

Framework to improve the coordination of agricultural support services:

A case study of the Oshikoto region in Namibia

Cecilie Ndeshipanda Jona

Abstract

This paper describes a framework for improving the coordination of agricultural support services. The paper is based on a PhD study: *Developing a framework for improving coordination in the provision of agricultural support services in the Oshikoto region of Namibia*. Most of the information in the paper is drawn from the Namibian governance system, which was established through the Decentralisation Policy of 1997. It also makes use of data collected from 200 farmers and 11 agricultural support service providers from the Oshikoto region, who were interviewed during the Phd research. The paper includes an overview of the challenges and opportunities involved in operationalising an agricultural support service framework.

Introduction

Due to budget cuts in agricultural extension service sectors around the world, many extension organisations are disorganised and work in isolation. Namibia is no exception. Düvel (1999), Okorley, Gray, and Reid (2009), and Jona (2016) observed that collaboration and the coordination of extension activities reduce the probability of duplication and the waste of scarce resources. Duplicated efforts can be avoided if organisations working in the same region establish partnership platforms that include farmer groups and agricultural development institutions (Düvel, 2005). It is important that such platforms are based at the local level. Establishing partnership platforms at a higher level risks a lack of ownership by the community and only partial participation in its activities (Düvel, 2005). The platforms should coordinate activities and projects identified at the community level. Unless the communities are closely involved in developing and implementing the projects, the platforms will be regarded as instruments of development rather than agents of change.

Current governance structures

Namibia is divided into 14 regions and subdivided into 121 constituencies. The size of a constituency is determined by the size and population of the region in which it is located. The region under examination in this paper – Oshikoto – has 11 constituencies.

The Namibian government adopted the Decentralisation Policy in March 1997 with the aim of bringing services closer to the community, improving government capacity, and planning and administering development at the local level (MRLGHRD, 1998:5).

Although the Decentralisation Policy seems to have set all the administrative elements in place, from the community to the national level, Larsen (2003) observed that the lower levels of the decentralisation structure are weak, particularly at the village and constituency levels. Larsen further noted that the participation of the community in the development of projects is limited and that most community members are unaware that the Decentralisation Policy enables

them to participate in development activities. In the absence of properly harmonised policies and strategies, the decentralised structures in Namibia are likely to remain fragile.

Proposed framework for coordinated agricultural support services in the Oshikoto region

The agricultural support service framework (presented in Figure 1) does not aim to change or subvert the Decentralisation Policy of 1997, but rather to complement it by improving the coordination of the agricultural support provided to farmers in the Oshikoto region and suggesting how stakeholders can best collaborate on work plans and projects that respond to farmers' needs.

As noted above, most of the information used in developing this framework was collected from farmers and agricultural support service providers in the Oshikoto region during the PhD research. Some of the ideas are based on Düvel's (2005) institutional linkage structure for participatory development and Swanson, Singh, and Reddy's (2008) agriculture technology management agency model.

Preparation for agricultural services at the village level

The effectiveness of preparations at the village level will determine the quality of the projects carried out by the community and the work plan executed by the agricultural support service providers. The agricultural service providers should work closely with headmen and villagers to categorise local farmers into groups according to their farming interests and needs. Next, the providers should conduct a participatory needs assessment with each group to identify possible community projects for further discussion and deliberation by the Village Development Committee (VDC).

Village Development Committee

After the preparatory process has been completed, the chairs or leaders of the interest groups should be included in the VDC. Because 29% of the farmers interviewed indicated that they depend on influential local farmers for information, it was felt that village headmen should lead the VDC. The farmers and service providers that were interviewed were divided on the question of who should assist the headmen in leading the committee. Some felt that the headmen should be assisted by experienced

farmers; others felt that this role should be played by the service providers and the private sector. The VDC meetings should be open to any community members and officials who want to attend. The functions of the VDC are to identify and evaluate local challenges and to come up with different development projects to address them.

The proposed framework suggests that the VDC prioritise the activities and projects to be funded by the government. A work plan should be approved by the farmers before forwarding project proposals to the next level, which is the Constituency Development Committee (CDC).

Constituency Development Committee

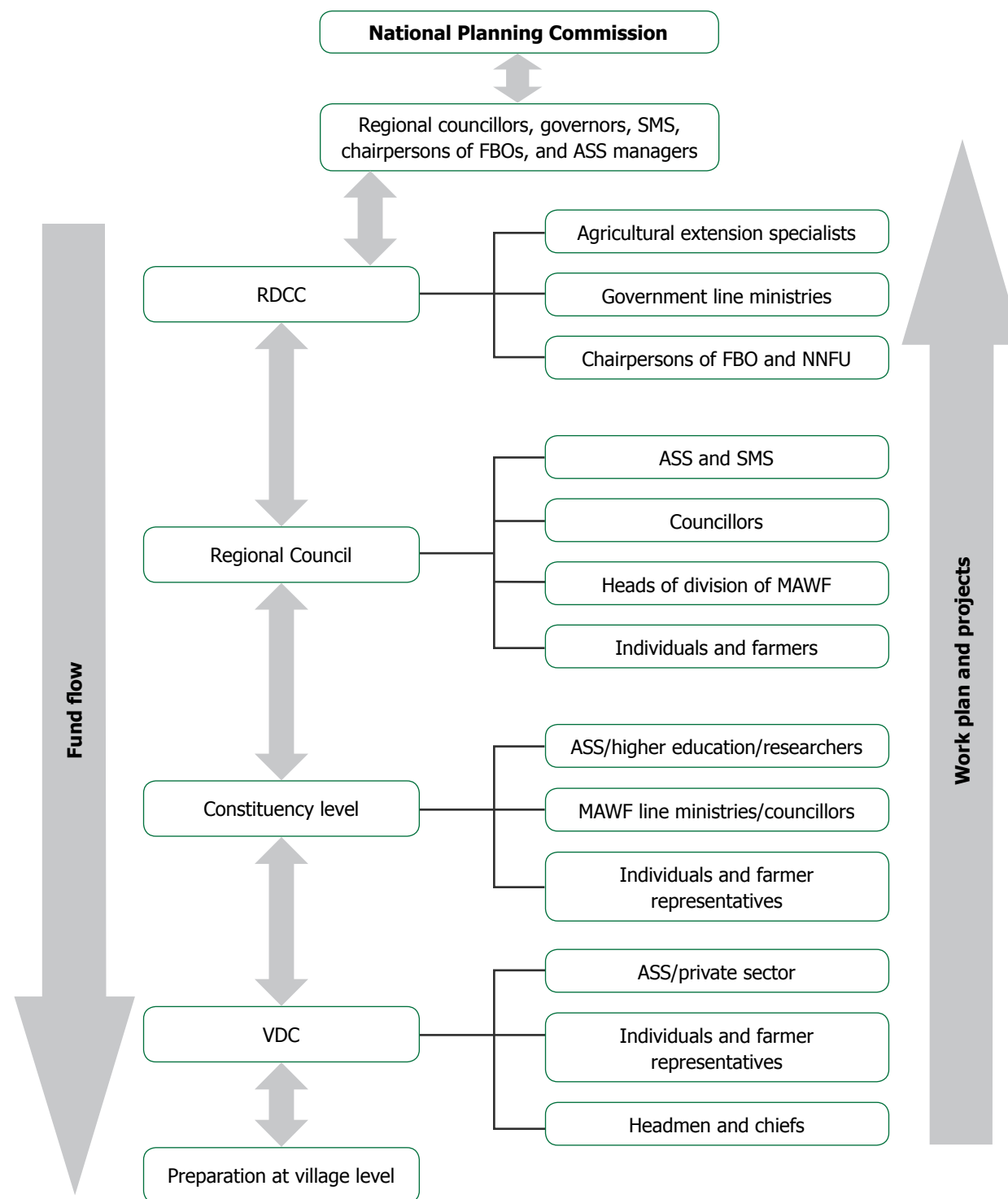
The CDC has similar functions to the VDC, but operates at a higher level. The Committee identifies and evaluates local problems and needs and evaluates the projects originating from the VDC. The CDC consists of representatives from the government ministries that are based at the constituency level. The CDC should also include representation from an institution of higher education to assist with the identification and fulfilment of training needs. The framework suggests that the CDC include members selected from the VDC as well. The CDC reports to the Regional Council (Larsen, 2003; MRLGHRD, 1998).

The majority of the interviewed farmers and service providers agreed that the CDC should be chaired by a councillor from the region and assisted by an agricultural service provider or farmer. An administrator from the councillor's office writes proposals. The CDC should work closely with service providers to develop a regional work plan, with help from agricultural subject matter specialists (SMS). All work plan activities should be prioritised, activities that need further research identified, and work plans approved by farmers or their representatives. Larger projects that need funding should be prioritised and forwarded to the regional government for consideration. The chair of the CDC, SMS, service providers, and researchers should represent the CDC on the Regional Council. The other farmer and service provider representatives should give feedback to the VDC on the projects.

Regional Council

Under the Decentralisation Policy of 1997, the Regional Council consists of councillors selected from the different constituencies in the region.

Figure 1. Proposed framework for coordination in the Oshikoto region



Source: Jona, 2016

Legend: ASS = Agricultural support services; FBO = Farmer-based organisation; MAWF = Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry; NNFU = Namibia National Farmers Union; RDCC = Regional Development Coordinating Committee; VDC = Village Development Committee

The projects that were approved at the CDC level are forwarded to the Regional Council for further scrutiny and prioritisation, based on the availability of financial resources. A secretary nominated by a regional management committee (RMC) revises the proposals as needed. The

Regional Council approves and rejects projects and work plans according to the priorities of the region. Approved projects are forwarded to the Regional Development Coordinating Committee (RDCC) for further consideration (MRLGHRD, 1998).

The proposed changes to the current framework suggest that regional councillors, agricultural service providers, SMS, and heads of divisions of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, farmers and farmer representatives should be part of the Regional Council. The SMS would give advice on technical aspects of agriculture to the councillors, the heads of divisions of the Ministry of Agriculture, and farmers to support their work plans and projects. The service providers with responsibility for the different project activities should be identified based on their experience and qualifications.

At this stage, all activities that need further research will be identified. The projects will be further scrutinised and reprioritised – with support from the SMS – based on funding availability. Regional Council representatives who serve on the CDC should give feedback to CDC members on the selected projects

Regional Development Coordinating Committee (RDCC)

The RDCC is chaired by the Regional Governor and consists of constituency councillors and senior administrative staff of ministry departments in the region. The RDCC prioritises the development projects approved by the Regional Council and forwards them to the Regional Councillors and Governors Committee for approval (MRLGHRD, 1998).

Subject matter specialists, individual farmers, and farmers' representatives should be included in the RDCC. The SMS will give advice on technical agricultural matters, and the farmers will witness the transparency of the RDCC and understand why certain projects are given greater priority than others. The SMS and farmers that will represent the group at the Regional Councillors and Governors Committee should be chosen by the RDCC. The representatives that are not selected to serve on the Regional Councillors and Governors Committee should give feedback on the chosen projects at the regional level.

Regional Councillors and Governors Committee

Under the Decentralisation Policy of 1997, this committee is chaired by the Regional Governor. The chief regional officer sees to it that the proposals meet quality standards. The Regional Councillors and Governors Committee approves priority projects from the RDCC and forwards

them to relevant ministries for consideration. The line ministries prepare the budgets for possible funding and send them to the Ministry of Finance for consideration. Once a project is approved and budgeted, the Regional Council carries out a feasibility study. This is followed by the advertisement of a tender, which is awarded preferentially to local companies before considering outsiders. Once the tender is awarded, the Regional Council Development Planner monitors and evaluates the progress of the project (MRLGHRD, 1998).

This committee should include some SMS and farmer representatives. The SMS can advise the councillors and governors on technical agricultural aspects. The farmer representatives on this committee should be responsible for giving feedback to fellow farmers in the VDC and the CDC.

The author is of the opinion that the work of this committee seems to be the same as that of the RDCC.

National Planning Commission (NPC)

Under the Decentralisation Policy, the NPC determines the priorities of all 14 regions in Namibia. The NPC also coordinates and implements the National Development Plan (NDP), which is part of the implementation of Vision 2030. This body only attends regional meetings upon invitation or when monitoring projects for planning purposes. The projects identified through the framework process are only funded in the following financial year once national priorities have been set (MRLGHRD, 2011).

The NPC sets national priorities, together with the Ministry of Finance, and considers projects from the regions. It will, however, be important for the NPC to give the regions the power to administer their own finances. As the framework suggests, the work plan originates at the village level and ends up at the national level, and the budget should flow from the regional level to the community level.

Challenges

The successful application of the framework requires that certain conditions be met:

- An agricultural extension policy is needed that protects all stakeholders involved in agricultural support services.

- The Decentralisation Policy must be fully operational (inclusive of financial administration powers given to the regions).
- Transparency and accountability must exist among all stakeholders.
- Proper monitoring and evaluation of activities must be routine.
- Field workers must have the minimum of a BSc degree in agriculture and the following skills:
 - strong interpersonal and facilitation skills with the ability to talk to different groups; and
 - strong motivation and commitment to delivering results.

If all of the above conditions are satisfied, the proposed framework will lead to:

- harmonisation of activities among stakeholders in the region;
- skills and knowledge-sharing among all stakeholders;
- efficient service delivery by all stakeholders; and
- responsive delivery of agricultural activities.

Operationalisation of the framework

The successful implementation of the framework described above requires an agricultural support service policy that includes the following elements, as stipulated by Jona (2006:164).

Memoranda of understanding

All agricultural support service providers should sign a memorandum of understanding on cooperation to demonstrate that the extension framework has been approved by all. The providers should also agree on the responsibilities they are each going to undertake. There should furthermore be a memorandum of understanding that details the partnership links among providers.

The memorandum of understanding on cooperation should ensure that the service providers have the minimum of a bachelor's degree in agriculture. Service providers with lesser qualifications should upgrade their skills and knowledge and attend short courses for career improvement.

Professional bodies

Agricultural support service providers should be registered with a professional body and be known in the region for their agricultural

activities and projects. In South Africa, for example, all agricultural extension advisers must be registered with the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP), a regulatory body that holds natural scientists to a code of conduct. A similar body is needed for agricultural support services in Namibia. Such a body should have the authority to deregister and take action against service providers who default on their activities.

Participation

All agricultural support service providers must take part in a participatory needs assessment of the farming communities with which they work, as well as involve themselves in the activities they have agreed to implement. The work plans of service providers will not be approved if they do not participate in the needs assessment.

Financial investment

Despite the decentralisation of agricultural support services, the budgets are still administered at the national level. This delays activities since it involves a good deal of bureaucracy.

The agricultural support service policy should require that service providers develop a business plan that clearly states what they will contribute to projects and how they plan to use the funds provided by the government. There should be a time limit governing the release of funds so that activities can be carried out in a timely fashion.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should be undertaken by communities and public and private organisations at all levels. The agricultural support service providers need to properly devise how best to monitor and evaluate activities at the village and constituency levels. Once the key variables to be monitored at each level have been agreed upon, an integrated M&E system, which incorporates all actors, can be developed and applied in the region. Relevant bodies at the regional level should occasionally carry out validation studies – possibly monthly, quarterly, or twice a year – depending on financial availability and practicability. The M&E need to respond to challenges and should ensure that projects and activities evolve, adapt, or change to guarantee the success of the framework and the delivery of professional agricultural support services to farmers in the Oshikoto region of Namibia.

Conclusion

This study was conducted in a single region of Namibia. Similar studies can be conducted by different ministries and countries if they are faced with agricultural support services that work in isolation with limited budgets. Planning and coordinating agricultural activities will allow agricultural support service practitioners to know what other organisations are doing and to avoid duplication of activities and the waste of scarce resources.

References

Düvel, G.H. 1999. Institutional structures for participation, empowerment and ownership in agricultural and rural development. *South African Journal of Agricultural Extension* 28: 1-11.

Düvel, G.H. 2005. Principles, realities and challenges regarding institutional linkages for participatory extension and rural development in South Africa. *South African Journal of Agricultural Extension* 34(2): 188-200.

Jona, C.N. 2016. *Developing a framework for improving coordination in the provision of agricultural support services to farmers in the Oshikoto region in Namibia*. PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.

Larsen, A. 2003. *Decentralisation in Namibia: A case study of the Erongo Region*. *The Interdisciplinary Journal of International Studies* 1: 1-16.

Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing and Rural Development (MRLGHRD). 1997. *A Decentralisation Policy for the Republic of Namibia: Decentralisation, Development, and Democracy* (Volume 1). Namibia, Windhoek: MRLGHRD.

Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development. 1998. *The policy: Its development and implementation*. Windhoek, Namibia: MRLGHRD.

Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development (MRLGHRD). 2011. *Report of the Auditor General on performance audit and study on service delivery by regional councils: The financial years of 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009*. Windhoek, Namibia: MRLGHRD.

Okorley, E.G., Gray, D.D. & Reid, J. 2009. Key factors of success for decentralised public agricultural extension: An expanded view from a Ghanaian case study. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 10(4): 233-249.

Swanson, B.E., Singh, K.M. and Reddy, M.N. 2008. *A decentralised, participatory, market-driven extension system: The ATMA model in India*. Paper presented at the IFPRI Conference on Advancing Agriculture in Developing Countries through Knowledge and Innovation. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 7-9 April.

This article was produced by GFRAS and FANRPAN with financial support from GFAR as contribution to the outcomes of GFAR.

Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS)
c/o Agridea, Jordils 1, 1001 Lausanne, Switzerland
Phone +41 (0)52 354 97 64, Fax +41 (0)52 354 97 97
info@g-fras.org, www.g-fras.org

All work by Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License

