

Implementation of the Departmental Evaluation Plan by the Western Cape Department of Agriculture

By Dirk Troskie (Dr)

The Diagnostic Review of South Africa (June 2011) conducted by the National Planning Commission (NPC) identified two reasons why South Africa has made slow progress since 1994 in achieving its objectives. These reasons were a failure to implement policies and an absence of good partnerships. The NPC has subsequently identified nine primary challenges of which one is that public services are uneven and often of poor quality. For this reason the focus of Chapter 13 of the National Development Plan (15 August 2012) is “Building a capable and developmental state.” The result is that the purpose of National Outcome 12 is to establish an efficient and development-orientated public service. At a Provincial level Strategic Goal 5 of the Provincial Strategic Plan (2014-19) aims to strengthen good governance in the Province.

As responsive and responsible use of public resources is such an important golden thread which runs through the strategic intent at all levels of government in South Africa, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture has adopted a multi-year rolling Departmental Evaluation Plan. The implementation of this plan is driven in person by the Head of Department and it is expected of Programme Managers to report on progress at monthly management meetings.

One of the key challenges during evaluations is the natural tendency of officials to experience an evaluation as a threat. After all, an evaluation can very easily be experienced as an attempt by “them” to nullify the career-long toil of an official. Hence, although the evaluation is done by an external service provider procured from the DPME list of evaluators, the management of the evaluation, the determination of its parameters and the finalisation of the research questions are placed in the hands of the official responsible for the intervention to be evaluated. As these officials are also capacitated beforehand, evaluations are turned from a threat into a source of management information. Indeed, it is interesting to note how officials implement recommended changes and find new meaning in their jobs.

In the previous financial year the following were some of the evaluations conducted:

- a) Outcome and impact evaluation of support to land reform beneficiaries: Based on 39 criteria spanning the triple bottom line of sustainability, a 62% success rate was found. The Management Improvement Plan (MIP) *inter alia* focuses on the development of an exit strategy for the 38% who were not successful.
- b) Outcome, impact and design evaluation of the Market Access Programme. One of the key elements of the MIP is to change this intervention into a Market Readiness Programme.
- c) Impact evaluation of agricultural learnerships training: Some of the actions in the MIP include the improved alignment between this intervention and the seasonal requirements of the Agricultural Sector as well as increased practical content of

13 evaluations currently in the DEP: 5 are completed and improvement plans developed and 7 are underway.

- the curriculum. The latter is achieved through improved partnerships with farmers.
- d) Implementation evaluation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme in Dysseisdorp. One result of this evaluation is that the whole nodal approach is in the process of being redesigned.

In the current financial year the following evaluations, in various stages of completion, are some of those included in the Departmental Evaluation Plan:

- a) Diagnostic evaluation of Farmer's service needs: Partly due to the recommendations in the Land Reform Support evaluation, this diagnostic evaluation intended to make a distinction between the needs of various categories (from smallholder to large commercial) of farmers. Despite common perceptions, and although the nature of the service needs differ, all farmers require some form of intervention from the Department.
- b) Evaluation of the implementation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) in Dysseisdorp, Western Cape. As a result of the evaluation a decision was taken to redesign the nodal approach to the CRDP.
- c) Impact evaluation of the food garden programme on household food security: Preliminary results indicate that, contrary to the common perception in the Department, community gardens may have a bigger impact than household gardens.
- d) Impact evaluation of long-term crop rotation trials on the farming community of the Swartland: Results from these trials, proving increases in technical, economic and environmental efficiency, has been published in various scientific journals. However, are the recommended practices adopted by farmers and does it have an impact on the sustainability of farming and the socio-economic conditions of farmers?
- e) Diagnostic evaluation of the regulatory environment of farmers. In the execution of their mandate domestic and international private and public institutions creates rules and regulations which influence the activities of farmers. Examples include labour, environment and health regulations. However, how does the combined impetus of these regulations influence farmers' ability to produce food?
- f) Impact evaluation of the annual Western Cape Farm Worker of the Year Competition: This competition is a prestige event in which almost one thousand farm workers annually participates. Does participation improve the socio-economic conditions, self-realisation ability and perceptions of farm workers?
- g) Impact evaluations of the commodity approach, meat safety regulation and the agri-business Investment Unit. These are implementation evaluations aiming to improve the way specific interventions are implemented.

Province adjusted implementation approach to CRDP following evaluation

Dr Dirk Troskie is a Director of Business Planning and Strategy at the Department of Agriculture in the Western Cape.