

ASSESSMENT OF THE NORTHERN FREE STATE MENTORSHIP PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

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The Department of Agriculture
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1. Introduction

This assessment of the Northern Free State Mentorship Project has been funded by the Department of Land Affairs (DLA), under the direction of the Free State Department of Agriculture.

The need for a mentorship project, which was envisaged as experienced commercial farmers providing advice to new farmers on an ongoing basis, was initially identified during the Land Reform Pilot Project. At this point, there was recognition that many of the activities of the Department of Land Affairs related to land transfer and not to farmer establishment and development. Although this need was identified within the Land Reform Pilot Project (when under the direction of the Department of Agriculture) and subsequently within the Provincial Office of the Department of Land Affairs, it was taken forward, owing to the fact that the 'after-care' elements of land reform were not a DLA function. Responsibility for extension and support activities were correctly identified as the Free State Department of Agriculture which was committed to supporting land reform projects, once they were designated and settled. This was reinforced by the fact that the Department of Agriculture had previously been restructured to support newly emergent farmers (in addition to its previous emphasis on supporting commercial farmers), and since funding had been secured by the Department of Agriculture to support emerging farmers through European Union money.

Ongoing negotiations between provincially-based Department of Land Affairs officials and officials and the MEC within the Free State Department of Agriculture led to the mentorship pilot project being established within the Northern Free State, this being the region where greatest support for the project existed amongst the Department of Agriculture officials. The fact that it is being run off a DLA budget owes to the prior establishment of such facilities for community facilitation and training by the Department of Land Affairs with donor money. However, the Department of Land Affairs insisted that the Terms of Reference of the project should be drawn up by the Department of Agriculture which was also required to direct the project.

The Terms of Reference which were drawn up specified that the following activities were to be undertaken.

- Terms of Reference for mentors were to be drawn up emphasising:
 - capacity building in management;
 - capacity building in financial reporting and control;
 - introduction to and incorporation into organized agriculture;
 - day to day guidance of the management in decision-making;
 - facilitating and improving the communication between management and the beneficiaries; and
 - inculcating the culture to treat farming as a business.

- The mentors were to be answerable to the project management committee and were to prepare a detailed work plan in respect of: production projects and targets; enterprise budgets; cash flow projections; and training plans.

- Mentors were to give close guidance and supervise the implementation of a work plan; they were to undertake practical skills training on the job for beneficiary groups, as well as promote liaison and linkages with other operations in the sector.

- Mentors were to guide rather than dominate beneficiary groups and work closely with the project leader in the Department of Agriculture.

- The mentors were to be closely monitored by the project leader within the Department of Agriculture to ensure that beneficiaries benefited from the facility, and that contractual obligations were adhered to.

- The Mentor Project Manager (the consultant) was to be accountable to the Director of operations in the Department of Agriculture; and
 - was to report monthly;
 - keep an accurate inventory of existing and future land reform projects;
 - work with the Farming Systems and Extension Division of the Support Services Directorate to develop farming prototype alternatives;
 - work with Extension Services to institute management guidelines and structures for the individual projects;
 - convene a mentor selection committee and develop guidelines for their selection and recruit mentors; work with the Monitoring and Evaluation Division of the Directorate of Operations to develop M& E guidelines, procedures and structures; and
 - prepare and present evaluation reports.

- The responsibility of the mentors was to be more in line with production and therefore the mentor project would fit better in the Department of Agriculture's mandate. The mentor project would therefore ideally be run by the Department of Agriculture. The Community Facilitation and support fund should be procured through the Department of Land Affairs and be dispersed by the Department of Agriculture.

2. The Status of the Land Reform Projects at the Inception of the Northern Free State Mentorship Pilot Project

The mentorship project was assigned some 12 land reform projects, 8 land redistribution, and 4 commonage projects out of the total 40 projects (22 land redistribution and 18 commonage), which had been handed over to the Free State Department of Land Affairs in the Northern Free State. However, it should be emphasised that the mentorship project only came into existence some two years after most of the projects had been handed over to the Department of Agriculture, which has meant that the mentorship project has in effect been running for only four and a half months.

It is apparent that the above TOR places great emphasis on providing assistance in respect of production targets, the assumption having been that the new farmers would have begun their production cycles and that the support that would be required would be of a technical nature. These assumptions proved to be unfounded at the outset of the project for four reasons.

Firstly, much of the initial business planning for the land reform projects had assumed that the CPF funding to support production activity would become available. This has not materialized primarily because the Department of Agriculture has not been able to develop adequate systems in terms of government (and European) regulations, in terms of which such grant money is able to be released. What this has meant is that there have been a variety of failed expectations. An example of how this lies in the Thabong project in Odendaalsrus. In this case, a well organized group of which some members had been successfully planting hired land to crops, had purchased land for grazing on the basis that CPF funds would be available for the establishment of pastures. Failure to acquire these funds forced the group to grow wheat at short notice because debtors for the implements and machinery would need to be paid. The soil was not correctly prepared and led to a total crop failure. In this case, this group of limited agricultural experience, which had been planting crops, was forced to plant a crop hoping for success without the full understanding that a wheat crop needs well prepared weed free soil to produce well. Guidance was required from experienced people at this point but was not available. The understanding of pay back ability was never conveyed to the group hence the inappropriate action. The consequence was a likely cash flow problem.

Secondly, there were design flaws in many of the early project which the Department of Land Affairs established. In the early stages of the pilot project large numbers of people applied for grants and for particular farms, on the basis that the collective subsidies such households were

entitled to would secure the price of the farm. Although the Department of Land Affairs shifted its policy regarding these projects and would only consider smaller groups with potential to work together on business lines, a number of these large projects were designated. Enormous organizational and inter-group conflicts emerged within these projects around issues of control, the allocation of work and the disbursement of profits (or debt).

This applies to the Sibongile project in Koppies which involved a going concern being transferred to a large group of 167 people. The original dairy, broiler and irrigation operations had been completely decimated, 14 out of the original eighty cows being left, the broiler unit no longer existed and the machinery was in total disrepair. Only one of the original 167 appeared to remain on the land.

Thirdly, as far as the municipal commonage projects are concerned, there has often been a reluctance by the municipalities to take up their responsibilities as owners and managers of municipal commonage. Considerable difficulties have been encountered in orchestrating the signing of leases with pre-identified beneficiary groups. In none of the projects visited, had municipalities taken the initiative of themselves developing systems for the management of their commonages. This is evident in the Bothaville commonages whose group had nonetheless made some progress owing the support of the local extension officer, the Parys commonage whose infrastructure had been gradually depleted by theft and the Edenville and Bultfontein commonages which had failed to secure lease or rental agreements for the land.

Finally, officials within the Department of Agriculture have been ill equipped to assist beneficiary groups from two perspectives. The first has been their lack of experience with assisting groups in resolving organizational conflicts which inevitably arise where clear ground rules have not been set, where understandings of accounting systems are negligible and where different members of groups bring with them different capacities, assets and potentials. The second has been the limited experience of dealing with or in advising groups on how to deal with the outside bodies which beneficiary groups are dependent on. These would include bodies such as Eskom, the Land Bank, municipalities and private sector supplier organizations. The lack of these particular skills relate to the Department's previous focus on technical issues as well as their general lack of experience as entrepreneurs in running businesses. Most of the projects have been affected by such shortcomings including most of the groupings using the commonages (with the possible exception of Bothaville), and even some which had previously been operating as viable businesses. This applies to Democratic Poultry near Kroonstad which had successfully been running a broiler unit for some years on hired land. New land was purchased outside Kroonstad. As suggested by the mentorship project manager, a poor understanding of land ownership and financial management, with the purchase of two vehicles led to a power struggle between two polarisations in the group. Neglect of their established markets in the interim led to difficulties being encountered. No doubt organizational financial management advice might have prevented this.

The circumstances meant that virtually all the projects that had been assigned to the mentorship project were either heavily indebted or otherwise on the verge of collapse owing to severe conflicts that had emerged within the groups. Since the same circumstances as those described above to other projects in the Northern Free State, one can fairly safely assume that the other projects face similar difficulties (there are 18 commonage projects in total and 22 land redistribution projects in the region).

Given the circumstances found in the land reform projects at the time that that the mentorship project was put in place, it is necessary to question the terms of reference as originally set out.

The first issue is that the technical and production emphasis of the project's TOR was misplaced for the circumstances the groups found themselves in at the time. Their primary needs were firstly to unravel the conflicts which had emerged within the groups as a result of the lack of activity and support, for the groups to develop strategies in line with their resources and capacities and finally to negotiate with the various outside agencies to enable this (whether restructuring debt in the case of the land bank, negotiating the leasing of land which could not be

brought under production in the short term or the acquisition of infrastructure as in the case of Eskom).

In terms of the original conception of the mentorship project, experienced commercial farmers who were envisaged to provide support would not be in a position to deal with group conflict (their experience having been to run individual enterprises). Their greatest value would be providing support of a technical and business nature to enterprises which are already up and running. It is in this light that the approach taken by Mngcunube Consultants should be broached.

3. Performance of the Consultants appointed to undertake the Mentorship Pilot Project

The strategy Mngcunube Consultants came up with on the basis of their initial assessment and agreed to with the Department of Agriculture was:

- to focus on the organisational development of projects (including committee training and financial management) to a point at which unity within the groups could be established to enable the process to move forward;
- to re-visit the vision of the groups through workshops and to develop production plans to enable process to be measured;
- the separation of projects into three groups, including small (under 35 members) commercial projects on owned land, large projects (need an entirely different process to establish production without conflict) and the commonage projects (owing to the additional requirement for support and mentoring of TLCs);
- to cancel the non resuscitatable projects;
- to allocate each remaining project an extension officer who is solely responsible for that project who would be mentored by the consultants; and
- to reduce the number of mentors originally envisaged until such time as the technical and business advice of mentors was required (projects started to produce).

The wider scope of this strategy that was originally envisaged in the Terms of Reference should be noted. Against this strategy, it is important to assess the facilitation role of the consultants, their liaison and trouble-shooting role with outside agencies, their liaison and mentoring role with the Department of Agriculture and Municipalities, the sustainability of the project as a whole and the role of the project as a pilot project.

4. Performance of the Facilitation Function within the Pilot Mentoring project

The Project manager initially took up the role of unraveling conflicts, which had emerged within the groups, so that, some degree of unity could be established in order that the group's vision and ground rules could be established. This role has grown to include a full time facilitator and a part time facilitator/administrator, who has also doubled as a facilitator as the scope of the job has grown. All (with the exception of the project manager) are fluent Sotho linguists. All of the people involved in the exercise are well qualified for the job. The project managers experience in managing the Land Reform pilot project (both within the Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs) provides important continuity in a process, which has typically been bedeviled by a high staff turnover, in respect of the people responsible for particular land reform projects. This experience is complemented by experience of managing farmer led extension projects in the Eastern Cape. The Project manager, the full-time facilitator and the facilitator/administrator have experience in commercial farming and the latter two of community development with disadvantaged groups within rural areas within the Free State. In all three cases, the unique combination of running commercial farming enterprises and of community development activities, has meant that they have been able to fulfill the dual roles of facilitation/ mediation and vision building as well as liaison and advocacy with outside agencies such as provincial departments, municipalities, parastatals, banks and so on. The two have tended to go hand in hand since the resolution to particular group's problems often rests in striking deals with outside agencies around debt restructuring (in the case of the Land Bank) or the signing of leases (as in the case of

municipalities), to give but two examples. The administration function is also particularly important in terms of setting up weekly schedules, making appointments with groups, Department of Agriculture officials and representatives of the range of organisations who are involved in the land reform projects. Holding these groups to account through written invitations and minuting has been particularly important where individuals or organisations are often recalcitrant in following through on commitments.

In terms of achievements in respect of the facilitation/mediation and vision building function, it should be noted that initial unity which existed in the groups which was founded on expectations generated by both the Department of Land Affairs (in terms of land and asset transfers) and the Department of Agriculture (in terms of the CPF fund). This unity could not be sustained when expectations did not materialize, the frustrations being directed to those departments. Subsequently, however, disaffection was internalized and directed between members of the groups themselves. Failure of profits or earnings to materialize would be translated into accusations of theft by the leadership given the absence of accounting systems or understandings thereof. Conflicts would emerge between worker/owners of land and owners who do not contribute labour or resources to the enterprise. Conflicts would likewise emerge between wealthier and poorer members of groups, where the former would utilize the resources of the farm (whether through cattle grazing or planting on an individual basis) to the exclusion of the poorer members without access to such assets.

It is in this context that the source of conflicts had to be unraveled through structured work-shopping exercises before consensus on the way forward could be reached within the groups. In most cases, this could be achieved, in some not. The two very large projects, Nyakalong and Sibongile, are a case in point where conflicts within the groups are so endemic, and the resource base of the farms so devastated that continued public support for them cannot be warranted.

The other cases such as Tswelopele Boerdery, exploitation of the poorer members by others has led to serious conflict. In this example, the leader of the group holds very direct control over the accounts, and controls the butchery through which most of the produce of the farm is channeled. He has, allegedly, been in collusion with the previous owner and has struck private and illegal deals in respect of part of the transfer of the assets of the farm. His ability to maintain control is founded on the dependence of the members of the groups on handouts from the leader for some of their daily needs. In the interim, the stock and resources of the enterprise are being depleted. In this case, the facilitation exercises have not, to date, succeeded in shifting the balance of power within the group.

There are other cases, however where this has occurred and fraudulent leaders have been dislodged (as in the case of Democratic Poultry), or interim compromises have been negotiated. One such case is that of Thabong, where agreement has been reached that repayment for jointly owned machinery will be met by individuals planting private lands for their individual benefit. In others, there has been agreement that different parts of the farm will be operated by different sub-groups, on the understanding that the properties may be sub-divided in future. Finally, there is recognition that some individuals have both the capacity and inclination to develop their own individual farming enterprises, and measures have been taken to target them for future land reform projects in terms of the 'step up' project (from subsistence and semi-commercial farmers to commercial farmers being advocated by the new Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs).

As far as developing visions and strategies for the enterprises are concerned, these have ranged from using the balance of grant from the Department of Land Affairs to pay outstanding debts to the Land Bank, and to consolidate debt and arrange for repayment on the basis of a secure income stream through the lease of part of the land. With increasing doubt about CPF funding materializing, this is also a strategy for the other unencumbered projects, where the leasing of land is viewed as a means to secure funds for production on a small scale, which will be increased gradually as confidence, experience and funds are built up.

In the case of the commonage projects, the strategy is to sub-let while building up production

funds and gaining experience by operating on a small-scale before attempting to operate at full capacity. In these cases, difficulties have been experienced securing leases from the municipalities before sub-leasing can take place. Some success has been achieved in gaining the support of Eskom in providing electricity and also in providing grant support for some of the production infrastructure.

5. Liaison with outside Organizations involved with Land Reform Projects

As will have become apparent, extensive liaison and negotiations have been undertaken with various outside organizations, which have been critical to the survival and or initiation of the land reform projects.

The view expressed by the head of the Land Bank in Kroonstad, is that most of the indebted projects would have faced sequestration had it not been for the intervention of the support project. It is also apparent that many of the commonage groups would have disintegrated, had it not been for the intervention of the support project in assisting the groups find direction, placing pressure on municipalities to prevent commonage assets from being stolen and to finalize leases with the groups.

The project manager has also made contact with supplier and buying organizations who have been positively disposed towards future collaboration. The difficulty at this stage is that deals that might be done through buying or selling are fairly meaningless as volumes produced by or procured by the land reform projects are relatively marginal at present. As production picks up, extending these contacts will become more meaningful.

6. Liaison with the Department of Agriculture and Mentoring of Department of Agriculture Officials

The fact that the mentorship pilot project is funded by the DLA, but is under the direction of the Department of Agriculture, placed the consultants in a particularly difficult position. The reason for this is that reporting on the status of the projects reflected negatively on the prior performance of the Department of Agriculture officials responsible for supporting particular projects. This was to emerge when the first report of the consultants was produced, creating some tension between the officials and the consultants. Much of this was subsequently dissipated as a result of the significant interaction between the consultants and particularly the Development Officers and some of the Extension Officers of the DoA. Many of these individuals lacked confidence in facilitation and liaison roles, which meant that they had been unable to make any headway with the groups. The mentorship project therefore was increasingly seen as providing direction to themselves and the groups as well. A shift in attitude is apparent, from one in which the consultants have been viewed as outside contractors who would obviate the necessity for the agricultural officers to interact with these groups, to one in which they are seen to have hard skills which can be learnt from.

Two subsequent developments positively affected this change in mind-set. First, the request by the Manager of the Rural Development unit for the consultants to mentor the development Officers involved in the land reform projects. Second, support of the project by the Department of Agriculture MEC at a meeting with the agricultural officials, project members and the consultant's, at which the latter's contribution to progress on the project was made embarrassingly clear.

Beneficiary support for the project, the commitment of individual development and extension officers and support of the manager of the Rural Development Unit and the MEC, are not, in themselves, likely to assure success of the Pilot Project.

Two sets of difficulties have emerged. First, systems in terms of which mentoring and skills can be transferred to development unit and extension officers have still to be developed. It has taken

some four months, for example, to implement the recommendation that individual development officers be assigned and be accountable to particular projects.

It has also proved exceedingly difficult to get development unit and extension officers to attend weekly meetings with the project groups. This is envisaged as the means through which learning can occur, and skills can be transferred in a way that will make the necessity for the intervention of private consultants redundant.

It should be emphasised that the reasons for non-attendance of project meetings and the difficulties of setting up schedules for project support are not necessarily the fault of the officials themselves. Intentions by officials to adhere to prior commitments are invariably subverted by demands placed on them elsewhere within the department, whether by workshops, or training courses set up at the last minute (or at least where the details of such courses are not relaying timeously) or by ad hoc or emergency planning meetings which must be attended.

For the full benefits of the pilot project to take effect, such a mentoring project must be driven from within the department. Unless an enabling environment is created in terms of which the lessons of the pilot can be absorbed by the department, the possibility exists that the interventions by the consultants will only benefit the projects they have been directly involved in. It would not affect those projects outside of their ambit, and prospects of such lessons being transferred to other regions in the Free State would be remote.

7. Assessment of the Original Goals of the Mentorship Project

The original emphasis of the mentorship project was the contracting of commercial farmers to mentor new farmers in technical, management and business skills has only really begun as groups are beginning to consolidate their visions and strategies and entering into production. It is thus premature to comment on the performance of these roles, suffice to say that attempts are being made to identify farmers who are located near existing land reform projects so as to promote neighbourly relations and also to involve the commercial farmers associations in selecting mentors so as to gain the support of these bodies.

8. Project Sustainability and the Extension of the Pilot Project

The importance of the pilot mentorship project and its extension into the other Free State regions needs to be viewed from the following perspectives. Millions of Rands have been spent on the purchase of land for redistribution projects and on commonage projects within the Northern Region alone. This represents a huge investment and potential waste if the other projects within the Northern Free State are in a similar state of disarray to those which were found at the outset of the mentorship project. If similar circumstances exist within the other Free State Regions, this potential loss is magnified phenomenally.

However, the importance of the project also needs to be highlighted from another perspective. That is, that, it is difficult to identify many emergent farmers within the Northern Free State outside of those for whom opportunities have been made available through land reform. Some four to six black farmers in the region had taken loans (or were in the process of getting loans) from the Land Bank, who were not land reform beneficiaries. This situation applies less within other regions (such as former homeland areas such as Qwa Qwa and Thaba Nchu) where there is an emergent farmer client base for the Department of Agriculture. With the Department of Agriculture's changed focus to emergent farmers, the point about the Northern Free State, is that if the lessons of the pilot mentorship project are not heeded and internalized within the Department, it could well lose its existing client base altogether.

8. The Role of the Mentorship Project in the Context of New Directions within the

Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs

The mentorship pilot project needs to be viewed in the context of whether and to what extent, it contributes to the new directions with the Departments of Land Affairs and Agriculture as articulated by the Minister in a recent policy statement. A major emphasis is "... to gradually change the structure of South African agriculture by opening opportunities thereby creating a significant number of black commercial farmers operating on a medium and large scale". Both the emphasis on the creation of medium and large scale black commercial farmers and the developmental thrust of the policy statement, represents a departure from previous policies and practices of the Department of Land Affairs which placed significant emphasis on land redistribution and restitution as a human rights-based imperative, and tended to target the 'poorest of the poor' for poverty alleviation purposes. This shift in direction is linked to proposed changes in the way in which land reform grants are allocated. Three redistribution windows are proposed to replace the current uniform R16000 household redistribution grant. These will be based on the total project cost, and not the size of the enterprise or type of farmer. It is envisaged that "... in percentage terms, the contribution of government to each of the windows is set at about 70%, 40% and 20% in the small, medium and large sized projects respectively.

What then is the relevance of the Northern Free State mentorship pilot project to these new directions in the Ministry of Land Affairs and Agriculture? It is suggested below that mentorship projects along the lines being run in the Northern Free State are critical to supporting 'first window' farmers, in facilitating movement between 'windows' and that technical and business mentorship by commercial farmers of new farmers will be important for small, medium and large scale farmers.

As far as the 'first window' farmers are concerned, it has become absolutely apparent in the Northern Free State that the type of facilitation and liaison support rendered to the groups by the mentoring project is absolutely critical to the future sustainability of the enterprises. It has become apparent that there is a dearth of these skills within the Department of Agriculture and that mechanisms like the mentorship project will be needed if these skills are to be transferred to Departmental officials.

It has become apparent within the Northern Free State that many potential medium and large scale individual farmers will be able to realize this potential as a result of their experience within the group enterprises which have been established in terms of the existing land reform project. Many candidates have been identified within these existing projects and are being targetted for medium and large scale farming options, when such grants become available. The important point about the mentorship project is that the kinds of support that have been provided at 'entry level', by the pilot project should enable some of the land reform beneficiaries to move from the first to the second and third windows. It is unlikely that it would be possible to 'step' between the windows without the kind of support that has been provided by the mentorship project.

It has not been possible to assess the effectiveness of mentorship of new farmers by established commercial farmers, as these are still being in the process of being appointed (for reasons outlined previously). Given the lack of experience of new farmers in running commercial agricultural enterprises, and the fact that agricultural officers typically lack such experience, one might assume that this form of mentorship will be absolutely critical for new small, medium and large scale farmers.

9. Recommendations

It is critically important that the kinds of skills that have been provided by the pilot mentorship project are transferred not only to the Development Officers within the Rural Development Unit, but also the extension officers. It would be very difficult for extension officers to provide adequate technical support if they do not have the kinds of facilitation and liaison skills which all groups require before technical extension support can be realistically transferred.

The other reality is that all extension and development officer staff will be required in these roles if support for the full range of land reform projects in the Northern Free State is to be provided. The mentorship project is presently only supporting 5 out of a total of 22 land redistribution projects and 4 out of a total 18 commonage projects within the Northern Free State. It will simply not be possible to address these needs in total if extension staff cannot be used in such roles in future. It is also critically important that the pilot project be extended to the other regions, if as seems likely, similar conditions prevail within these regions.

It is critically important that authoritative support for the pilot project and the extension thereof is provided from within senior levels within the Department of Agriculture. The lessons of the pilot will not be absorbed unless systems are adapted to enable such learning – that designated development unit and extension officers are assigned to particular projects, that routine scheduled meetings with project groups are attended, that appropriate training in missing skills are obtained (a start has been made in this with the facilitation course organized through the pilot project), and that systems are developed in terms of which the progress of groups can be monitored and officials can be held accountable for non performance. The difficulty faced by the project consultants here is that their direct ability to influence such systems is limited. For the lessons of the pilot to be absorbed by the Northern Free State Department of Agriculture and indeed by the other regions, it is necessary for the process to be driven from a very senior authoritative level within the Department.

This issue was discussed with the MEC, who acknowledged the achievements of the consultants who had been appointed to run the project, and the fact that such achievements partly related to the fact that they were able to operate outside of structures of government service as contracted consultants. One suggestion made by him to ensuring that the lessons of the pilot be integrated into the Department, was to make the project directly accountable to him. A more appropriate solution, we would suggest, would be to secure funding for a technical assistant to the Department's Chief Director (the Head of Department), whose task would not only be to assist in the management of existing and future mentorship projects, but more importantly, to assist the regions develop management systems which would enable departmental officials to continue where the pilot staff left off.

Given the fact that a large number of municipalities within the Free State have acquired commonages and that the municipalities that were visited lack capacity or direction on managing their commonages, it is also suggested that the Department consider establishing a municipal support project to assist municipalities in this task. This would be consistent with the constitutional principle of cooperative governance and could ultimately reduce the burden of the Department of Agriculture in having to pick up the pieces in neglected commonage projects. If such a project were to materialize, it would make sense for it to be managed as part an parcel of an extended mentorship project, and also be managed by the Head of Department with the proposed technical assistance.

The issue of whether the pilot project achieves its broader aims is also contingent on future funding. It should be noted that the current mentorship project contract expired at the beginning of April and that the existing donor funding within the Department of Land Affairs is only likely to be rolled over for another year. Apart from recommending the extension of the project for another year, in terms of the wider terms of reference that the consultants have taken on, it is also critical that other funding is secured to support the extension of the pilot into the other regions. Given the status of the projects that have been supported and the tasks that have yet to be undertaken, an intensive mentorship project of 18 months per region would seem appropriate in getting projects up to speed and transferring such lessons to the Department of Agriculture. Thereafter, outside support might need to be limited to the mentorship support as originally envisaged, that is ongoing technical management and business advice.

Finally, given the fact that the mentorship project is a pilot project and that many of the initial assumptions of the Terms of Reference have proved unfounded, it is important that short quarterly independent evaluations of the project be undertaken to revisit the terms of reference

and to assess performance.

In summary:

- 1 the current contract of Mngcunube Consultants should be extended for another year;
- 2 their terms of reference, should be extended to include their facilitation and liaison roles and a mentoring role they are playing for Department of Agriculture officials;
- 3 the Pilot project should be extended to the other regions within the Free State to run for at least 18 months within each region;
- 4 a technical assistant should be appointed on contract to support the Head of Department to manage the mentorship project and develop management systems within the Department to enable it to absorb the lessons of the pilot;
- 5 the Department of Agriculture should consider establishing a municipal support unit to assist municipalities find direction in respect of their commonages;
- 6 project proposals should be developed to enable the securing of funds by the Department of Agriculture for extension of the mentorship project to other regions; and
- 7 quarterly reviews by an independent assessor should be undertaken to ensure that the assumptions of the mentorship project are still valid and that the consultants are performing adequately.