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“Utilisation of diversity in land use systems:
Sustainable and organic approaches to meet human needs”

Seed of Hope for Rural South Africa: Bringing Innovations to Communities and Institutions

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Abstract

Ten years after the end of the Apartheid regime, large part of the black South African population still lives in utter poverty. The rural-urban divide mirrors the dualistic nature of the South African economy, which underpins the structural cause of poverty in rural areas.

Between 1997 and 2006, GTZ together with the South African Government in the Limpopo Province has institutionalised Participatory Development Approaches (PDA) to better respond to the economic and social development needs of impoverished communities. The project has focused on the development of models for agro-based economic development, matching the availability of local resources, building on social capital and strengthening local organisational capacity and representation.

A range of social and technical innovations were introduced to rural communities and institutions. This was achieved through developing competencies of people, expanding service capabilities of organisations and setting new policies in institutions. The project is an example of Capacity Development, the methodological thread that distinguishes GTZ work in international co-operation.

Project interventions have facilitated change at the interface of communities and service providers, a pillar in any client-oriented service delivery system. This was realised by taking different stakeholders from research, private sector and civil society in “round tables”. Through new service platforms agricultural innovations from research benefitted farmers. A PPP model and market linkages facilitated the commercialisation of local produce to bring concrete economic improvements to farmers.

Visible results have been obtained. 300 field extension officers were trained over a period of 2 years through a learnership. More than 1000 community self-help groups have become more effective through the establishment of co-ordination bodies at village level. The Limpopo Smallholder Farmer Association represents the interests of smallholder farmers and partners with the Department of Agriculture in service delivery. Today, more than 1000 smallholders produce certified seeds and market them through a co-operative. Other innovations in basic animal health, soil fertility management and conservation farming were also successfully disseminated.

Ownership of the required organisational changes was anchored into the Departmental organisational systems. This has allowed the learning made in Limpopo to be replicated in other provinces of South Africa.

Keywords: Capacity development, community-based seed provision, demand-led service delivery, agricultural innovation system, local organisational development, participatory development approaches, South Africa