her shortcomings as well as his/her potential for positive change.

We learn from these definitions that people-centered development is the processes by which people as individuals and structures make efforts themselves to improve their own quality of life according to their aspirations, and through the sustainable mobilization and management of available resources. This therefore means that development is a process through which people become aware of their capabilities, acquire knowledge and work in a collective to meet their abstract needs (Swanepoel and De Beer, 2006) such as self-respect, self-confidence, and self-reliance, and they also become collective in a social and economic interaction for positive change in their lives. The emphasis is that the decision on development of a society has to be in the hands of the community members themselves without any prescription from an outsider. This phenomenon may be a long process to allow the participating parties to develop such capacity to manage and mobilize the resources for their own benefit (De Beer 1997).

Our extension and advisory service should be seen to be working towards empowering people in preparing them to take charge of their own agricultural development processes. As extension workers we therefore need to be prepared to work ourselves out of community to another.

¹ Published by *Informant*, the South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE) Central Branch's Newsletter, January 2013.

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