

***ANALYSIS OF FACTORS FACILITATING LOCAL FARMERS
GROUPS NETWORKS: A CASE STUDY OF GA-MOTHIBA
VILLAGE IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE***

By

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Dissertation

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Abstract

Farmer's networks can be an effective means to contribute to sustainable agricultural development. Farmers can learn from each other, with each other, can act as a negotiating partner, invest collectively and involve relevant partners. However farmer's networks are often confronted with barriers such as lack of institutional and organizational support. The main objective of this study was to analyze factors that facilitate local farmer's group network in Ga- Mothiba village of Limpopo Province.

Eight local groups were identified. The focus groups interviews were done with all the groups using a questioning route. Thereafter individual interviews were conducted with members from the groups using a questionnaire that was designed based on responses from the questioning route.

Participatory Rural appraisal was done to assess the activities within the village. Groups were given a chance to identify factors pertaining to development in their village such as natural resource management (soil, vegetation and water), infrastructure, support from other stakeholders and communication coverage.

The forum was formed out of the common interests that were obtained from the transect walk. Existing groups have been strengthened during the process while other informal groupings decided to be recognized as a local group. They've organized themselves, to be more effective in managing their natural resources, to expand their access to natural resources, to control and gain access to services, to lobby for their needs, and to make their voices heard in decision-making processes.

The emergence of the forum resulted in a number of achievements. Farmers are able to exchange ideas and share experiences. The local forum gave farmers recognition and they've different support linkages and exposures. And this facilitates and promotes the development of new groups of farmers. The forum also had an opportunity to be part of the Limpopo Small-Scale Farmers Forum (LSAFF) and also as a member of the East and Southern African Small Scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF).

Although the study indicated that there are benefits for farmers to network, management aspects of the network were found challenging. These aspects included balance leadership, collective responsibility and coherence of the group. Limited interest in these aspects may endanger the continuity of the network in the future especially when new members join in with different expectations.

It has been recommended that there should be continuous field days, farmers days, local workshops as part of awareness campaigns so that farmers can exchange information and experiences. Extension should assist farmers in facilitation, identification, mobilisation and integrations of different types of knowledge. There's also a need for monitoring and evaluation of farmers participation in development work and to analyse the impact of its interaction of farmers in development.

Declaration

I declare that the dissertation hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo for the degree Master in Agricultural Extension has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at any other University that is my own work in design and in execution and that all materials untainted therein has been duly acknowledged.

Signed.....

Maredi Nkhakha Maria

Date.....

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents:

Lesetja David Maredi and Emma Ngoanaphalama Maredi

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CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

According to Cameroon (1994) sharing is one of the most demanding requirements in development work, yet it is the most essential common denominator developed by the poor in order to provide for each other and live under diverse conditions. It requires a willingness to have an open mind and to have confidence in one's own work to expose it to others. It involves offering advice, helping farmers analyse their problems and identify opportunities, supporting group formation and facilitating collective action.

One of the ways in which farmers can share information is the platform. **Introduction**

A platform is a physical location or a social process where farmers and mostly farmer's group leaders meet for sharing information. It can be based on a local network of stakeholders or peers that come together to develop ideas, to share experimental learning and to make use of the world through communication (Garforth & Lawrence: 1997).

Garforth & Lawrence (1997) also identified several functions of the platforms as follows;

- Helping farmers to create a new quality of human cooperation by focusing on the mind rather than on matter;
- Enhancing cooperative thinking, creativity and dialogue; and
- Improving collective learning and quality of work.

- Networking enables farmer's leaders to exchange information and experience and consequently enhance learning among members.

The success of small holder farmers relies on their local networks with one another and their self- initiated innovation to improve and adapt their practices in the light of changing circumstances within the context in which they function, often marginal and risk prone environments (Scoones & Thompson, 1994).

Locally generated knowledge is disseminated through farmer-to-farmer interaction usually involving farmer's leaders in a platform. The network is seemingly made up of more or less homogenous resource poor group leaders, sharing their skills, knowledge and inputs to ensure their ability to produce and to survive. However, in some instances the members of these networks are not homogenous group leaders but often come from diverse backgrounds having access to various resources (Maseko & Chonya-Habasonda, 2004).

Smallholder farmers from Ga-Mothiba built innovative knowledge and experiences, which they are presently using in their villages to improve their farming activities. They have been practicing and using different ideas and experiences based on agricultural production, which by now has been successful. Therefore they need to network to share their diverse indigenous knowledge and facilitate a joint learning. Rolling (1990) noted that emphasis on network might help shift attention on farmers' social learning and building platform for sustainable natural resource management.

2. Problem Statement

Smallholder farmers are the holders of experiences and knowledge, which can improve the sustainability of agriculture (Kirsten, 2003). This is possible if farmer's group leaders from different backgrounds can share their experiences about what they are doing in their respective villages.

In Ga-Mothiba community, several interest groups are involved in different activities which may overlap each other e.g. farming, cultural groups and youth development. These interest groups hardly share their experiences with regard to what each group contributes in the community.

Most groups hardly sustain themselves because no one knows about them in the community, no one knows about their problems. They all try to survive to bring development in the community. Development does not only involve agriculture or a specific social aspect alone but a combination of all activities that can lead a community to change and sustain itself.

Farmer's group leaders should be encouraged and assisted to network and build their own platform to be able to share their experiences. In a platform farmers will be able to create space for joint learning and innovation.

3. Objectives of the study

3.1 The overall Objective of the study

The overall objective of the study was to analyse the factors facilitating local farmer's groups' networks in rural communities.

3.2. The specific objectives of the study

- 1) To identify different local groups and local stakeholders in Ga – Mothiba
- 2) To describe the activities of local groups
- 3) To identify the factors that support the emergence of networking activities among different groups.
- 4) To explore opportunities to enhance networking activities to impact on a broader range of outcomes

4. Research questions

- 1) What are the existing local groups and local stakeholders in Ga – Mothiba village?
- 2) What are the activities of local groups?
- 3) What are the factors that support the emergence of networking activities among different groups?
- 4) What are the opportunities that enhance networking activities?

5. Significance of the study

Within the current South African decentralisation process and the support to development forum, such a study will provide key insights on social transformation forces in the community with the emergence of people driven processes of social innovation.

On the other hand, several initiatives in Limpopo supported networks through Local Organisational Development activities and it would be of interest to see how a locally rooted network can integrate other levels – provincial, national and international

6. Limitation of the study

Since the study was conducted in one village of the district where there is an emergence of networking forum, the findings of the study will not be generalised for the whole of Capricorn District and Limpopo province as a whole.

7. Expected outputs

The study will produce a document containing the following:

1. A process on how to identify different farmers groups and stakeholders
2. Activities taking place in local groups in Ga-Mothiba
3. Factors facilitating local farmers groups networks
4. Opportunities and benefits of networking

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Garfoth & Lawrence (1997) extension involves the conscious provision of information and communication support to rural users of renewable natural resources. It involves offering advice, helping farmers analyze their problems and identify opportunities, supporting group formation and facilitating collective action.

The emphasis of this chapter is to identify the relevant literature related to networking of farmers groups for sharing of information and experiences. It further outlines the benefit of networking. The main focus is on the internal barriers of farmers' networks with respect to management of a group and knowledge sharing.

2.2. SMALL-SCALE FARMERS IN AGRICULTURE

Understanding the nature of agriculture in rural areas is the fundamental of understanding development, as it remains the key activity in rural areas (Bebbington *et al*, 1996). In South Africa Smallholder farmers are resource poor and they are historically disadvantaged (Kirsten, 2003). They were considered as subsistence-minded and they were restricted by such factors as tradition, fatalism, lack of innovation and lack of deferred gratification. However in the tradition of agriculture, they are considered as poor and insufficient (FAO, 2002).

Small-scale farm households, and the rural societies they belong to, usually consider agriculture as a way of life rather than as an ordinary occupation (Thanwa, 2001). Since small-scale farmers are relatively poor, they benefit very much from farmers' groups and networks, by which they can help each other through the exchange of knowledge and experiences. Farmers' groups can also increase the bargaining power of small-scale farmers in the purchase of inputs and marketing of outputs (Mattee et al, 2003).

Small holder agriculture helps to restore or maintain a common focus on the domestic function, concentrating on time and effort, right and duties of the household members so that the density and significance of shared, cooperative activities are increased (Netting: 1993).

2. 3. FARMER'S KNOWLEDGE AS A COMMODITY

According to Hanyani-Mlambo (1994) farmers are automatically major stakeholders in sustainable development. They are the holders of the rich and diverse indigenous knowledge that is critical for sustained agricultural production. They adopt all sources of indigenous knowledge.

Warren et al (1995) and Motselebane (2004) define indigenous knowledge as the knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. It is by nature reputed to be locally bound, that is the knowledge that exists within a community. Chaminuka et al (2004) emphasized the importance of indigenous knowledge in rural development. It forms the base for the society upon which communication and decision making is facilitated

In comparison, rural knowledge is accumulated, embedded and imported knowledge among local actors about specific technologies, processes and markets (Munnich *et al*, 2002). Rural knowledge is inclusive of both the indigenous knowledge and the conventional modern knowledge that exists among communities in rural areas. In

emphasising the importance of rural knowledge Motselebane (2004) noted that the existence of rural knowledge has potential to give rise to innovative ideas, which are useful for community development. However where innovative ideas exist it is also useful to share them with others as a way of empowering one another.

2.4. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Knowledge highly depends on people, who actually create, share and use it. Knowledge sharing is only possible when people can share the knowledge they have and build on to others. It is basically the act of making knowledge available to others within a group (Shiruma, 2004). Knowledge management specialists argue that knowledge sharing between individuals is a process by which knowledge that is held by individuals is converted into a form that is understood, absorbed and used by others (Fairbairn & Fultorn, 2000). Farmers sharing or exchange are a complex event during which mutual interaction allow guest farmers to think freely, at the same time, share thoughts with fellow farmers and to reflect on reality (FAO, 2000).

2.5 GROUP DYNAMICS IN SMALL-SCALE FARMERS

According to Ringer (2002) a group is a collection of people who interact with one another; accept rights and obligations as members and who share a common identity. For the collection of people to be defined as a group, members should interact with one another, be socially attractive to each other, share goals and have a shared identity which distinguishes them from other groups. Human beings exhibit several characteristic behavior patterns in groups. When these group patterns are combined with a goal of individual development several topics and issues emerge. Sometimes individuals go on solo journeys and solo learning expectations but by and large many experiences take place in a group. Therefore the nature of a group varies with one another.

2.5.1 Group Formation

Many different players start groups for a number of reasons in a wider community. The formation of interest groups, networking and the group dynamics process are seen as important elements of farmer trainer training approach to achieve sustainability and to generate the critical mass for the demand and supply of services required by the individual farmers (Hanyani-Mlambo & Hembinck, 1996).

With no encouragement from a formal structure, individuals may meet spontaneously and discuss, eventually agreeing to form a group. These individuals have a common bond or interest that brings them together such as being a farmer. Thus farmers group becomes a new identifiable component of the community. By so doing, farmers create a partial change in the composition and operation of the community. This creates a setting in which actions may be identified and the newly emerging group as new subject; new actor will play a role in the community (Mattee & Lassalle, 1994).

However, sometimes farmers feel that they have whatever it takes to make them successful with such an experience in the community. For that reason farmers develop a negative feeling towards group formation or any other common action. This will make them unable to re-organise themselves in response to the changing situation. Therefore there is a need for external catalysts that brings farmers together as a group that can share and act at its own benefit for the benefit of its members and for the community as a whole (Mattee et al, 2003).

2.5.2 Group Development

Theoreticians assume that groups pass through several phases or stages as they develop just like the human nature. These stages may be longer or shorter for each group or for individual members of the group, but there is a need to experience them. Stage models of group development theorize that groups move from one stage to the next in a predictable sequential fashion. There seems to be no standard pattern of group development (Tuckman, 1965).

Botha & Stevens (2003) noted that guiding a group successfully through development stages requires several skills and that the dynamics of group development must be facilitated in order to get synergy between cooperation and combined action of group.

The number and names of the stages vary among theorists. Many models however highlight certain interpersonal outcomes that must be achieved in many groups that exist for a prolonged period (Botha & Stevens, 2003).

Tuckman & Jensen (1977, pp 419- 427) outlines the five popular classical stages.

The first stage

This stage is known as the orientation stage. At this stage members of the group become orientated towards one another. Personal relations are characterized by dependency. During this stage the group is determining membership and what are acceptable group behaviors.

Second stage

The second stage is called the storming stage. At this stage conflict within a group is a key to growth and some solution is sought to improve the group environment. Members accept the existence of the group but there is resistance to the constraints that the group imposes on individuality. As the group members attempt to organize for the task, conflict

inevitably results in their personal relations. Individuals have to bend and mold their feelings, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs to suit the group organization.

The third stage

The stage is known as the norming. At this stage norms and roles that develop regulate behaviour and the group achieve greater unity. Members in a group feel relief, acceptance, mutual respect and team cohesion. This increases cohesiveness and reflects the development of group norms, which also stabilise and harmonise the dynamic of the group. Members of the group feel that they resolve differences and clarifying the mission and roles.

The fourth stage

At this stage, the group reaches a point at which they can perform as a unit to achieve a desired goal. Members feel satisfaction with progress and understand each other's strength and weaknesses. It is marked by interdependence in personal relation and problem solving in realm of task functions, and the group is in general focused on its purpose for establishment. Members are both highly task oriented and highly people oriented. There is unity: group identity is complete, group morale is high, and group loyalty is intense. The task function becomes genuine problem solving, leading toward optimal solutions and optimum group development.

Tuckman's final stage, adjourning, involves the termination of task behaviors and disengagement from relationships. A planned conclusion usually includes recognition for participation and achievement and an opportunity for members to say personal goodbyes. Concluding a group can create some apprehension in effect, a minor crisis. The termination of the group is a regressive movement from giving up control to giving up inclusion in the group. The most effective interventions in this stage are those that facilitate task termination and the disengagement process.

Group Cohesion

According to Heyer *et al* (1999) group cohesion is a dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency of a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and for the satisfaction of the member affective needs. They observed that even if group may fall under several stages there should be a bond or a unity within a group.

Barneister *et al* (2000) defines a cohesive group as a group having a collective identity, sense of shared purpose and structured pattern of purpose. It is a set of forces that is acting on members of a group. It also depends on the characteristics of individual members.

Heyer *et al* (1999) notes that groups that stick together are more likely to be successful in terms of their performance. The author identified socialization and task orientation as a factor that will influence group cohesion.

Social cohesion refers to the nature and quality of the emotional bonds of friendship, liking, caring, and closeness among group members. A group displays high social cohesion to the extent that its members like each other, prefer to spend their social time together, enjoy each other's company, and feel emotionally close to one another (Steward, 1996).

Task cohesion refers to the shared commitment among members to achieving a goal that requires the collective efforts of the group. A group with high task cohesion is composed

of members who share a common goal and who are motivated to coordinate their efforts as a team to achieve that goal (Steward, 1996).

During the group performance task cohesion is the one that is needed most because it requires a high level of coordination, communication and performance monitoring of group performance. Therefore task cohesion enhances group performance (Barneister *et al*, 2000).

Barneister *et al* (2000) identified the following factors that influence group cohesion: attitudes, demography, lifestyle member's context, attraction and acceptability.

2.6. SUCCESSFUL GROUPS

Groups that function well share a number of identifiable characteristics, confident leadership, a sense of cooperation and good communication. When a group has a strong sense of cooperation its members recognise the importance of central issues for the group and the necessity to work with others to achieve their desired objectives (Forsyth, 1990).

This desire for cooperation prompts members to play their parts and the trust and confidence to ensure the collaboration of others (Rondot & Collion, 2001). Good communication is a pillar for building this sense of cooperation. It also ensures that participants are able to express views and concerns and is likely to withdraw from the group a sense of not being able to contribute or influence the direction to work (Rolling & Wagenmaker, 1998).

Effective groups pay attention to both task and the process on how the group has to do and on how the group function and maintain its relationships. Groups often neglect their process issues, commonly in order to concentrate on their task. However, both task and process will suffer if they split from each other. For that matter they go hand in hand for the success of the effective group (Carney, 1996).

Mattee & Lassalle (1994) also observed that to be able to form effective groups, it is necessary that the dynamics of development must be facilitated well in order to get synergy between cooperation and combined action of group members and several skills are needed to successfully guide a group through these stages.

2.7. FARMERS GROUPS

The principal of farmers groups is an avenue through which farmers can improve themselves in sharing farming experiences, problems and solutions (Sebastian, 2001). Viable farmers groups require farmers who see that they have something in common, their own identification of problems or potentialities, but also belief that these common problems or potentialities can become the binding force of the group. It also requires a favourable atmosphere or a platform in order to establish communication between the initiators or actors (Mattee & Lassalle, 1994).

Farmers groups also play a major role in development because it makes it easier to reach farmers as it brings them together. It enables farmers to work together for a collective interest and needs (Bingen *et al*, 1995).

A group is meant to facilitate access to specific services that address a common felt need. For example, some groups have been formed for purposes of market access, others for managing organized irrigation systems, securing access to land and some for the purpose of obtaining technical support from government or private service providers (Hanyani-Mlambo & Heminck, 1996)

Van der Ban and Hawkins (1996) also indicate that farmers groups help in formulating local forums and gathering that makes it easier for trainers to reach other members at a go. And not only helping the trainer but also make farmers to have a collective voice and

if need be, as a pressure group on issues of common interest e.g. getting easy access to innovations and technique of common interest.

2.7.1 Farmers' needs in a group

Different people meet different needs in a group. The needs that gave rise to the group in the first instance may well be different from the needs the group needs later. Farmers have different types of needs which include those felt by an individual farmer: access to and management of information and knowledge, access to and management of common goods, access to and management of economically oriented services- all of them in order to improve the way production processes contribute to a more sustainable livelihood (Bagchee, 1994).

However, for them to meet some of these needs they usually organise themselves as a local farmers group, which may later coalesce into a local network. But as the farmers needs become more complex the farmers have to adopt other forms of organizations, which are more complex (Mattee & Lassalle, 1994).

In the search for more knowledge, or in the quest to better manage common goods, the farmers may have to organize themselves into an association or trust funds, which would legally allow them to manage these goods collectively (Christoplos, 1996).

2.7.2 Working with groups

Group works are characterised by partners that bring something for sharing and where each builds on the strengths of its partners rather than trying to benefit from others in order to fill their own gap (Mortiss, 1993). Groups can also help farmers to form their own communication links to develop their own interdependent activities and build a social solidarity (Mattee et al, 2003). It can help the extension officer to keep in touch with individuals and the community as a whole.

There are many factors that motivate the formation of groups including an efficient means for communication and transmitting information, sharing information, evaluation and identifying group techniques, improving on- farm and off- farm linkages and the encouragement and empowering of the farmers. Farmers groups provide the ideal organizational structure to work collectively towards change at farm level and to the agricultural system in general (Rolling, 1987).

However, even if the group works effectively, socialisation is another key factor that contributes in a group. It increases the level of communication, the level of commitment within a group and individual progress (Abrew, 2003). When a group can reach a socialisation stage, it will be a time at which an individual accepts the group's norms, values and perspectives and the group adapts to fit the new concerns needs. In most cases group member's reactions to their group at a particular time are based on the value of the membership, commitment to a group and their role in relationship to the group (Botha & Steveson, 2003).

According to Beal et al (1990) the more group members actively participate and work together within a group, the more favourable are their attitude towards the best of the

group members and the greater the feeling of concern for and identifying with the group in future.

2.8 NETWORKING

Cameroon (1994) defines networking as a process resulting from the conscious effort of certain social actors to build relationships with each other in order to enhance sustainable development.

The network is created because of the wish of its members to transcend their limited or isolated level and to make them heard or noticed within the regional society on the basis of proposals or suggestions for development policies. It enables farmers to exchange information and experiences and consequently enhances learning among the members of a given network (Hanyani-Mlambo & Heminck, 1996).

The networks are more or less formalised, more or less durable relational pattern that emerge as a result of purposive efforts. However in order for networking activities to correspond to a mission, the same group must formulate one that they are able to focus on. Networking among people can provide the setting for essential communication process (Hanyani-Mlambo & Heminck, 1996).

Mattee *et al* (2003) points that a network is seemingly made up of more or less homogenous resource poor group leaders, sharing their skills, knowledge, inputs, etc to ensure their ability to produce and to survive. However, Cameroon (1994) urged that in some instances the members of these networks are not homogenous group leaders but often come from diverse backgrounds having access to various resources. The network is made of both homogenous and heterogeneous people depending on the goal and objectives of a group.

Mattee & Lassalle (1994) supported by Cameroon (1994) pointed out that the existence of a network allows the emergence of a group from which it is formed or composed. It is usually a feedback by group that emerge because of it.

Networking provides a space where the group can reflect on itself and define its own references (Hanyani-Mlambo, 1994). At the same time the concept of network is based on communication exchanges between and among the members. As a poly-centered structure, it is well adapted to limited logistical resources because it is not dependent upon global decisions and actions (Mattee et al, 2003).

Again it also represents communities' ideas, a space for like-minded people to interact on the basis of a common interest, mutual trust and anticipated concern. It helps to create a fundamentally new quality to human co-operation by focusing on mind rather than matter. It enhances a co-operative thinking, creativity and dialogue (Engels, 1995).

The added value of networking is strongly linked to the development of the ideas, to share experiential learning and to making sense of the world through communication. Network is very much carried by the wish to jointly search for the new ways of understanding and intervening in complex development situations (Mattee *et al*, 2003).

Rittman (2004) further observed that the down side of having a strong network is that farmers may rely too heavily on the network support rather than building their own solidarity in their groups.

2.8.1 Networking of farmers groups

Farmers forum are defined as local groups of rural producers coming together to form a forum, based on the principle of free membership, to pursue specific common interests of their members developing technical and economic activities that benefit their members and maintaining relations with partners operating in their economic and institutional environment (Gubblels,1992).

Strong farmers' forum can be among the most effective mechanisms for achieving accountability at local levels .However, their effectiveness in achieving this depends on their internal strength and cohesion, a clear set of objectives which normally include agricultural and economic activities, and a favourable external environment (Alex, 2003).

Collaboration and networking enable farmers to extend their knowledge and experiences, thereby improving their outreach abilities in order to serve as a target group and individual beneficiaries as possible. This enables the extension officer to reach farmers at a go and to identify farmer's problems easily (Mattee & Lassalle, 1994).

Farmer's networks can be strengthened through meetings, workshops and field visits on selected local farms and group discussions, which focus on common problems. Such networks can act as a platform for participants to discuss and share their experience as well as enhancing the interaction of actors within the technology development and dissemination system (Alex, 2003).

Stevens & Terblanche (2005) further observed that such platforms can also provide participants with firsthand experience which consist of broaden perspectives as a foundation for the new learning and which consolidate the existing knowledge, skills and attitude to create enthusiasm.

The informal network usually emerges from mutual accommodation and cooperation among and within various farmers groups. The generation or development of knowledge and resources through regular interaction or informal contacts among different actors characterizes the networks (Hanyani-Mlambo, 1994).

The main difference between informal networks and formal linkages lies in the initiatives and efforts of different organisations, individuals and local communities to create and maintain them. Informal networks can sometimes be based on the objectives of a reciprocal exchange of information and favours; again, the emphasis is on one-to-one network effort as opposed to the organisational culture that characterises most formal linkages (Oerlesa & Assouline, 2001).

2.8.2 FACTORS THAT LEAD TO NETWORKING OF FARMERS GROUPS

There are various factors that lead to the formation of networks. The network seems to be formed to address a variety of issues.

FAO (1991) outlined the following factors that facilitates networking

- handling credit delivery and payment to or from groups ,

- facilitating information exchange between members groups,
- setting disputes within member groups or between members groups or collective purchase of inputs,
- bulk marketing and
- To get support linkages from different stakeholders collectively.

Cameroon (1994, pp: 140) also outlined the following factors that lead to networking:

(I) The first includes upgrade of collective group performance which encourage the networkers to place a great deal of emphasis on documenting and sharing ideas, experiences and knowledge as are deemed relevant to the purpose of the network. Therefore farmers will be able to document and share ideas, experiences from their colleagues. Its aim is improving collective learning and the quality of farmers work.

(ii) Second it involves the wish to upstream analysis and action. It takes on the relevance or efficiency of the field operations themselves within the prevailing social and political context in the country or region. It goes beyond the relevance consequences of the problem at hand to address its source. It emphasizes shared diagnosis, reflection, classification and coordination. Its main concern is achieving a better understanding of complex development situation.

(iii) Finally, networking lead to up shifting, this emphasizes a need for articulating and advocating alternative developments. It leads networkers to engage in communication activities to reach a broader public.

Roling (1998) indicates that networks are also designed and operated to break through relative isolation and facilitate process among actors within the development arena, in order to jointly achieve a more comprehensive and innovative understanding of complex development situation. Hanyani-Mlambo (1994) also noted that the emphasis on networking might help shift attention in extension work to facilitation, social learning and building a platform for a sustainable agriculture and natural resource management.

From the factors that motivates the small-scale farmers network, FAO (1991) & Cameroon (1994) noted that where there are motivation of networking there are also benefits and challenges that networking is faced with. The following benefits and challenges of networking have been identified by Cameroon (1994) & FAO (1991):

Benefits of Networking

- Information exchange

Network facilitates the exchange of information, skills, knowledge, experiences, and materials through meetings, workshops publications and cooperative programmes. This increases the overall competencies of individual or group members.

- Less Duplication of work

Networking facilitates the exchange of information and coordination which reduces the unnecessary duplication of work and effort, thus facilitating faster progress and a wider overall impact.

- Linkages

Network can effectively link peoples of different levels, disciplines and backgrounds for those who would not otherwise have an opportunity to interact.

- Awareness

Network can create awareness for members that may have similar concern and development problems.

- Critical Mass

Network can provide the critical mass needed for local, national or international advocacy, action and policy.

- Complex problem

Network can help address complex development problems and issues that seem overwhelming to those at the village.

- Cooperation

Network can bring together funding and technical cooperation agencies with those in need of resource and support.

- Peer support

Network can provide members with a source of encouragement, motivation and professional recognition. This can happen particularly to those who are not well known to be recognized by normal hierarchies of government, education and international research.

CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS THAT NETWORK FACE

- Lack of clear objective

Without specific objectives, network finds it difficult to develop dynamic, monitorable programmes with distinct targets that can be met and free of the manipulation of dominant individuals.

- Membership disparity

Large, resource rich agencies and institutions with well- educated, confident staff may dominate smaller organisations; members who are closer to farmer reality may be less well heard than international staff.

- Lack of resources

Network often suffer from lack of funds for network activities and coordination. Where network do have funds, considerable tension can be generated through the way funds are administered and dispersed.

- Misinformation

While network can disseminate valuable information, some information being shared may be of dubious reliability.

2.8.3. Network Development

Like most organizations, farmer networks depend on active, energetic members and shared goals. While each network may have specific needs, the most effective ones tend to share some features (Anderson & Feder, 2003). A shared purpose is the glue that adhere most networks. It inspires the group and gives it energy. A good planning also plays a major role in development of network. Effective networks are also characterized

by people with shared interests coming together to talk about their goals for a network, their plans for the community, and strategies for working together. Thereafter members can develop a list of common values, aspirations, and purposes (Rittman, 2004).

- **Core group**

According to Rittman (2004) the size of networks can vary widely but it usually takes the momentum of four or more people to start and maintain a viable one. Most networks have one or two coordinators who do on-the-ground management tasks: keeping members informed of events or acting as contact persons. Additional core members provide leadership through event planning, decision making, or recruiting new members.

Participation needs to be flexible, allowing other members to participate at the level most comfortable for them, whether that's attending an occasional event or committing major time and effort to helping organize a large public gathering. Networks also usually develop a member roster to encourage people to contact each other between visits (FAO, 1992).

- **Meetings**

How often a network meets depends on the group's needs, how that fits with the round of seasonal work on members' farms, and the distances members need to travel to get together. Experienced networkers stress the importance of engineering meetings carefully. For example, when planning events and meetings, what outside commitments do participants have, what are their on- or off-farm work schedules, what transportation is

needed for travelling. This can mean the difference between a successful network and one that doesn't quite get off the ground (Rittman, 2004).

- Maintaining a lively network

Sharing of responsibilities maintain a lively network. Developing these skills is an important part of farmer-to-farmer networking across a broad base. In this way, members gain a sense of belonging and the skills necessary for continuing the network, should key leaders step down (Arnaiz *et al*, 1995).

Equity is another factor that contributes toward the maintenance of a lively network. Most networks have members who are natural talkers and those who are quieter. Learning to facilitate discussions is a solid empowerment skill for everyone who values collaborating with others (FAO, 1991).

Bryceson (2000) warns against too much formality such as defining group norms, network structure as these may destroy spontaneity. Informality and flexibility are important for networkers. Most successful networks have an informal, flexible atmosphere that feels spontaneous, creative and stimulating to its participants.

2.8.4 Networking through Farmer-to-Farmer

Locally generated knowledge can be disseminated through farmer-to-farmer interaction usually involving farmer's group leaders in a platform. Farmer-to-Farmer is an informal system by which individual farmers in a community spread information and practices to their fellow farmers (Kruger: 1995). Theologians assume that each person has a valuable

knowledge and experience to contribute. Therefore farmer –to-farmer is thriving as a way in which farmers pool ideas, exchange perspectives and learn from each other (Rittmann, 2004).

Rogers (1995) noted that outsiders often fail to appreciate the problems that most farmers in villages face. But for the people who live together, who understand each other's culture and language, it is easy to exchange information, which helps to build confidence and trust. He concluded that farmers easily adopt innovation when they learn it from their fellow farmers.

The empowerment of the community brings about rapid change when knowledge is shown to lead to a significant economic benefit .Farmers know the needs and resources of their community and can play an active role in finding better ways of meeting these needs (Maseko & Chonya-Habasonda,2005).

Zelaya (1997) and Rogers (1995) point out that the benefits of farmer to farmer exchange includes, strengthening the autonomy of local farmers groups and to create a network support, promoting inter-personal relationships and collaboration, building capacity of local communities to plan for their future and manage their resources. They concluded that these benefits will promote sustainable development and encourages use of indigenous knowledge leading to successful innovation and close interaction among communities.

2.9 Group formation in Limpopo Province

The small farms are located mostly in the former homelands area and they cover approximately 30% of the provincial land surface area. Farming under the small holder system is characterized by low level of production technology and small size of farm

approximately 1.5 hectares per farmer with production primarily for subsistence and marketable surplus (LDA, 2006).

The new philosophy of the strategic support to agricultural sector by the department is participatory and demand led\driven (LDA, 2006). This philosophy is supported by four key service delivery approaches namely:

- Municipal focus
- Commodity based
- Value chain analysis
- Project based

Therefore formation of groups was done using the commodity based approach. The commodity based approach allows farmers to organize themselves in groups based on their production commodity and the very same applies to extension officers.

One of the benefits of commodity based groups is that it allows farmers to work collectively during bulk marketing more especially in areas around Sekhukhune District where there is high production of sorghum and at Vhembe District where there is high production of maize seeds. The other benefit is through getting support linkages from different stakeholders collectively (LDA 2006\2007).

The challenge on other groups more especially at irrigation schemes is that group cohesion is still a problem because with these new systems of floppy irrigation, farmers are supposed to form a cooperative and also to share land equally and to agree on

production of new crops seasonally. Commodity based group formation within the province is seen as a successful approach to access farmers and measure development and sustainability (LDA, 2006\2007).

Summary

Many different players form a group for a number of reasons. Farmers form groups to fulfil an identified local need which initiate them. A group is formed by a number of individuals with common interests to facilitate access to specific services that address a common felt need.

A groups act as an avenue in which farmers come together to improve themselves through knowledge sharing and helping one another with problems that they are faced with. They also play an important role in development because it makes it easy for the farmers to be heard.

However, their effectiveness in achieving this depends on their internal strength and cohesion, a clear set of objectives which normally include agricultural and economic activities, and a favorable external environment. Their existence can both encourage and at times enforce greater accountability of service providers.

Knowledge and experience that is gained by the individual group is not enough for the farmers. Farmers need to network with other farmers with common interests. A network is created because of the wish of its members to transcend their limited or isolated level

and to make them to be heard or noticed. It allows members to exchange information and experiences and consequently enhance learning among the members. It also creates an essential communication process.

There are various factors that facilitate the formation of networking which includes; facilitation of group formation on those who are working individually, collective purchase of inputs, credit delivery or payment to or from groups, also support linkages from other stakeholder's lack of resources, skills and experiences on farming.

Other factors that leads to networking includes upgrade of collective group performance which encourage the networkers to place a great deal of emphasis on documenting and sharing ideas, experiences and knowledge as are deemed relevant to the purpose of the network. Upstream analysis and action where it involves the relevance or efficiency of the field operations themselves within the prevailing social and political context in the country or region and upshifting which emphasizes a need for articulating and advocating alternative developments.

Networking allows members to exchange information and experiences and consequently enhance learning among the members. It also creates an essential communication process which allows other stakeholders to work with farmers collectively.

The networks are more or less formalized, more or less durable relational patterns that emerge as a result of purposive efforts. However in order for networking activities to

correspond to a mission, the same group must formulate one that they are able to focus on. Networking can also be done in many ways. Firstly through a platform which facilitates the establishment and strengthening of linkages among various actors in the local stakeholders. It entails more coordinated intervention of activities such as joint meeting, field visits and field days. By combining the activities it also helps local stakeholders to have a common voice.

Secondly farmer's network is through farmer-to-farmers linkage, which is an informal system, in which individual farmers spread information and practices to their fellow farmers through field visits, meetings and workshops.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

A local network is not achieved simply by people coming together with no reason. But a group of people that comes together with the same concern and common interest especially on development. Networking forum is linked with various activities that are performed by the farmers and more basically activities that individual groups experienced on their fields. Some of these activities are challenging which at the end groups are enabled to progress.

This chapter reflects on the methodology used to identify the existing farmers groups and their activities that take place in their respective groups. It further discusses the procedure that is used to achieve the specific objectives of the research study which is to analyze the factors that facilitates local farmers groups networks

FIG 1: Map showing description of study area

People are engaged in rain fed farming and traditional livestock keeping activities. Nevertheless, the improvement of the sustainability of the rural livelihood of the community could be managed by improvement of the rain fed farming practices.

Most of the community benefits from traditional systems of the land tenure. The location is at the limit between communal land and commercial farms that makes it challenging for land redistribution boarding communal lands. Several commercial farms have been allocated to various groups belonging to the community. Redistribution initiatives were done in consultation with traditional authority that facilitated the emergence of groups to benefit local communities.

3.3. Determination of the process

Action research process

Initially CRCE had an opportunity to work with one group in the community (Leolo project). The relationship had been concretised with the community through that group. A Participatory Rural Appraisal has been done in collaboration with Post Graduate Students who conducted action research processes in the area to determine what the resources were and activities available in the community. This research will be an action reflection process. Firstly, the researcher will reflect on the learning and experiences on farmer's leader's platform at the regional level (East and Southern Africa) to better understand the current context of networking among farmers.

Secondly the researcher followed the process of: Institutional introduction, attending community meetings and identification of existing groups in the community and their activities as well as supporting interested members who wanted to start groups in their area. Thereafter the focus group discussion and individual group discussions were organised for collection of data.

3.4. Data collection

Qualitative data was used whereby data was in the form of words, Observations and transcripts. With the qualitative data the researcher usually gathers specific information on many cases e.g. respondents and subjects (Neuman: 1997).

The Primary Data

The primary collection of data was done in two ways:

- First primary data
- Second primary data

The researcher attended meetings with the community and conducted the in-depth interviews with community leaders as key informants using the manual note taking to gather the in-depth information on local groups existing in the community. Thereafter the researcher grouped the groups with common interest.

Secondly, the groups were visited to identify the group leaders and the activities taking place in various groups and organize discussions with selected group of individuals to gain information about their views on networking by using a focus group interview. Focus group involves organized discussions with selected groups of individuals to gain information about views and experiences on a specific topic (Morgan, 1988). It is particularly suited for obtaining perspectives about the same topic. Powell *et al* (1996) define a focus group as a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the

research. Focus groups however rely on interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher (Morgan, 1997). Hence the key characteristic, which distinguishes focus groups, is the insight and data produced by the interaction between participants.

- The first primary data

The first primary data was collected from eight focus group discussions using the questioning route based on the factors that facilitate networking using the STEEP (Social, Technical, Economic, Ecological and Political) Analysis.

STEEP Analysis provides concentrated information of everyday life. It creates a snapshot of today's socio-political reality and existing trends. It also helps to know what is going on at the present moments that assist in visualising the need, role, identities and relationships between the communities (Jacobsen, 2003). This constitutes the context in which the community lives

Focus group sometimes may discourage certain people from participating for example those who have communication problems. After the focus group interviews, the researcher verified the responses by doing an in-depth interview with individuals from the group using a questionnaire.

- The Second Primary data

The second primary data was collected during the in-depth interviews individually from the whole groups using a questionnaire. Questionnaires based on issues \ themes that were discussed from different focussed groups.

Table 1: Sampling size and distribution by groups and genders

Sampling size was drawn from all members from groups as indicated below.

Name of a group	Male	Female	Total
Bakone	6	5	11
Leolo	6	7	13
Kodumela	-	9	9
Swaranang	7	8	15
Melkboom	9	8	17
Makobo	7	5	12
Rangmo	7	3	10
Mothiba livestock farmers	5	11	16
TOTAL	47	56	103

The Secondary Data

The secondary Data was obtained from different sources, the journals, reports from Department of Agriculture and other sources.

3.5. Data Analysis

The research was qualitative, therefore data was organised into different themes based on the objective of the study using a content analysis whereby the systematic analysis process was followed.

Weber (1990) defines content analysis as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing words of text into fewer content categories based on a given study, whereas Berelson (1992) defines it as an approach of empirical, methodological analysis of texts within their context of communication. It enables researchers to sift through large volume of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion.

Systematic analysis procedure is where the researcher will start analysing data immediately during the focus group interview by taking notes at the key points, themes and quotes. Furthermore the researcher constructed typology from the findings of the interview as to analyse the overall data.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of the study according to the objectives. It discusses different groups and their activities and it further outlines the factors that facilitate local groups of farmers to network and how these groups benefit from the local network.

4.2. IDENTIFICATION OF LOCAL FARMERS GROUPS

In rural areas, formations of groups are done in connection with the tribal authority. The key informants from the tribal authority were used to identify the local groups existing in the village. The groups were grouped according to their activities and their interests. The following eight groups were identified:

- Bakone youth Development Organisation,
- Leolo farmers group
- Kodumela Farmers group
- Swaranang Age club
- Melkboom Farmers group
- Makobo farmers group
- Rangmo project,
- Mothiba livestock farmers.

4.3. THE FORMATION OF GROUPS AND ACTIVITIES

The formation of groups and their activities were mainly based on the interest, origin and the objectives that they wanted to attain.

4.3.1. Bakone Youth Development Organisation

- Group establishment

Bakone youth development organisation is a local group that was initiated by youths of Ga-Mothiba in 2003. It consists of seven youth members. The project is located at Ga-

Mothiba rural community village at a place called Melkboomfontein. They already have the permission to occupy land (PTO). The project activity is to produce broiler chicken.

Since the community depends much on subsistence farming, the project pilots the self-reliant broiler poultry in the community. Its focus is on youth employment and encouraging youth members to participate in agricultural business.

- *Group functions and achievements*

Apart from production of broilers, the group also expressed interest in implementing agroforestry practices in both their proposed poultry project and community park. As part of the poultry project, they would also like to include cultivation of variety of vegetables as well as production of goods from indigenous trees and herbs. They are also interested in creating a community park using indigenous trees and shrubs. The community park would be the site of the proposed youth centre where young people may find assistance and support for a variety of issues plaguing today's youth in Ga-Mothiba.

4.3.2. Leolo Farmers Group

- Group establishment

Leolo project started in the year 2002 after a long process initiated by seventeen members who had no farming experience. Meetings were held with members of Mathibaskraal community who were interested in farming and enlisting of names of interested members in the community. Members of the community who were interested agreed to meet

officially on Tuesdays and Thursdays every week to agree on how they could get access to land to start farming.

- *Group functions and achievements*

The group was formally introduced to the tribal office where they agreed on a permission to occupy the land. In that process members agreed to donate money to help with the facilitation and the implementation of the project. They meet every Tuesday of the week on the land that they've occupied. Throughout the whole process the group was motivated by prospects of self employment, employment of other members in the community, poverty alleviation, avoiding starvation and enhancing food security and job creation.

The main activity that is taking place in the group is farming through cultivation of maize on dry land. They also showed interest in the practice of agroforestry on their field because of soil erosion and run-off water. Leolo farmers group motivated other groups in the community and made strong collaboration with other stakeholders outside the community.

4.3.3. Kodumela Farmers Group

- Group establishment

The Kodumela Farmer group was established in 2005. The group consists of women only. All members shared a common interest in farming to improve their livelihood. The idea of forming interest groups was initiated by the women farmers who used to work on

commercial farms. The formation of a group was motivated by the networking forum of farmers within the community.

- Group functions and achievements

Since the group was formed after the networking forum, the group received ideas from the forum. The local forum assisted the group to get Permission to occupy land from the tribal authority. The main activity that the group performs is cultivation of maize on dry land. The group also showed an interest on the practice of agroforestry in the community for development.

Although the group was considered successful; there are still some issues that needed to be improved. Since the group is newly established, it still lacks capacity. Another challenge is that group development is new; therefore members are having different interests and vision about the group but some of them are harmonised. The other limitation is that the group depends too much on the support of the forum and this delayed the progress of the group towards self initiation. This was mainly because of the overt interference from other groups.

4.3.4. Swaranang Old Age club

- Group establishment

The group was established by pensioners around the village with the main aim of improving their health condition through farming. During the formation, the group had about thirteen members and presently the group consist of about thirty members. Apart

from farming the group also perform various activities such as exercising to upgrade health conditions of pensioners around the village through awareness creation.

Their businesses were purely farming with maize. They had a strong relationship with each other and all had a high desire to enhance their farming. It is noticeable that besides being self-selected, group members had had strong relationships with one another before joining the group. In addition, all the activities at the forming stage were conducted by the group itself without any internal or external support.

- *Group functions and achievements*

The group has selected its own committee to represent them. The group also maintained monthly meetings and weekly meetings. To cover operational expenditures, the group collects a membership fee of R30, 00 monthly. And for the household improvement, the group members initially ran their individual businesses on various farming activities.

4.3.5. Melkboom Farmers

- Group establishment

The Melkboom farmers did not recognize themselves as a formal organization of farmers, but instead cultivated their maize in individual plots in the area known as Melkboom. Melkboom farmers were especially concerned with the large amounts of soil erosion brought about by a general lack of vegetation around their homes. In response to this concern, they chose to apply a variety of agroforestry practices that are designed to slow the run-off water as well as improve the overall aesthetics of their community.

They were mostly interested in planting trees in public areas and along roadsides in order to prevent further soil erosion as well as improve the overall aesthetics of the area. Stabilization of earthwork structures was of particular importance to the people of Melkboom as water availability is a limiting factor. Many households within the Melkboom area have employed the use of home gardens and rely on their home gardens as a supplementary food. Because Melkboom was located between two hills, the use of terraces was also an attractive option in order to reduce the overall flow of water.

- *Group functions and achievements*

Since the problem of soil erosion was addressed individual farmers function as a group that represent the Melkboom farming area. With the problem that they have experienced, they started working with other groups of farmers to address their concern. Selection of the committee was done by farmers themselves. Once they were able to secure Permission to Occupy land; they plan to cultivate maize and other vegetables.

4.3.6. Makobo Farmers group

- Group establishment

Makobo farmers group was established in 2004 by the tribal authority. It consists of twelve members. Makobo farmers were also a group of autonomous farmers who cultivated maize on individual plots of land in the Tamaane area. They decided to organize themselves as a formal group of farmers. They now refer to themselves as the Makobo farmers Group and have begun the process of becoming an official community

organization recognized by the traditional authorities. Once they are able to secure Permission to Occupy land, they plan to cultivate maize and other vegetables and agroforestry practices in their field.

Tamaane farmers were most interested in using micro-catchments as a means of promoting the growth of seedlings especially during the dry winter months. While improved fallows were initially selected as a useful agroforestry intervention, Tamaane farmers decided that they did not have enough land to set aside for cultivation. Instead, they prefer to implement crop rotations along with alley cropping. Live fences were selected as means of preventing wild and domestic animals from entering their plots.

4.3.7. Rangmo Youth Group

- Group establishment

Rangmo project started in 2005 by unemployed youth in Ga-Mothiba. The group consists of eight members. The main activity that is taking place is the production of broiler chickens to generate income and to create job opportunities which will also create sustainable families' livelihood in the poor family in the community and mainstream economic growth in the province.

- Group functions and achievements

The project has already obtained Permission to Occupy Land from the tribal authority. And for the start up of the business, members managed to contribute money to join other forms of organisations as to capacitate one another. They are working together with

Bakone youth development organisation because it has already registered as non profit organisation. A number of training courses have been organised and provided by stakeholders such as the Youth Commission and Department of Agriculture to empower them. The main challenge that the group is facing is participation of members as a whole. This makes it difficult for them to get represented.

The group is busy working on natural resource management through the practice of agro forestry to take care of the environment and ecology in the village. They receive support from various stakeholders such as local University, Department of Agriculture and Department of Water Affairs and Forestry with the implementation of the project.

4.3.8. Mothiba livestock farmers group

- Group establishment

The Mothiba Livestock farmers do not recognise themselves as group of farmers but as individual farmers who come together when there is a need to do so. They work together to support each other, exchange information and knowledge and to develop new ways of improving their livestock management. The group facilitates negotiations and links with different stakeholders which make a strong collective feeling among the members.

- Group function and achievements

Members benefit from working together because this guides and support one another. Members join the group continually. For the group dynamics, the growth has important consequences especially since the members who joined in later, have different motives

and ideas of farming. And for the early members, it is considered as a big challenge to secure the collective feeling and incorporate the new members.

The most difficult challenge that they face is lack of land for grazing which lead to poor production. Another challenge that farmers meet is lack of resources such as water, disease prevalence and infrastructure which motivates these farmers to meet with the community so that they can support one another.

4.4. FACTORS FACILITATING LOCAL NETWORK

Community meeting was organised by the group leaders. The main objective of the meeting was to hold a discussion and assessment of local groups that are available in the village. Local groups expressed an interest in participating in the focus group discussion. Transect walks was used as a tool to assess the natural resources that are available in the village.

A community meeting was arranged whereby results from the transect walk were presented to the community during workshops. The objective was to present a feedback tour of Ga-Mothiba to the community in order to facilitate the discussion of various activities within the community. The community engaged in several discussions covering a variety of factors that emerged from the transect walk. These were the results from the transect walk indicating the status of natural resource in the village.

- **Vegetation**

The results from the transect walk indicated that most of the vegetation areas in Ga-Mothiba were composed of grass species and some alien plants which resulted in poor vegetative cover. However due to extensive human settlement and cultivation; most of indigenous vegetation has been radically transferred to cultivated field.

Large stock farmers practice a free-range system whereby they utilize grazing land as a communal asset. They have full exclusive ownership which made them to neglect management principles. The large number of livestock still presents a greater personal wealth or determines the social status in the village. As a result of non practice of grazing management it results in overgrazing and land degradation.

- **Bush Encroachment**

Overgrazing, uncontrolled utilization of the veld, injudicious burning and mechanical disturbances have been found as the main factors that caused bush encroachment in Ga-Mothiba.

- **Soil**

As a result of poor vegetation, this means that the soil is exposed to action of water and wind. Because of vegetation degradation, it has been found that the soil particles are loosened , washed down the slope of the land .Gully erosion has been found as the main

erosion occurring near the bottom of the slopes because of vegetation on the steep slope , as water running downhill cuts channel deep into the soil.

Group assessed the applicability of natural resource management in Ga-Mothiba and the incorporation of appropriate practices into community initiatives. Practices were identified to be applied to various interventions initiated and designed by each individual group at the community, group or individual level. The objective of these interventions focus on creating sustainable solutions of factors identified in Ga-Mothiba.

Community representatives were asked to identify the key opportunities and constraints pertaining to each factor. These discussions played an important role in assisting the people of Ga-Mothiba in the formation of a common understanding of their village and how they relate to it.

These factors were identified in order to allow the community to evaluate them in their own terms from their own perspective. Developing this common understanding of factors within the community played an essential role in solidifying the foundation upon which the people of Ga-Mothiba can build community vision. Groups were then identified and priority practices that will most be useful and applicable at the project level and in the community.

EMERGENCE OF A DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

The idea of forming interest groups was initiated by the farmers themselves. The aim was to help farmers set up a self directed learning environment within the community.

The community's common interests formed a concern forum of farmers. Existing groups have been strengthened during the process while other informal grouping decided to be recognised as a local group. Therefore one of the prerequisite that farmers thought is to create a platform through which they can act collectively and get their voices heard in decision-making processes. They've organized themselves, to be more effective in managing their natural resources, to expand their access to natural resources, to control and gain access to services and also to lobby and making their voices to be heard.

However, even when organized, farmers may not have the means to leverage the direction of development activities implemented on their behalf. They needed to have some special mechanisms to enable them to have ownership and control of development. Such mechanisms include their participation in the planning and implementation of local development projects and to increase their capacity to make informed choices.

An environmentally concerned platform of focused group's leaders emerged from the transect walk. Beyond their respective activities to be implemented within each respective group, group leaders felt that the platform that they constituted was worth becoming a permanent forum to cross check and exchange information and learning.

This level of co-ordination at the community level became a promising forum where one can either up-shift suggestions and experiences from the groups to the community level to embark into improvement of common infrastructure or to propose adapted bye-laws

that would reach out each household. The platform is aimed at strengthening the communication process enhanced during the current research.

The emergence of a platform became a social innovation around the village. However Ga-Mothiba rural community has yet to be convinced that its platform for management of natural resources can bring a positive change in the community. Each group is very motivated to translate their vision into a concrete transformed environment. Changes occurred in some minds, they now have to occur in the fields to become the expected transformation that both the community members and the support team pursue.

Prior to the formation of the networking forum, the farmers organized various activities to raise awareness about the concept of network. First, an initiation of networking forum was done to provide basic information to interested farmers about forming an interest group. Information provided included: what an interest group is, how it could help farmers, and how it is formed and functions, which is serving as a platform where farmers meet and share the ideas. Secondly it serves communication process which facilitated the process of development within the village through exchange of ideas.

Local network became a common concern which blends action research teams composed of the community representatives, University and the local government representatives. Farmers then became interested in building upon their interests; therefore the environmental platform has emerged from the whole concept of natural resource management.

4.5. OPPORTUNITY TO ENHANCE NETWORKING

Number of opportunity were made available to the Ga-Mothiba community which encouraged and assisted in the sustainability of networking. These opportunities are discussed below:

4.5.1. NETWORK AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

The benefit of the development network is that farmers got the opportunity to network at different levels. It started with farmer's group formation at the grass root level where individual farmers came together to form a group. The key objectives of networking was to develop effective mechanisms to address farmer's information needs in a way that they can understand, while translating their experience into a form suitable for use at other levels. Hence they consider that it is important for them to establish linkages that will help them to exchange information at different levels. Farmers see that there is a need to form various groups to be able to work together for sustainable development.

The formation of groups was done in consultation with the tribal authority which helped them with facilitation. After the formation of groups, they started to link with one another to facilitate the level of communication within the village and also to share their experiences.

From the formation of individual groups, the first level of communication is at the local level, where the different groups share experiences and discusses their activities in a local

networking platform. The diversity of groups and of the situations generates a need for linkages between initiatives and experiences. Opposite to a superstructure with a hierarchical functioning, the Mothiba farmers' forum is a light structure whose activities are focused on flow of information, experiences and learning among the members and towards other groups. Effective tools for facilitating communication at this level are community exchange visits, workshops, and local and national meetings.

The second networking level is at the provincial level where it serves as a source of communication and information exchange. The main focus on the network is to assess the information needs of the communities, finding the information, and offering it in the appropriate format and at the appropriate times to the communities which represent all the districts in the province which is Limpopo Small Farmers Forum (LSAFF).

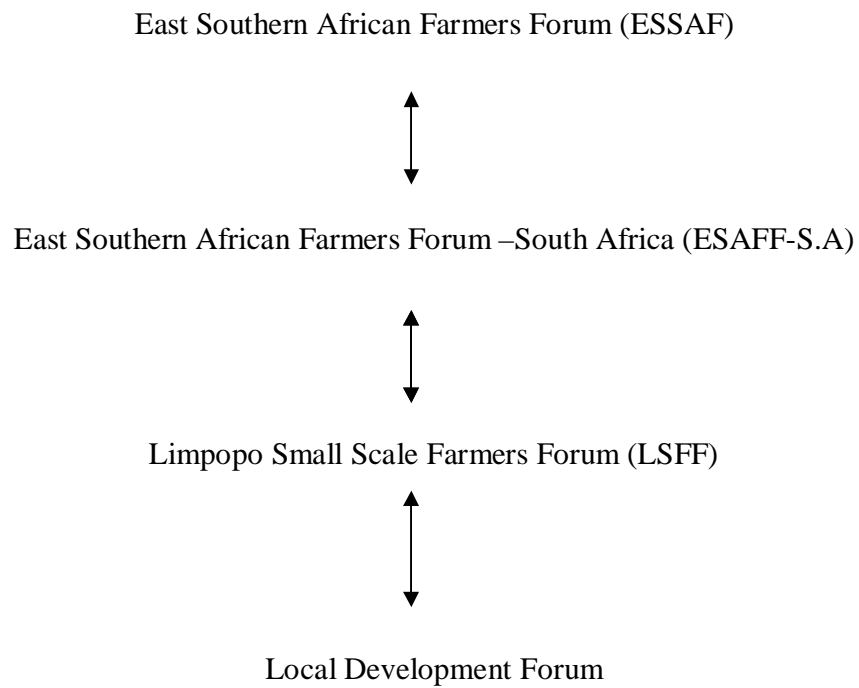
The third level of communication is the national one, which plays a critical role in coordinating and channelling the different types of information coming from, and going to the provinces that represents South Africa which is East and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers Forum – South Africa (ESAFF-SA).

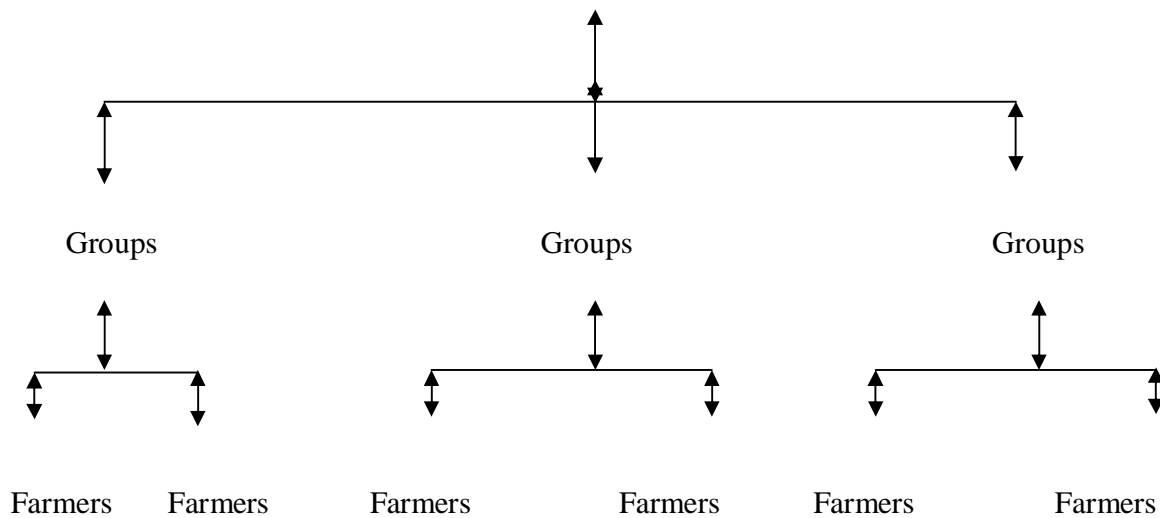
The fourth level of communication is the international one in the sense that all small scale farmers from East and Southern Africa meet to share issues and challenges which is the East and South African Farmers Forum (ESAFF). The main objective of the forum is to increase small-scale farmer's awareness about the potential and capacity to defend needs and interests and advocating small-scale farmer's rightful positions in society and policy

making process. It also mobilizes self help organisations and helping farmers to have a collective voice and act as a unit.

Fig: 1: Different levels of networking and communication by farmers

Level of networking





4.5.2. Improvement of Natural Resource management

Through the development forum, management of natural resources was another achievement. Again, through the exposure to other experiences; farmers had a chance to practice management of water and land through water harvesting to improve rain-fed cropping system. With the support from the Centre for Rural Community Empowerment (CRCE), farmers groups managed to do trenching on their plots to collect and store rain water for farming practices.

A trenching fund was established to hire labour for trenching either mechanically or manually according to the agreements of the respective groups. And each group supervised trenching progress done on their plots. Land and water served as an opportunity because farmers had an exposure and experience of natural resource management.

4.5.3. Access to Resources and services

Farmers now have the ability and capacity to obtain needed resources on favourable terms. They've established new means to get access to various resources through their representatives from the forum which also include other people from the tribal authority.

Local Farmer's forum made farmers to be recognized and to have access to resources. Provision of land was officially done by the tribal authority for the legal settlement to those who did not have land to perform their activities, which encouraged other individual farmers to organize themselves. For the new groups the "PTO" was valid for six months for them to utilise it. And if the land is not utilised within that given period the "PTO" was cancelled.

Having a forum was an opportunity which helped farmers to negotiate with the tribal authority to give farmers permission to extend the 'PTO'. Furthermore the tribal authority supported the forum by providing them with a hall for meetings, training and workshops.

4.5.4. Support linkages

In the same way that farmers organized themselves into a networking forum, they received support from different stakeholders. They managed to bring together local actors within the village. They managed to get opportunity to link with various stakeholders listed below:

I. Tribal Authority

Land is the main source of farming. Tribal authority played an important role in the form of land degradation and management. Farmers received permission to occupy land to perform their activities and to further their development initiatives. Also during functions and meetings they supported them through attendance, participation and allocation of resources such as hall if it was needed.

The impact on networking also resulted from the fact that, in the forum there are also key informants from the tribal office that assist the forum with negotiations that are related to the tribal authority.

II. Government

Government services also played a role in the local development through their staff. Both the Department of Agriculture and Department of Water affairs and forestry were involved in the whole process of development i.e.

- Department of Agriculture

Local extension officer has made significant contribution in workshops, training and meetings through offering technical advice. Furthermore fencing was done for infrastructure development to help farmers to protect their field by the Department of agriculture. Not only with the development of the infrastructure but also with the fight against poverty. The forum had an opportunity to work with the Department of agriculture to identify the poor household to provide them with broilers to produce with the aim of generating income to improve their livelihoods.

- Department of Water Affairs and Forestry

With the management of natural resources, the community also proposed to develop small community nurseries for farmers to produce seedlings more especially for trees that will also serve as erosion control and production of fruits. The department supported the initiation of the project. They offered technical advice on sustainable use and management of natural resources to serve the community.

III. University of Limpopo

Ga-Mothiba Farmers' groups approached the Centre for Rural Community Empowerment (CRCE), the community engagement arm of the School of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (SAES) of the university, to assist them in improving their farming incomes in a sustainable way.

The Centre for Rural Community Empowerment supported the community in various ways:

- Natural Resource management

The CRCE assisted the forum to develop a natural resources management plan with the community while assessing agro forestry practices and its possible contribution towards a better natural resources management and sustainable livelihoods. They also assisted the community with the implementation of the nursery. Furthermore they linked the community with relevant experts in the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry.

- Capacity Building

Most of the groups were operating with their skills. The CRCE provided workshops for farmers in relation to the food, agriculture and forestry to establish better ways that they can sustain themselves. The CRCE also trained group leaders (from the forum) with management of the forum and to assist in mechanisms of operations as leaders at their respective groups.

- Poverty alleviation

The local forum worked together with Center for Rural Community Empowerment in the implementation of indigenous chicken's project. The main aim of the project was to help them to start a Poultry business to help them to have a source of income.

- Donations

The Leolo project also turned as an opportunity for Leolo project because they managed to get a donation of a wind mill in their project. And lastly they assisted youth by building a youth center where youth can perform activities and also infrastructure through fencing of field.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Farmers' networks can be an effective means to contribute to sustainable agricultural development. Farmers can learn from each other, with each other, act as a negotiating partner, invest collectively and involve relevant partners. The potential of farmers' networks are often confronted with barriers, such as lack of institutional support and organizational aspects of the network.

In most cases these barriers are caused by lack of clear vision by network members and lack of common understanding of the objectives and role of networks. Therefore networks are successful when they are supported so that performance can be improved. Facilitation of networking is a tool in development work because it can help farmers to become part of social learning environment which helps local actors to manage their work effectively.

The overall objective of this study was to analyze the factors that facilitate farmer's group's networks. This chapter summarises the results of the findings of the research study. Conclusions and recommendations are further discussed based on the findings.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

Eight local groups of farmers were identified. These groups were formed in collaboration with the tribal authority based on the activity, origin and the objectives. The main activity of the groups is farming to improve their livelihoods. Apart from farming, farmers were interested in management of natural resources such as land care and management of water and agro forestry practices.

Participatory rural appraisal was done at Ga-Mothiba using the transect walk as a tool to assess the activities around the village. Several factors were identified. These factors became a joint concern of villagers. After the transect walk, a general meeting was organised by the key informants with an objective of discussing the assessments of identified factors at the group level. Local groups expressed their interests in participating in the focus groups.

From the discussion a community meeting was organised whereby groups presented the outcomes from a focus group discussions. The groups assessed the applicability of natural resource management and its incorporation with appropriate practices into

community initiatives. Each group identified and prioritised them according to the way they wanted them to be used at the project level and in the community as a whole.

Farmers saw that there was a need to address those factors and challenges through a central point that act as a platform for facilitation of development in the village. Small farmer groups recognized that they can and do generate significant economic benefits by uniting on a small group basis rather than as individuals.

Farmers formed a forum out of their common interest. Existing groups were strengthened during the process while other informal groupings decided to be recognised as local groups. Therefore one of the prerequisite is that farmers thought it to create a platform through which they can act collectively and get their voices heard in decision making processes.

The emergence of a platform became a social innovation in villages which brought a positive change and also opened opportunities for local and emerging groups. Local networks became a common concern that blends action research teams composed of community representatives, Universities and local government representatives which also played a role in various support services which came up as an opportunity for the farmers.

The local networks act as local facilitators to coordinate the project activities to be implemented by various groups. It supports, strengthens and disseminates innovation among members. The forum identified, supported, analyzed and promoted existing initiatives

developed by local farmers. It also helped solve the problems and challenges facing their communities. The key objective of the forum was to minimize the level of isolation at the local level while providing local communities with access to information and the resources they needed, as well as the capacity to obtain these resources in order to support the work they are already engaged in. In principle the resources included:

- provision of information about other groups or communities working on similar issues or facing similar problems, which allows them to communicate and share experiences and ideas to strengthen their own local initiatives;
- facilitating the inclusion of these local groups in international activities and networks related to their work
- a better way to access resources e.g. land

The emergence of the forum resulted in a number of achievements. Farmers were able to exchange ideas and share experiences. The local forum gave farmers recognition. Through the forum support linkages were developed, these linkages exposed farmers to different experiences which in turn facilitated and promoted the development of new groups of farmers.

The forum also had an opportunity to be part of the Limpopo Small-Scale Farmers Forum. The Limpopo Small-Scale Farmers Forum serves as a source of communication and information exchange. The main focus of the forum was to assess the information needs of the communities, finding the information, and offering it in the appropriate format and at the appropriate times.

5.3 CONCLUSION

Putting farmers in charge makes extension more responsive to local conditions, more accountable, more effective and more sustainable. However, most groups still need to be clearer in defining their roles and their activities but they are key partners of any further development process.

There's an important task for facilitators and advisors in supporting farmer's networks aiming to contribute to sustainable agriculture. They could play a supportive role in enhancing collective learning processes of the group to improve their management.

Furthermore on the forum members:

Little interest in management aspects such as balanced leadership, collective responsibility, coherence of the group and enrolling capacity, turned out to endanger the continuity of the network in the future especially when new members join in with different expectations.

Members often saw collective learning within the group as a means to overcome technical barriers only. Learning to improve group performance, for instance through monitoring and evaluating common goals, impacts, results and strategies does not get a high priority. This may hamper the realization of the goals of the network in the future.

In general terms, the main management barriers farmer's networks are confronted with are:

- 1) Lack of coherence among members due to differences in perceptions and goals
- 2) Lack of self-management capacity with respect to balanced leadership, collective responsibility, evaluation and monitoring of impact and results.

Lesson learned from networking is that networking is an approach which contributes to a fundamental shift in emphasis in rural extension. Looking at the experiences of ESSAF how it has been developed, challenges and its functions, it shows that the role of networks is the baseline of extension work with respect to sustainable agriculture. The lesson learned from both the ESAFF and the LSFF is that participation among the farmers themselves makes it easier for them to have the sense of ownership of their work.

By networking, they increase scope for knowledge and information retrieval, learning and understanding for their members within the villages. Network helps local groups to become part of the learning environment that is directly related to their work.

Therefore networking forum facilitates a social learning environment within the development work. And on the other hand, it makes facilitation of extension work easier. On villages like Ga-Mothiba, the formation of development forum (network) promotes farmers interests so that they can be responsible for their own development within the village. Group cohesiveness has been a major factor resulting from most of the groups as it promoted farmers accountability and responsibility.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the experiences and findings of the study, the following recommendations are drawn from research study:

To the farmers:

- It is advisable to formulate a constitution so that the forum can operate by the rules and regulations which will fully bind them. They should decide on their own structure and bylaws because currently they are operating without any thing.
- Farmers should find a balance between leadership and shared responsibility. The capacity to ensure broad –minded leadership (vision- conception –animation- facilitation-drive awareness rising).They should fully participate equally in the forum and also in the individual groups. In groups like Bakone and Rangmo participation is high at the forum level than at the group level. Therefore they should find a balance between the two.
- Farmers are advised to strengthen their capacity to manage self-development process e.g. diagnosis of problems, survey of needs, planning, establishment of new projects, monitoring and evaluation by being involved in every step of development.
- Since the forum resulted in the formation of many groups, they should continue to encourage other groups within the village.

To the extension agent:

- Farmer's days, field visits and local workshops should be organized so that farmers can be able to exchange information and experiences and be aware of what is happening in other farmers groups.
- Extension should assist farmers in facilitating, identification, mobilization and integrations of different types of information that is sustainable.
- Farmers should be trained so that they can have skills or knowledge of management of their groups and also managing the network.

To the researcher

- There's a need for monitoring and evaluation of farmers participation in development work and to analyze the impact of this interaction of farmers in development.
- There's a need to help farmers in prioritization of their needs because these impose lots of ideas which they find it difficult to implement especially at the individual group level.
- Researchers should participate effectively on project design, planning and implementation which will assist in integrating farmers in phases of development.

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Questioning route:

Analysis of factors that facilitate local farmers' group networks

By

Nkhakha Maria Maredi

For

Masters in Agricultural Extension

Name of Village -----

Name of the group _____

Group leader_____

Activity of the group_____

PART I

Social Analysis of the group

When did the group start?

How many are you in your group?

Which of the following motivated you to form a group?

- To facilitate efficient communication
- To transmit information
- To share information
- To evaluate information
- To improve farming techniques

- To empower ourselves
- To work collectively towards change
- To socialize

Is there any group that you are working with?

What are the main activities taking place?

Are these crops for you consumption or for the market?

How many yields do you produce per hector?

Is there following social exclusion apply in your group?

- Racists' attitudes
- Open Society
- Discrimination

Do the groups collectively and individually have the potential to improve their livelihoods?

What has been the role of farmers groups in both purchases of inputs and marketing of outputs?

Have indigenous knowledge played a role in the exchange of knowledge and experiences

Has indigenous knowledge lead to generation of new ideas or innovative ideas

Have the groups taken initiation to organize farmers exchange programmes

Is there any negative feeling about group formation? What sparks these feeling?

Is there any positive feeling about group formation? What separate these feelings?

What actually binds the group and what can split them

What favorable conditions exist in Ga- Mothiba for group formation?

What are the negative conditions that exists in Ga-Mothiba

For what specific purpose were the groups formed?

Farmer's forums\ groups as pressure groups?

What is the potential to move from local farmers groups to local network to farmers association to trust?

What are the norms, values and perspectives that bind the groups?

To what extent is these norms and values perspectives accepted the group?

Access to land

To whom did you find permission to land?

Did you pay anything to get that land?

What kind of land do you occupy (land type)

- Irrigated
- Dry land
- Rejected land
- Other

Do you pay any fees for land? 1. Yes 2. No

If yes, how much per plot/hectare?

How long has had access to this land?

Who in the household has access to this land?

Tell me how you got your land?

What encourage you to get land?

PART II

Economic Analysis

Any economic activity that is performed by a group

Is there any activity that u do as a group for community development?

What is your relationship with outside Local Organizations, service Providers?

Any support that you receive or technical support

Any linkages with stakeholders

PART III

Technological analysis

How do you access information?

Telephone	Internet	Manual (letters)	Other
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Ecological Factors

Is your group obeying environmental regulations?

PART IV

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Is the tribal authority involved in your group?

Is the community involved in your group activities?

Do you participate in political issues?

Is equity occurring in your group?

PART V

Analysis of a development network\forum

When did the forum start?

Why did you form the forum (Formation)?

How many are you start the forum?

What are the roles of the forum?

What was the membership?

How does one become a member?

How one does loses a membership?

What have you achieved since the forum was started?

What is your vision as a forum?

What are the challenges?

What are the basic regulations?

Whom are you collaborating with or networking with?

How is the community benefiting? Who else

How often do you meet as a forum?

How do you operate as a forum?

Do you have donation?

What difference do you see since the forum has been established?

How do you elect \ select members of the forum? The criteria

Do the youth participate actively in the forum?

How are you related to other organizations?

How do you manage the relationship of different levels?

What role did you do for local development?

To what extent have network been used for exchange of knowledge and experience

What efforts have been put in place to facilitates (conscious effort to build relationships with each other in order to enhance sustainable development)

What new ideas emerged out of the networking?

To what extent has the network been strengthened by the following?

- Meeting
- Workshops
- Field visits
- Group discussions

Rank the following as motivation for networking

- Sharing of ideas, experiences and knowledge
- Shared diagnosis, reflection, classification and coordination (understanding of complex development situation)
- Articulating and advocating alternative development (Engaging in communication activities reach a broader public)

To what extend has networking achieved the following?

- Improved facilitation
- Social learning
- Building platform for sustainable development

Has farmer to farmer network taken roots?

To what extend has farmer to farmer exchange assisted in building

- Trust
- Confidence
- Empowerment of the community

- Created network of support
- Assisted to formulate own solution to problems

THE END
