

RESULTS OF THE FIRST ANNUAL FARMER SATISFACTION SURVEY FOR RAYMOND MHLABA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Raymond Mhlaba Farmers' Association

June 2018

1 Introduction

The Farmers' Association's Action Plan of 2016 included an item to "Establish an 'extension review mechanism' to motivate and assess the performance of extension staff in different parts of the municipality". This report summarises the Association's first attempt to undertake this action, although it should be pointed out that the exercise goes somewhat beyond assessing the performance of extension staff. In short, the Association undertook a survey of farmers around Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality in order to collect their views on the support they get from extension staff and the Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform more generally. In line with the original vision of the Action Plan, the idea was not to shame government, but to hold up a mirror that in principle could reflect on both the positive and negative aspects of service delivery.

This is in keeping with the concept of Citizen-Based Monitoring (CBM), which the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) has been seeking to promote since around 2013. The current exercise is in the spirit of CBM, even if it is not formally part of, or in partnership with, a government department or initiative. According to DPME,

"The experience of citizens – as the intended beneficiaries of government services – is a critical component of measuring the performance of government and for the delivery of appropriate and quality services. It is therefore necessary to support and build systematic ways of bringing the experience of citizens into the monitoring of services. Citizen-based monitoring does not duplicate or replace existing public structures or processes such as community development workers and ward committees. It offers the potential to strengthen the monitoring capacity of these by providing tools and methods to enhance public participation in monitoring." (DPME, 2016: 3)

Given that this was the Association's first attempt at such an exercise, we do not claim that it is perfect. However, we do claim that it is an honest and fair attempt to consult a wide and diverse collection of farmers, in hopes of promoting food security and poverty reduction through agriculture in Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality. We will refine the approach in the future, and will gladly work with other farmers' associations who wish to conduct similar exercises in other parts of the Eastern Cape or South Africa.

2 Approach

The assessment is based on a survey of black farmers which made use of a standardised questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised five pages of mostly closed-ended questions in six main sections. The first section collected basic descriptive information about the farmer. The second section collected detail as to the farmer's interaction with extension officers and types

of support received over the previous 12 months and before. Section 3 asks farmers to explain why they think they did not receive support, and what kind of support they would have liked, if any. Sections 4 and 5 consisted of series of questions asking the farmer to rate the extension officer and/or Department regarding their perceptions of the qualities and characteristics of extension and other Departmental staff. And Section 6 concluded with two open-ended questions regarding perceptions of the qualities and characteristics of extension and other Departmental staff the farmer's general perceptions of their experience in with the Department and their needs.

Altogether 238 questionnaires were completed. These were conducted by means of face-to-face interviews conducted by members of the Raymond Mhlaba Farmers' Association. For the most part, the Association organised meetings in selected communities, or took advantage of meetings that were called for other purposes, and then conducted the interviews with those present. While there was an effort to touch different parts of the Municipality, one shortcoming of the exercise was that the majority of interviews were conducted in communities relatively close to Alice; having said that, interviews were also conducted with farmers near Middel drift, Fort Beaufort, Seymour/Balfour, and Adelaide.

3 Main findings

This section is organised according to the main parts of the questionnaire as described above.

3.1 Farmer profile

By way of background, the table below summarises demographic information about the farmers who were interviewed. It can be seen that there is a reasonable mix of farmers by age, in contrast to the common assumption that farmers are all elderly. All of the interviewees regarded themselves as Black African, which represents a weakness of the survey, in that it would have been better if it had also captured some Coloured farmers, given that Black African *and* Coloured farmers are the main constituency of DRDAR in Raymond Mhlaba. As for educational level, it can be seen that that majority of respondents have at least some secondary education. And in terms of gender, female farmer respondents somewhat outnumber male farmer respondents, which is a true reflection of the population of black farmers in the area. Altogether, the sample drawn appears to be a fair though not perfect reflection of black farmers in Raymond Mhlaba.

Table 1: Demographic information

| Items | Response/value | Number | Proportion (%) |
|-------------------|----------------|--------|----------------|
| Age | 18 or younger | 1 | 0.4 |
| | 19-35 | 28 | 11.8 |
| | 36-50 | 49 | 20.6 |
| | 51-60 | 61 | 25.6 |
| | 60-70 | 70 | 29.4 |
| | 71-older | 29 | 12.2 |
| Population group | Black African | 238 | 100.0 |
| | Coloured | 0 | 0.0 |
| | Indian/Asian | 0 | 0.0 |
| | White | 0 | 0.0 |
| Educational level | Grades 1-6 | 92 | 41.2 |
| | Grades 7-12 | 122 | 54.7 |
| | Tertiary | 9 | 4.0 |
| Gender | Male | 102 | 43.4 |
| | Female | 133 | 56.6 |

The questionnaire asked what sorts of farming activities are pursued by the respondents, although without going into detail. Overall, about 46% of the respondents were involved in livestock production, and 73% in horticulture and/or field crop production, with virtually none involved in forestry or aquaculture.

Table 2: Farming activities

| Items | Response | Number | Proportion (%) |
|----------------------------------|----------|--------|----------------|
| Livestock | Yes | 108 | 45.6 |
| | No | 129 | 54.4 |
| Horticulture &/or Field crops | Yes | 174 | 73.4 |
| | No | 63 | 26.6 |
| Forestry | Yes | 1 | 0.4 |
| | No | 236 | 99.6 |
| Aquaculture | Yes | 0 | 0.0 |
| | No | 237 | 100.0 |

Respondents were also asked whether they regarded themselves as “subsistence” (produce mainly for own consumption), “smallholder” (produce mainly to derive an income), or “commercial” (have turnover of R1 mn per year or more), making use of the same categories and definitions that DRDAR used in its Farmer Register project. About 82% of respondents regarded themselves as subsistence producers, versus 18% who identify as smallholders, and none as commercial. This maybe under-represents black commercial farmers in Raymond

Mhlaba, but probably not by much. Finally, respondents were also asked whether they belong to a farming-related organisation of some kind, to which 92% said that they did.

Table 3: Other farmer characteristics

| Items | Response/value | Number | Proportion (%) |
|---|----------------|--------|----------------|
| Farmer type | Subsistence | 190 | 82.2 |
| | Smallholder | 41 | 17.8 |
| | Commercial | 0 | 0.0 |
| Membership in a ward/village group/commodity/water user association | Yes | 215 | 91.9 |
| | No | 19 | 8.1 |

3.2 Support from extension officers and DRDAR

This subsection presents findings regarding respondents' experience of support from extension officers and the Department more broadly.

One of the most important findings from the survey (Table 4) is that only 39 respondents out of the 238 reported having had contact with an extension officer during the previous 12 months, making a share of 17%. Of these 39 farmers, 20 (53%) had been in contact with an extension officer on only one occasion, while another 12 (32%) had been in contact only twice. About 41% of these contacts took place at DRDAR's local office, while just more than half took place at the farmer's farm or project.

Table 4: Interactions with extension officers over previous 12 months

| Item | Response | Number | Proportion (%) |
|---|-----------------------|--------|----------------|
| "Did you experience agricultural extension services in the past 12 months?" | Yes | 39 | 16.8 |
| | No | 193 | 83.2 |
| "If yes, how many times in the past 12 months?" | 1 | 20 | 52.6 |
| | 2 | 12 | 31.6 |
| | 3 | 1 | 2.6 |
| | 4 | 5 | 13.2 |
| "Where did you usually experience these extension services?" | At DRDAR office | 16 | 41.0 |
| | At own land / project | 21 | 53.8 |
| | At a meeting | 2 | 5.1 |
| "In the past 12 months, have you applied for any type of assistance?" | Yes | 82 | 34.5 |
| | No | 156 | 65.5 |
| | Yes | 20 | 24.4 |

| | | | |
|---|-----|-----|------|
| “Have you received the support that you requested?” | No | 62 | 75.6 |
| “If not, does the department update you on the status of your request?” | Yes | 13 | 21.0 |
| | No | 49 | 79.0 |
| “In the past 12 months, have you made any urgent requests to the Department for assistance with ailing livestock or crop diseases?” | Yes | 50 | 22.4 |
| | No | 173 | 77.6 |
| “In the past 12 months, have you received any other form of support?” | Yes | 10 | 4.3 |
| | No | 224 | 95.7 |

Table 4 also shows that during the previous 12 months, just over one third of respondents had approached the Department for assistance. About 11% received the support they requested; of those who did not receive this support, most (92%) said that they did not receive updates regarding the status of their request.

The next two questions relate not to the previous 12 months but to the respondent’s past experience more generally. Asked how they usually go about requesting support from the Department, the majority (about 56%) said that they visit the office, whereas a smaller share used other means such as telephoning or writing letters. What is also interesting about the answers is that only a very small share (7.5%) have never requested support.

One very positive finding from the survey is that the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that the Department assists or interacts with them in their preferred language.

Table 5: Past interactions with extension officers and the Department in the past

| Item | Response | Number | Proportion (%) |
|---|--------------------------|--------|----------------|
| “How do you usually go about requesting support from the department?” | Visit office | 126 | 55.8 |
| | Telephone | 25 | 11.1 |
| | Write | 24 | 10.6 |
| | Two or more of the above | 34 | 15.0 |
| | Have not requested | 17 | 7.5 |
| “Does the Department assist you in your preferred language?” | Yes | 230 | 98.7 |
| | No | 3 | 1.3 |

3.3 Why farmers think they did not receive support and types of support sought

The questionnaire included one question asking respondents to indicate why they think they did not receive support in the past 12 months, and another question asking them to indicate the kind of support they were hoping for.

Most (54%) of the respondents who did not receive support from extension officers or from the Department in the previous 12 months, indicated that they did request some kind of support, but did not know why they hadn't received it (Table 6). The next most common response (26%) were those who in fact did not request support, not because they didn't want support, but because they did not expect a response. Relatively small numbers of respondents did not know how to request support (11%) or did not need support (8%).

Table 6: Why respondents think they did not receive support in the previous 12 months

| Response | Number | Proportion (%) |
|--|--------|----------------|
| Did request but did not receive, not sure why | 107 | 54.0 |
| Did not request because didn't expect a response | 51 | 25.8 |
| Did not know how to request | 22 | 11.1 |
| Did not request because did not need | 15 | 7.6 |
| Did request but told not eligible | 3 | 1.5 |

Regarding the question of what kind of support respondents had been hoping for, the responses are summarised in Table 7. It should be noted that this was an open-ended question wherein respondents were not restricted to a predefined list of choices, so the responses were clustered according to theme even if the specifics differed. For example, some people indicated they want irrigation systems, others water tanks, and so forth; these responses were clustered together under the common heading of 'water'. It should also be noted that some respondents identified two or more desired types of support, which is why the percentages in the right-hand column sum to more than 100%.

Table 7: 'What sort of support would you like to have from the Department?'

| Type of support desired | Number | Proportion (%) |
|---|--------|----------------|
| Water ('irrigation systems', 'tanks', 'water', etc.) | 76 | 32% |
| Inputs ('seed', 'seedlings', 'fertiliser', etc.) | 71 | 30% |
| Fencing | 71 | 30% |
| Skills ('skills', 'visits', 'training', 'knowledge', etc.) | 38 | 16% |
| Tools and equipment ('garden tools', 'machinery', etc.) | 25 | 11% |
| Funding | 24 | 10% |
| Animal health support ('medication', 'vaccination', etc.) | 22 | 9% |
| Tractors | 17 | 7% |
| Vague or miscellaneous ('support', 'prepaid electricity', etc.) | 14 | 6% |
| Dam scooping | 12 | 5% |
| Markets ('market', 'place to market the produce', etc.) | 8 | 3% |
| Drought relief | 7 | 3% |
| Structures (eg for poultry) | 7 | 3% |
| Livestock ('breeding rams', 'chickens', etc.) | 5 | 2% |

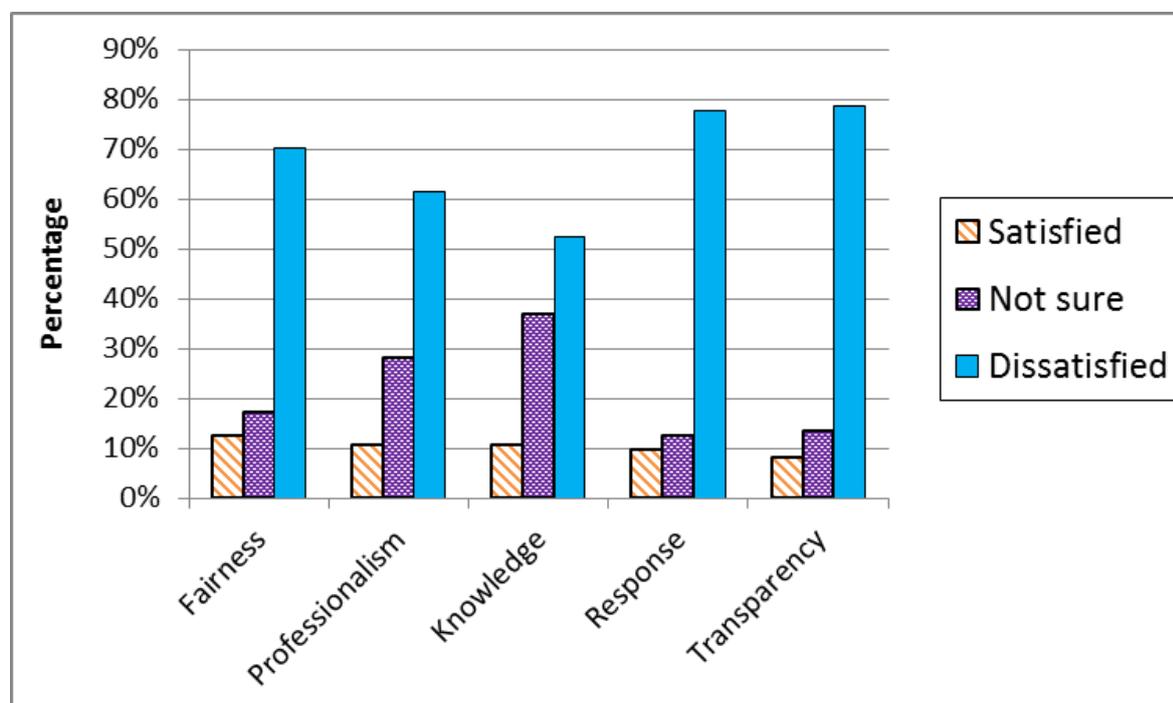
The top three types of support identified related to water, inputs and fencing. Unfortunately, only 16% of respondents indicated that they wanted support with skills development. This reflects one of the big challenges with agricultural support today, which is that farmers want material support far more than they want extension, and the demands for material support would appear to be far greater than what government is able to provide.

3.4 Perceptions of the qualities and characteristics of Departmental staff

Section 4 of the questionnaire asked farmers questions as to their satisfaction with a range of characteristics of Departmental staff. For each question, the respondent was requested to state their level of satisfaction, from ‘extremely satisfied’ to ‘extremely dissatisfied’, with less extreme options in between. To keep the presentation simple, the satisfaction responses were lumped together, as were the dissatisfaction responses. The results are presented in Figure 1 below.

In a nutshell, there were uniformly low levels of satisfaction with the perceived fairness, professionalism, knowledge, responsiveness, and transparency. Where there are differences in views regarding these traits, they relate to the balance between ‘dissatisfied’ versus ‘not sure’; in particular, a relatively high proportion of respondents were not sure about “the level of knowledge displayed by the Department”, presumably because they had too little interaction with the Department to be able to judge.

Figure 1: Levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the conduct of DRDAR staff



The questionnaire also probed a wide variety other characteristics of Departmental staff, with particular focus on how they interact with farmers. This part of the questionnaire consisted of

a set of statements (e.g. “The agricultural office and ward extension officer are committed to do their job”), to which respondents were asked to whether and to what extent they agreed or disagreed. The two figures below summarise the findings.

Figure 2: Levels of agreement/disagreement with perceived characteristics of DRDAR staff

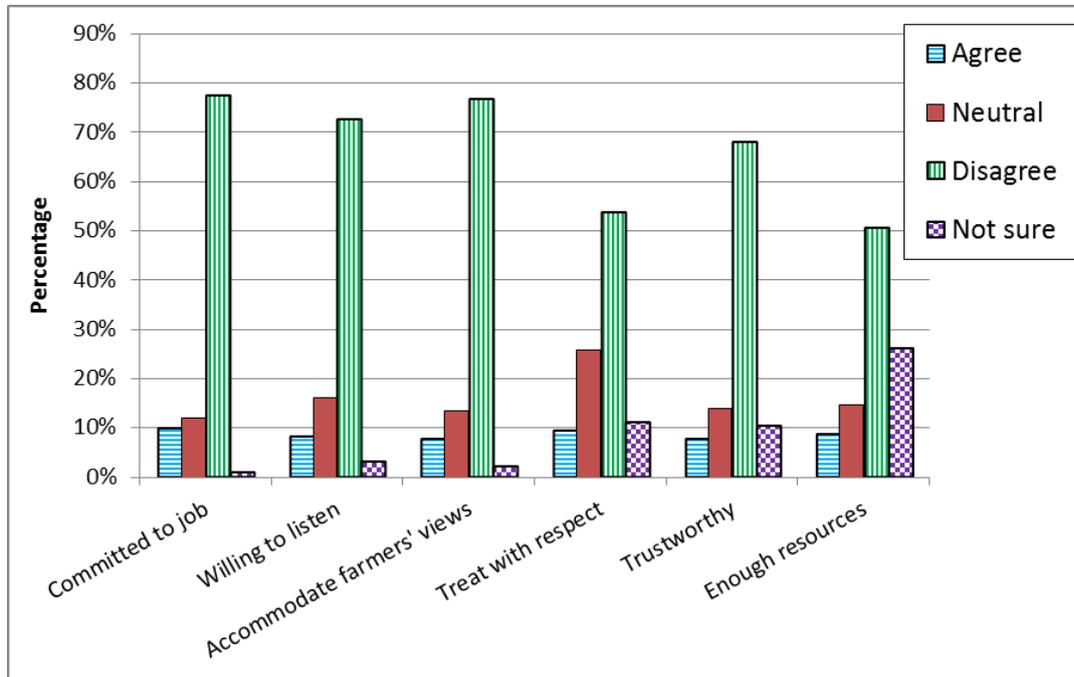
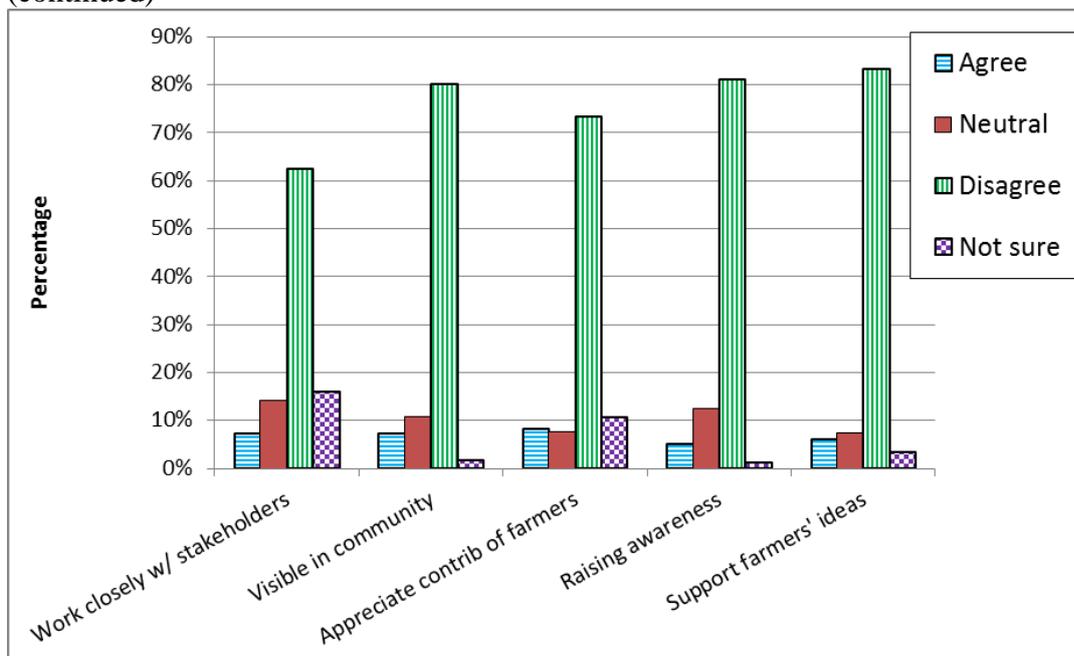


Figure 3: Levels of agreement/disagreement with perceived characteristics of DRDAR staff (continued)



Generally, there were low levels of agreement with the statements, which is not to say that there is universally high disagreement. There was some acknowledgement that the local

agricultural offices do not always have enough resources with which to do their jobs. On the other hand, the dominant picture is that farmers feel that they are not listened to or taken seriously.

4 Conclusions

This first attempt at conducting a satisfaction survey in Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality has proven to be revealing but in a depressing way. While of course the Association has been aware for some time of the challenges farmers experience in accessing support, we did not necessarily appreciate the extent of the problem. In short, farmers in Raymond Mhlaba are not so much unhappy with the quality of the support they receive, as with its absence. As concerning as the lack of support is the lack of trust between farmers and the Department.

On the other hand, the survey results also reflect on farmers themselves in such a way that we are forced to ask ourselves difficult questions. One of the issues covered in the survey which could have been explored in more depth, is the nature of the support that farmers want. The overwhelming majority of small-scale farmers want material support of one type or another, which is emphasised to such an extent that it far outweighs their wish for more extension support, that is, for skills development. As an Association, we accept that it may be the case that farmers' expectations are unrealistic, in the sense that not all farmers can receive all of the support they wish to receive. Perhaps there is a need for a constructive dialogue between government and farmers regarding what kinds of support can be reasonably expected. On the other hand, even normal extension support seems to be in short supply, which might be one reason why farmers seem to be unaware of its value. Another consideration is the lack of transparency regarding the Department's budget resources for Raymond Mhlaba; farmers' expectations may be too great, but perhaps it would help if there were more awareness of what resources are actually available, and how they are being used.