



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FARMER MENTORSHIP:

POLICY AND GUIDELINES

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**MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND LAND AFFAIRS
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Initiator of the policy and guidelines

The Minister for Agriculture and Land Affairs has established a policy for mentorship in agriculture, which includes guidelines for its implementation.

Rationale

The Strategic Plan for South African Agriculture includes a specific undertaking to implement a mentorship programme as a matter of high priority, the more so as conventional extension services do not satisfy the needs of new and emerging farmers, many of whom find it difficult to make a success of their enterprises in a sector that is complex and risky. There is a need to address these needs without delay.

Mentoring projects that have been carried out recently have shown that, provided mentoring is based on sound principles and practices, it can make an important contribution to the success of new farmers. The policy will secure these sound principles and practices in a practical programme of implementation.

Although the policy has been driven by the need to deal with the needs of new farmers, the principles embedded in the policy have application in all settings where a farmer is in need of support.

Purpose

The policy establishes a sound, generally accepted framework for mentoring and will therefore enhance the quantity and quality of support available to new and emerging farmers so that their agricultural enterprises have improved prospects of profitability and sustainability. The initial emphasis in implementing the policy is on land reform beneficiaries.

Strategic Relevance

The policy draws directly from the Strategic Plan for South African Agriculture, more particularly its vision of “a united and prosperous agricultural sector” and on the strategic goal “to generate equitable access and participation in a globally competitive and sustainable agricultural sector contributing to a better life for all”.

Standards

The policy establishes norms and standards for mentoring to ensure that a clear and healthy mentoring relationship operates at two levels:

- Assisting to enhance the prospects of the enterprises of new and emerging farmers
- Contributing to the transformation of relationships between new farmers on the one hand and established farmers and providers of goods and services on the other, thus helping to build a “united sector”.

The norms and standards relate to:

- The definition of mentoring
- The roles of the mentor and the mentee
- The rights and powers of the mentee
- Selection and management of mentors

Implementation

Implementation according to requirements set out in the guidelines.

Priorities and Roll Out

There is a considerable backlog of support requirements for new farmers and it is unlikely – whether by virtue of access to resources or not yet effective implementation – that all new farmers can be reached in the short term.

Furthermore, the land and enterprise of many land reform beneficiaries are group-owned, for example trusts. Often large, these groups create special challenges for the successful operation of the farming enterprise. In these cases support needs to be directed at management and organisational development, in addition to farmer to farmer mentoring and technical skills development. Priority will initially be given to (a) those enterprises with reasonable prospects of sustainable success through farmer mentoring and (b) to those enterprises with large and complex support requirements where the possible bankruptcy of the enterprise would have significant effects on the local economy.

The policy accepts that mentors be compensated for the service they render.

Participation

The policy was developed in consultation with key stakeholders in Provincial Departments of Agriculture (PDAs), organised agriculture (NAFU and Agri-SA), private sector banks, members of the NGO sector currently engaged with mentoring programmes, the Department of Land Affairs, the Land Bank and the Primary Agriculture Education and Training Authority (PAETA). All participants welcomed the establishment of a policy on mentorship and support the final policy position and guidelines. *(Note – these guidelines differ on implementation systems)*

CONTEXT

As an important part of post apartheid transformation, government has a land reform policy which has seen many black South Africans acquire agricultural land. This is progressing at an increasing rate, to which the proposed Agri – Black Economic Empowerment Policy will add further impetus.

It has however become clear that many of the beneficiaries of land reform are not succeeding as farmers, which can undermine the process of land reform. It is widely accepted that lack of appropriate post settlement support is a major reason for this problem. Training and traditional agricultural extension have been applied, but have not prevented or turned around the worrying situation of new farmers. It is clear that more appropriate support is urgently needed.

Government, aware of the intentions and obligations of the Strategic Plan for South African Agriculture (2001) in this regard, and in accordance with the high priority given in the strategic plan to implementing a mentorship programme, has acted to establish a mentoring policy and guidelines in consultation with relevant stakeholders and partners.

The purpose of the mentoring policy and guidelines is:

- to provide clarity on the nature of government's intentions and the reasoning behind these intentions
- to establish general standards to ensure that good practice in mentoring is applied with the desired effect
- to outline and explain the proposed means for rapid and widespread implementation of mentoring while preserving application of good practice
- to outline how monitoring and reporting on the impact of mentorships will be carried out.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The struggle for liberation and freedom was, in many respects, centred on the need for restoration, redistribution and restitution of land dispossessed during colonialism and apartheid. The challenge facing Government is to promote a sustainable new class of black entrepreneurs. It aims to do this in a deregulated, more competitive environment that has seen the dismantling of tariff barriers and other forms of State support that in the past had helped build the white commercial farming sector. Currently a comprehensive land reform programme is an essential element of integrated sustainable rural development.

Since the 1999 elections there has been new energy and a shift in policy to accelerate sustainable land reform. The land reform sub-programme, Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD), is aimed at promoting access to land for productive use, specifically for agricultural purposes. Its objectives are to:

- transfer about 30% of the country's agricultural land over 10 -15 years
- improve nutrition and incomes of the rural poor.
- expand opportunities for rural people, especially women and youth.

The Directorate "Programme" Farmer Settlement was established within the National Department of Agriculture. Its vision is the settlement of black farmers and assistance towards their development of commercially viable farms to increase long-term self-sufficiency. Although land reform is critical in ensuring broad-based participation in the agricultural mainstream, a number of support needs must be addressed simultaneously to ensure that the process of access and empowerment is successful and sustainable.

To date the emphasis on support has been for land reform beneficiaries under LRAD and its predecessor, the Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG). As land redistribution and agricultural development are the priority of the Department of Agriculture, land redistribution beneficiaries are the most obvious focus of the policy and guidelines on mentoring. However, four other categories also need support:

- New farmers who have acquired land through their own initiative
- Those who acquired land under the policy that preceded LRAD, making them equally eligible for the application of the LRAD policy and guidelines
- People and groups using commonage for agricultural purposes and
- Those living on communally/ traditionally owned land in former 'homelands'.

The latter two groups are engaged in agriculture but have little access to support services, agricultural inputs, adequate infrastructure and the market as a whole. Their specific needs – for example full time mentors where the appointed mentors live far from the mentees - are not dealt with specifically, as the principles outlined in this document apply generally to all the settings mentioned.

1.2 Problem Statement

The South African agricultural sector suffers from historical inequalities in the manner in which land and agricultural enterprises are owned and managed.

During the last ten years considerable institutional energy and funds have been applied to providing access to land for new entrants, but the envisaged viability and prosperity of their enterprises have not materialised. The main reasons for this are:

- The land acquired did not have the potential to generate income at desired or planned levels, and preplanning or business planning that could detect this was absent or deficient; or the delay in transfer meant that the business plan is no longer reliable; or the grant process did not detect whether the applicants were genuinely interested in land for commercial farming or just in having their own land.
- Where group ownership prevailed, conditions for management and decision making and the nature of support were especially challenging.
- That farming is a complex, challenging and risky undertaking and that lack of appropriate support to entrants would result in failure or at least undue struggle to succeed were not adequately appreciated.
- As a result of past inequities, few new farmers had experience and the know-how of independently operating their own enterprises
- Past inequities also resulted in new farmers having little or no information on or support relations with the commercial farming community or with suppliers of goods and services to the sector: such isolation in any circumstances would be a significant constraint.
- On transfer there is usually no prearranged support (advisory or other) or access to the seller's knowledge on matters such as soils, water and markets.
- Extension officers of the PDAs were available for support, but this generally consisted of knowledge of agricultural production. As they had minimal knowledge or experience of operating an entire farming enterprise, their support was of limited usefulness to the new farmers.

From the above exposition it is clear that different, complementary measures that target the situation and needs of new farmers and land reform beneficiaries are needed.

The agriculture sector plan states the following on "skewed participation" in agriculture:

"Because of the legacy of exclusion and discrimination in South African agriculture, the challenge is now to improve participation in all facets of the sector and rid it once and for all of the many entry barriers excluded in its historical dualism. The challenge is especially to identify programmes that will encourage new entrants – black and white; young and old; men and women; small and medium scale enterprises to enter the sector. It is important to find ways to ensure that these different constituents of the sector genuinely feel and see themselves as belonging to a single entity."

Government acknowledges that these goals can be supported through use of a mentoring approach. This approach has been tried in different settings in South Africa and globally, to good effect. The farmer-to-farmer mentoring is a central feature and has particular relevance to the strategic intention to remove skewed participation. However, it must also be recognised that the group ownership pattern of many land reform projects means that organisational development and leadership mentoring are equally important in these settings.

1.3 What is mentoring, why use it and why involve government

Defining Mentoring:

Mentorship can be applied and used in different ways.

The following are adaptations of definitions that capture the meaning of mentoring well, and which are not sector specific:

“Mentoring exists when suitably experienced and competent persons act as resources, sponsors and transitional figures for another person. Mentors provide less experienced persons with knowledge, advice, challenge and support in their pursuit of becoming full members of a particular segment of life..... Mentors welcome less experienced persons into their world and represent skill, knowledge, networks and success that the new professionals hope to someday acquire”

“Mentoring helps people understand and work through change and so contributes to the achievement of their intended improvements. Mentoring helps people to learn and supports self development.”

Mentoring is a process of forming a relationship between a more experienced, seasoned and wiser person (mentor) and a less experienced person (mentee), where the mentor assists the mentee (who is not the mentor’s direct report) to achieve a specific goal or develop a specified capacity.¹

Why mentoring

Mentoring is more than a process of skill transfer or training, although a mentor does need to have the skills and knowledge that the mentee needs. It is a personal link where the more experienced mentor nevertheless treats the less experienced mentee as an equal in terms of how support is given to the mentee in reaching his or her goals and coping with new and changing conditions.

Mentoring also differs from training in that it is not a once off event or series of events with predetermined content and results. Mentoring responds to actual needs and issues of the mentee as and when they are felt or expressed. Mentoring therefore requires frequent interaction over a period of time (walking the road together) until the mentee feels empowered to pursue his or her goals with a sense of confidence and independence. The process of mentoring is thus one of facilitation based on action learning, that is, the mentor, who has more knowledge and experience, helps the mentee to reach his or her goals rather than telling him or her what to do.

¹ Adapted from Meyer, M & Mabaso, J. *Mentoring as a Way to Transfer Learning and Accelerate Empowerment.*

International experience shows that farmers find it easier to learn from other farmers than from formal training and supply-side advice for several reasons. They share the same interests and challenges. Farmers are seldom in direct competition with one another so there is no barrier to co-operation. Indeed farmers need their neighbours to operate according to generally accepted standards to avoid problems such as the spread of animal and plant diseases, the cross over effects of misuse of agricultural chemicals, reducing and managing the risk of fire. Above all the mentor understands that farming is a business. The business of farming is far more than optimising plant or animal production. It involves marketing, financial management, bookkeeping, record keeping, planning, mechanics, understanding credit and financing, labour relations, relations with suppliers of goods and services, and so on. The farmer mentor brings experience in the many areas of decision making needed in farming and of the many small practical steps that make up the know-how of managing costs and risks and of optimising income and profit. Sharing this invaluable experience can make the difference between success and failure:

Agriculture is characterised by long cycles of production and is particularly susceptible to external events such as variable rainfall, pests and diseases and fluctuating prices for primary products. New farmers in particular need support and advice through their first few production cycles and in confronting external impacts. Once-off or sporadic support inputs through training and extension do not easily fit with these realities.

Some land reform beneficiaries are group owners of the land. This was particularly so before the LRAD programme was introduced, but group ownership of land continues even under LRAD. It is widely acknowledged that group ownership can and frequently does lead to internal conflict and other difficulties in effective management and operation of the farming enterprise. This creates a set of needs and conditions usually beyond the experience of ordinary farmer mentors. In other words, organisational development and management /leadership facilitators are needed in addition.

Mentorship is one mechanism that can bridge the gap between formal and informal economies and ameliorate the current dualism in agriculture in SA by -

- Integrating new entrants into the commercial farming community and the associated network of providers of goods and services and of information, thus building both commercial and social relations;
- narrowing the skills gap in farming, notably business skills;
- Where applicable complementing farmer mentoring with organisation and management development.

It is most important that mentoring is not seen as the sole way of guaranteeing success of new farmers or as a miracle cure. There is a range of business and policy settings, for example those related to trade, credit, and infrastructure provision that can also be crucial. There are also other educational practices that can take place within or outside a mentoring setting, such as study groups, share cropping and the provision of relevant skills training. Apart from noting that, in some respects, the linking of mentoring with factors such as credit and infrastructure provision may have a positive potential, these other factors are outside the scope of these guidelines.

Having noted that mentoring should not be seen as the only solution it must also be recognised that some solutions – for example, the typical first cry for help with funds for refinancing, equipment and infrastructure – also cannot stand alone without mentoring.

The role of government

As stated earlier, the agricultural sector strategy is clear: Government at all levels has an interest in effective support services of all kinds for new and emerging farmers and land reform beneficiaries. Land reform and transformation/BEE in agriculture are central to a just and equitable post-apartheid South Africa.

As far as mentoring is concerned there is a specific case for the involvement of government over and beyond the commitment in the sector strategy to establish a mentorship programme. Government has to ensure that mentoring proceeds according to generally agreed standards. The term 'mentoring' can be interpreted broadly as a relationship based on condescension and the handing down of orders, as is often the case in an organisation that can set and manage mentoring standards and has experience of doing so, and where the relationship between the mentor and mentee is determined by organisational structure.

However, such an interpretation would undermine the important support dimension and overlook the fact that mentoring in agriculture takes place outside the conventional setting for mentoring.

Government can and should therefore –

- Ensure that there are commonly accepted standards of good practice for mentoring in agriculture and land reform
- Mandate organisations to implement mentoring that conforms to government policy on standards of good practice
- Gathering information that reveals what impact mentoring has.

The application of a mentoring policy has implications for provincial government, for example in terms of how the extension officers they employ would cope with the mentoring process. For most small towns agriculture is a defining influence on the local economy. So local government also has a stake in the success of new farmers and the success of land reform. These considerations clearly oblige government to play a role as other sectors and agencies are not under any obligation to take these matters into account.

Lastly, the sector strategy clearly goes beyond the need for an effective and efficient sector. It also speaks of a "united" sector and has a goal that embraces "equitable access and participation" as well as a "better life for all". These are matters of social transformation that government, and not only the Department of Agriculture" has a responsibility to take.

Having pointed out that clear reasons and obligations underpin the involvement of government, the policy and guidelines make it equally clear that government sees itself as a partner in this process. The implementation of a mentoring programme allows for the growth of relationships and, in certain respects, the capacitation of organised agriculture and of government itself.

1.4 Mentorship policy and CASP programme

The mentorship policy can be seen as an accelerator of the implementation of some of the pillars of the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP), such as training and capacity building, and advisory and technical services. In offering the latter services to the farmer mentees, the mentors will have to establish links between the mentees and sources of the appropriate services.

2. GENERAL STANDARDS OF GOOD PRACTICE IN FARMER MENTORING

2.1 Preconditions for success

Adhering to overarching principles

Above all there needs to be agreement that the key principles that underlie the mentoring approach (as set out in this section and implied in the introduction) form the core of this policy. These principles have to be observed steadfastly regardless of the means of implementing the mentoring approach.

Diverse Settings

As already indicated prospective mentees must not be seen only as individual farmers. There is in fact a predominance of group ownership which raises special challenges and special mentoring needs beyond that of farmer-to-farmer mentoring. Any implementation and resourcing system that cannot respond at this level will have very limited prospects of success.

Many beneficiaries have also owned their enterprise for a number of years and, in the absence of appropriate support, are experiencing declining returns and (possibly) debt problems. The needs of such individuals are clearly more demanding than a recent entrant who is debt free.

Naturally the demands on the type of mentor and their skill levels varies across the settings mentioned above and this needs to be recognised in all aspects of implementation and budgeting.

Point of Entry

Mentorships should not be pressed on prospective mentees nor should they be offered with the mentee having a full and clear picture of the nature and intentions of the policy and guidelines.

The situation of the prospective mentee needs to be analysed by the extension officers in the PDAs. The purpose is to make a realistic assessment of the viability of the enterprise as determined by business factors, and the potential of the ownership and management system to respond effectively to any changes and improvements that may be indicated.

While the general intention is to offer mentoring where needed and wanted, there will, in practice, be a need to prioritise. Therefore the PDAs will decide on whether or not to allocate resources for mentoring and other support (see section 3). Enterprises with reasonable prospects can be expected to be given preference; so can those which are of sufficient local significance to have a marked negative effect on the local economy should they become insolvent.

Ideally the point of entry will be before the mentee commences operations, but in reality and for the present many mentees will have owned their enterprises for some time.

Role of the Mentee

The mentee is not a neutral factor in the mentoring and has to play an active and constructive part as an individual or group member. In short the mentee must be willing and able to achieve goals through his or her own efforts and decisions after proper mentoring has been offered. (See 'Point of Entry' above for the process to be followed.)

The entire mentoring approach has to be summarised in simple language (in the vernacular where necessary) so that the prospective mentee fully understands the intention and the approach before mentoring commences.

After a mentor has been appointed a simple 'contract' should be drawn up. It should identify the obligations and responsibilities of the relevant parties (especially the mentor and mentee) which would embrace a 'code of conduct'.

2.2 Attributes expected of mentors

Mentors can be men or women. They should have the following qualities, although it is acknowledged that they may not fully possess each and every one of the qualities:

- A good track record in farming (related to the mentees farming operations)
- Good standing in the community, and a good relationship with stakeholders in the service, supply and finance sectors
- Personal qualities such as patience, respect, empathy and maturity,
- Willingness and ability to provide support in a facilitative manner (not top down) and to consciously engage in joint learning with the mentee and others
- Skilled in all aspects of farming – farm planning and management, production and marketing, economics, finance and administration
- Ability to communicate effectively with the mentee
- Personal interest and commitment to the objectives and principles of mentorship
- Living and working close to the mentee's farm.
- Could be retired, but must still be part of the farming community.
- Ability to operate on a part time basis, ideally while operating his or her own farm (if not retired)

2.3 Selection of mentors

These selection criteria are largely the same as set out under 'Attributes of Mentors' above.

2.4 Terms of Reference for Mentors

Depending on the needs of the farmers/mentees and the type of services being provided the mentor will engage in different activities with mentees. These include:

Good Practice in Mentoring

- Be familiar with guidelines on good practice in mentoring and observe these
- Use participatory, facilitative methods in providing support and guidance (Note: training and support on these methods will be offered to mentors)

Farm Operations and Management

- Carry out regular short visits to the mentees based on an agreed programme. It is crucial to maintain consistency and reliability of visits in order to develop a climate of respect and trust between mentor and mentee.
- Provide support and a value-adding service, not the management of the mentee's farm;
- Carry out own farm activities and provide demonstrations from their own farm.
- Assist with building the management capacity and technical skills (production, marketing, equipment use and maintenance, etc) of the mentee
- Give day to day guidance in management and decision making
- Identify areas of training need and links with training agencies

Network Building

- Introduce the mentee to organized agriculture and commodity organizations and incorporate him or her into these
- Link the new entrants to input suppliers, marketing agencies, financial institutions, training agents and government services, especially extension and other services of the PDAs.

Planning

- Build capacity of the mentee to value the use of goals and targets
- Build the capacity of the mentee to use records in planning, assessing progress and financial controls and reporting
- Facilitate awareness of the nature and importance of cash flow management, provision for maintenance and depreciations, and an understanding of the difference between income and gross and net profit
 - Work with the mentee on his or her existing business plan (see 'Preconditions for success' above) or facilitate development of a business plan

Reporting

- The mentor is required to submit a short, simple but informative reports of daily activities, along with any key observations on progress and problems once a month. The mentor may also need to assist the mentee by helping with documentation of their plans, etc.

Co-ordination

- The mentor needs to communicate with local stakeholders, in particular extension officers at the provincial department of agriculture.

2.5 Incentives for mentors

Mentors must be accountable. Therefore a contract is indispensable. However, if there is no financial compensation, accountability is weak, whether a contract exists or not.

The compensation system for farmer mentors should be administratively simple. Avoid, for example, variable payments according to kilometres travelled and hours spent on mentoring. The Department's incentive package could include:

- An allowance of Rx/day
- Free mentoring for mentors
- Annual awards
- Free office space in an area where a service is provided (with basics like, desk and computer).

2.6 Support, Management and Monitoring of Mentors

Management and Monitoring

It is evident from the foregoing sections that mentors and a mentoring programme cannot operate in a vacuum. Initiating an action to get a mentor, identifying which mentees need and want mentors, the process of selection, remuneration and contracts, maintaining performance, submitting reports, etc., all require some form of managing and facilitating by the extension officers and agricultural SETAs.

Support for Mentors

Mentors are not the source of all knowledge and many will find themselves working in an independent setting with no peers close by who could offer supportive advice. It is therefore important, for the sake of effective mentoring, to make available, for a period at least, a level of support to mentors.

- Mentors will need some initial orientation into the guidelines on good practice, especially on the principles underlying mentoring and government policy in this regard. The orientation will also need to cover, the setting of the whole mentoring programme in the land reform, BEE and transformation context, and on operating factors such as their terms of reference, reporting and monitoring standards and requirements, and communication.
- Mentors will need some form of support and/or training on use of a facilitative approach. Farmers in particular are accustomed to making quick, independent decisions and issuing orders to carry them out. This may work on a farm but not in a mentoring situation. Training in facilitation and communication can be costly but is effective. SAQA Unit Standards will go part of the way to developing facilitation skills and if these qualify for application under the Skills Development Fund, costs could be curtailed.

3. IMPLEMENTATION BY STAKEHOLDERS

Two stakeholders are involved s implementers of the farmer mentorship programme, namely the Department of Agriculture (DoA) and the Provincial Departments of Agriculture (PDAs).

3.1 Department of Agriculture

The Department will post newspaper advertisements for farmer mentors after it has received the database of the mentees identified by the PDAs. The Department will process the application forms in collaboration with the agricultural SETAs. The agricultural SETAs will be responsible for the registration and accreditation of mentors. The process should be firmly built on the standards of good practices. A match between the mentor and mentee is crucial.

3.2 Provincial Departments of Agriculture

Extension officers in the PDAs have clear knowledge about the farmers and their operational environment. They are expected to identify beneficiaries who are in need of mentoring, give information on form of ownership (individual, family, group, group size and legal form), locality, contact details, information on the planned farming operation and its current status (including debt).

Extension officers will implement the mentorship policy. Therefore a lee-way programme for their training will be built into the mentorship implementation scheme. This training will capacitate the extension officers with the skill to facilitate farmer mentoring and conduct monitoring and evaluation.

4. MONITORING AND REPORTING

It is essential that government be able to assess the effect of implementation of its mentoring policy. As government funds are applied in implementation it is important to assess whether the funds are spent on actions that have the desired effect and whether the results are achieved at fair cost. Below is a discussion of the three levels of monitoring that are required.

4.1 Monitoring of the mentor on the ground

This level boils down to basic performance monitoring and management and considers whether or not the mentor is conforming to his or her terms of reference and is operating in accordance with the principles of and guidelines for good practice in mentoring. For this purpose the extension officers will compile -

- reports on mentors based on mentee inputs; and
- quarterly progress reports for submission to the Department of Agriculture.

4.2 Monitoring of the progress of the mentees farming operation

This monitoring provides information on how well the beneficiary is doing. It requires that the beneficiary have a clear target or targets against which performance can be assessed.

The mentor will routinely work with the mentee to ensure that records that allow progress to target are kept by the mentee and that they are used to assess progress and to identify any problems that need to be resolved. This work will be captured in the mentor's regular monthly reports.

- The PDA should, at defined intervals (such as shearing season, harvesting season etc) perform full appraisals of the overall status of and prognosis for the farm.