



UNIVERSITY
OF NATAL
CASS
DURBAN

PRELIMINARY REPORT
ON THE FEASIBILITY
STUDY OF THE
UMGABABA AGRICULTURAL
PROJECT

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Centre for Applied Social Sciences
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1. INTRODUCTION

During August 1984 the Centre for Applied Social Sciences was approached by the Kwa Zulu Training Trust to assist in evaluating the progress and effectiveness of an agricultural demonstration project at Mfume, situated some 20 kms inland from the Trust's Training Centre at Umgababa on the Natal South Coast.

Consequently initial discussions were held by staff of CASS with the responsible KDC staff in order to ascertain the original aims, intentions and directions for the project, and visits to the project site were undertaken to view the facilities and services on offer to the community at Mfume.

A major concern of the Corporation was whether, as a total concept, and as a set of agricultural production methods and services, the project was fulfilling the objectives of influencing, directly or indirectly the agricultural practices of homesteads in the immediate vicinity. Further concern was whether the project was cost effective, since for the period January 1982 to January 1984 the programme had shown only a small net profit (R791) from direct sales of vegetable, fruit, chickens, eggs, ducks, rabbits and sheep. For the same period overall project management costs incurred by the Trust, which included transport, salaries and wages, and major physical inputs, had amounted to R31 517. These two major considerations were the focus for this brief project evaluation. While no written terms of reference were provided by the Corporation, the explicit request to the Centre of Applied Social Sciences was to determine in broad terms whether the successes and achievements of the project to date warranted its continuation.

The Centre (CASS) undertook to investigate the programme by means of a field investigation covering:

- i) attitudes towards the programme; and
- ii) the extent of adoption of techniques demonstrated by the project among households in the immediate vicinity of the project.

Further, CASS undertook to identify positive and negative features of the project as a developmental exercise. CASS also agreed to attempt a broad and non-quantitative benefit-cost assessment of the project in the light of the findings. It was also agreed that CASS would make recommendations in regard to similar ventures in the future.

This is a preliminary report in which certain major findings and conclusions are presented for consideration by the sponsors. A fuller report in which the results of the fieldwork are presented in greater detail and in which certain additional conclusions regarding agriculture in the area are drawn will be presented in due course.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project, a 2 ha demonstration 'farm' was established as a model for a cost effective, homestead centred, integrated agricultural production unit. Best described as an 'assisted self-help' programme it was established in a necessarily 'top-down' initiative from the KDC in 1981. The original concept was adapted from experiments and similar developments in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Briefly, the main organising principles are:

- i) At a total capital cost of R1590 an individual might, through the implementation of the variety of the agricultural production techniques demonstrated, establish himself as a full-time small farmer on 1 to 2 ha of allotted land, producing sufficient to satisfy all household consumption requirements, as well as produce a marketable surplus for sale.
- ii) Integrated agricultural development at this scale includes the raising of poultry, rabbits, pigs, sheep and goats - the utilisation of animal and bird waste for fertilising a vegetable garden and fruit orchard, and the establishment of a wattle woodlot for both firewood and sale.

Project facilities were constructed on land under the contract of Chief Charles Hlengwa of Thayana Ward in Umbumbulu District, KwaZulu Area No. 4. The area falls within that classified by Phillips as Bioclimatic Group 1b, potentially the most productive group. Land tenure in Thoyana Ward ranges from 'traditional' allotments, betterment planned allotments and individual freehold lots at Mfume village.

Presently land use in the ward varies; parts, as throughout KwaZulu, are used for grazing and staple crops, and the area has recently witnessed the large scale introduction of sugar cane cultivation on both 'traditional' and betterment allotments.

Sugar cane has become a dominant feature of local homestead economics, affecting the context within which the project is situated very considerably.

3. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The project is overseen by KTT staff based at Umgababa who provide the necessary ongoing inputs such as fertilisers, seed, fencing, inoculants and so on, along with extension work in the district directed mainly at promoting the introduction of appropriate broiler production methods at homestead level. A local labour force of 3 manage day to day affairs, and are responsible for selling project produce to local people.

In the earlier stages of the programme the demonstration farm was used for educative purposes, directed at two main target groups. Groups of schoolchildren from various parts of KwaZulu, and the Inkatha Youth Programme were shown the methods and techniques by means of tours and demonstrations. Secondly some local people were directed by extension officers of the KwaZulu Department of Agriculture and Forestry (KZDAF) to view the project.

The incidence of attendance by both types of audience has declined over the last year and at present structured demonstrations do not take place at all. What has developed, however, is a tendency for locals to view and to use the project as a source of both inputs, such as seed and broiler chickens, as well as of ordinary commodities, such as eggs, cabbages, fruit and so on. This tendency has a clear bearing on the project, to be discussed later.

4. BROAD PROJECT EVALUATION

4-1) A General Description of the Target Group - Demographic Income and Subsistence Production Trends.

A systematic set of interviews was conducted for the present investigation. These are presently being completed and analysed.

The broad trends uncovered thus far, however, suggest that a reasonable idea of the type of community in Thoyana Ward, their range of circumstances, and the potential for self improvement through the adoption of sustained agricultural production may be obtained from results of another survey undertaken in the Nkandla District of KwaZulu¹. From this survey Table 1 shows that overall, subsistence production contributed less than 20 percent of household income, yet considerable variation occurs due to the type of household composition.

Table 1
SUBSISTENCE INCOME
IN NKANDLA : AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE

Type of Household	N	Subsistence percentage of household income	Annual cash value of subsistence to household (in Rands)	Median Incomes per capita achieved by household members (in Rands)
No pensioners or migrants	7	25,38	140,42	69,00
No migrants	16	21,76	148,55	135,50
Unemployed migrant head	11	17,54	160,24	97,00
Female head with male at home in agriculture	10	17,03	110,48	73,50
No pensioners	19	16,81	295,77	165,00
Married male head with migrant members	37	16,06	217,83	106,25
With pensioners	21	15,45	268,10	144,25
Migrant head	53	13,55	203,13	143,75
Total Sample	22	11,84	167,36	137,50
	69	14,54	194,46	143,75

Thus in homes headed by a migrant, agricultural production constituted only some 12 percent of household income, yet homes without migrants but with pensioners obtained incomes from agricultural production constituting 25 percent of total household income. Increased agricultural production is possible due to the presence of men, whose contribution in agriculture is however dependent on there being other significant sources of income to the household - such as pensions and remittances from another migrant. This appears to be typical of other areas as well, including the area under investigation.

From our investigation of randomly selected households currently being analysed this factor of varying composition has a major bearing on the degree or extent to which the project's methods are likely to be introduced.

4-2) Factors Effecting Adoption of Project Methods

a) Socio Economic Factors

Following the above, a major factor affecting the project's success is its initial overall conception. Consider the following: household circumstances in rural areas vary considerably. Firstly wealth is unevenly distributed between households with incomes ranging considerably, and coming from a variety of sources from different members of the household. Secondly men and women take employment on a daily, weekly or monthly basis in towns along the coast, in Durban or on the Witwatersrand, or on white owned farms. Thirdly, while the homestead is the basis for the family, its continuation depends largely on outside sources. This leads to a tendency for households to invest in resources directed at promoting the continuation of opportunities outside the home and family 'farm'. Education, transport, technical and business skills are seen to be more rewarding than investment in sustained agricultural production.

Fourthly, in combination these factors mean that work and investment in agriculture is generally undertaken for various purposes. One is to subsidise incomes earned elsewhere, another is to supplement incomes through sales of some produce, a third is a conscious decision made to begin full time farming operations on mature or premature retirement, usually with the use of savings and fourthly agricultural work may be undertaken when employment prospects of most household members are exhausted. Such ventures are often limited due to lack of savings.

By implication then, as a total approach the project would be likely to be adopted only by those who have retired, either maturely or prematurely, or those who have exhausted employment prospects. This second group is unlikely to have sufficient capital to take on such a venture wholesale, and from our investigation the first category of people here have opted for cultivating sugar cane, as have the second category of people outlined in the previous paragraph.

b) Sugar Cane Production and Domestic Labour Demands

The aforementioned development of sugar cane cultivation has a number of implications for successful adoption of the KDC project methods, in either piecemeal or in an 'in toto' manner. Briefly, the South African Sugar Association's Small Cane Growers Fund, in conjunction with the local sugar mill and private African contractors, provide a sustained package of services from ploughing, planting, harveting and transplanting the crop to mills. While incomes from cane vary according to plot size and management practices, the time and labour required of the household unit precludes their ability or willingness to concentrate on other forms of agricultural production. A paradox is apparent - on small land holdings : cane growers yield low cash returns on a non-food crop, yet such households require food grown at home to supplement income.

Labour demands and space utilisation preclude this and thus some households face declining standards of living.

4-3 Some Practical Factors : Location and Communication

a) Location :

The present project site facilitates visits from people in Vumandaba sub-wards 1 and 2, but access for people in the other 3 sub-wards of Thoyana Ward is restricted, obviously, due to distance and poor communication. While the location on land directly in front of Chief Hlengwa's home, and adjacent the tribal court might attract interest from people on official or 'tribal' business, at the same time, for some people we interviewed this location undoubtedly contributed to the opinions of the project as "something for the chief" or 'a business venture for the KDC' Projects intended for adoption by ordinary people require structuring around ordinary people's circumstances.

b) Communications

Practically, apart from factors of physical and social distance mentioned above, the spread of information about the project has been limited by poor co-ordination between the KDC extension staff and the KZDAF extension officers operating in the area. From our investigation there appeared to be no ongoing formal collaboration between staff directed either at bringing groups of interested people to the project or at informing people attempting to grow produce, about the project. The staff of the KZDAF are actively dealing with circumstances of land holders in the district, both at homesteads and on community agricultural projects on 'communal' arable land. Co-ordination here would have promoted the adoption of techniques and methods of the project in a piecemeal fashion by people in a variety of circumstances.

5. OVERALL SUMMATIVE EVALUATION (PRELIMINARY)

So far in this report we have placed attention on the following:

1. the possibility of households adopting the project's methods in an "in toto" manner - as a means of achieving fulltime subsistence and some commercial production considering,
2. the diverse circumstances of the target group - local households, and
3. practical difficulties such as the influence of sugar cane production, social and physical distances and poor communication between departmental representatives.

Our investigation revealed that the project has only been observably effective in two areas, best described as 'adoption in a piecemeal fashion'. Firstly some households have taken some ideas, notably chicken and egg production and vegetable cultivation and used these to only marginally improve their circumstances, i.e. to subsidise or supplement incomes earned elsewhere by members of the household. Secondly local people have used the project as an ordinary commercial venture, buying seed, birds, eggs, rabbits, sheep and goats to meet short term consumption needs at home.

The implications are twofold:

Firstly as a method for either improving the quality of life on an assisted self-help basis, or as an 'integrated' agricultural solution to the problem of extreme rural poverty at the homestead level the project has not achieved its original intentions.

Secondly the diversity of socio-economic circumstances in the community, and their varying perceptions of what the project is all about imply that agricultural development programmes undertaken by parastatal organisations such as the KDC and directed at the homestead level may require a different emphasis.

Instead of gearing projects, programmes or policies at providing integrated, total or partial agricultural "solutions" the emphasis needs to be on the timely provision of appropriate agricultural services, made available in such a manner that people may draw on these services, over time and when their "socio-economic" circumstances prompt them to do so. In other words when they can afford to do so, or when they decide to invest their time, effort and money in agricultural production.

Practically, and in the context of this project, this would ideally require a diversification of the project into a number of smaller outlying demonstration plots which also provide technical inputs such as seed, fertiliser, layers, broilers, water tanks, improve sheep, goats, pigs, cattle and inoculants and chemicals on a perhaps subsidised but commercial basis, and directed and managed from the central project. The practicality of such diversification has yet to be fully assessed however, and more will be said in the final report.

The suggestion above includes viable small-scale commercial services. Commercially based agricultural services have not yet successfully extended into many rural areas of KwaZulu. Yet considerable embryo commercial activity exists as people try to improve their circumstances through trade in livestock, chicken, eggs and so on. Planned co-ordination of the extension programmes of both KDC and KZDAF would eliminate problems in programme management - producing effective programmes of both an educative and practical nature, capable of achieving the ends outlined above.

6. INITIAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This brief study reveals a limited and diffuse response to the concepts, methods and purpose of the "Umgababa Agricultural Demonstration project".

The project has not been successful considering that the major intention was for poor households to adopt its methods 'in toto' in order to make a full-time living from agriculture at the homestead level.

Our main point is that the target community is too involved in a number of different activities, which are undertaken in order to improve their material prospects, and to provide for their families and dependents future. Undertaking fulltime agricultural activities would mean major and difficult adjustments. The rewards of the 'project' - a full time subsistence living, with some cash income from the sale of produce are insufficient to warrant the changes. It is only a small minority retiring with savings, who would be likely to attempt the venture. For many, given the lack of technical knowledge, and limited knowledge about the very poor availability of agricultural sources and inputs, the sugar programme must appear a more viable prospect.

Our recommendation then, is that the KDC reconsider this project as it stands at present.

However, section 5 notes a possible potential for expanding the scope and scale of the project, should the KDC consider an ongoing initiative in Umbumbulu district. By a combination of private and public sector functions directed to more outlying areas, providing technical services and commodities, we feel that the actual needs of the community could be better served. A word of caution is necessary. The sustained and widespread provision of appropriate inputs and advice suggested here would not however increase the overall level of production significantly. It would allow those, willing and able, to begin to undertake more sophisticated methods of production and over time, through consumption and trade improve their quality of life.

More will be said about these possibilities in the final report.

Footnotes :

1. Ardington E M Poverty and Development in a Rural Community in KwaZulu. Working Paper No 9. Development Studies Unit, Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Natal, Durban.



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