

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING STRATEGY FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

Programmatically, the agricultural education and training prior to the democratic dispensation, lacked coherence and co-ordination. Poor articulation characterized the programmes offered both between the formal and non formal sub-sections but also vertically within the formal education and training sector. It had no strategic direction that focused its development or determined priorities. The funding of the programmes was skewed and uneven across different sites of provision with former White institutions still better resourced than their historically Black counterparts. Programmes differed markedly in quality, standards, outcomes and curriculum and therefore limited the opportunities for students to change from institution to institution and created further barriers to higher levels.

The AET Strategy was developed to address these inequalities of provision. The process of developing the AET Strategy started in 2002 and it was completed in 2005. The strategy was developed as part of the Reconstruction and Development Programme. The AET Strategy is concerned with the provision and maintenance of sound education and training to support an environmentally and economically sustainable agriculture. At present, AET is provided by a variety of statutory, non-statutory and private institutions.

STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AET STRATEGY

The Strategy was developed by the Department of Agriculture in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). It is based on an extensive consultative process.

Two Research Officers and National Research Officers were appointed in each Province and at National level respectively to conduct a survey on the provision of AET in the various provinces and at National level. Two structures were established namely Provincial Agricultural Education and Training Task Team (PAETTT) and the National Strategy Formulation Team (NSFT). The role of PAETTT was to evaluate the status of AET provisioning in the respective provinces and report to the NSFT, while the National Research Officers conducted research on the status of AET provisioning at national level with regard to the policies in the different national departments (DoA, DoE, DST, Labour, SAQA).

Research Officers were coordinating the activities of PAETTT in the different provinces and the national Coordinator was coordinating the NSFT.

PAETTT was constituted of the following stakeholders within the Provinces:

- Farmer Unions
- Provincial Departments of Agriculture
- Provincial Departments of Education
- AET Providers
- Universities and Technikons
- Colleges of Agriculture
- Agricultural Research Council

NSFT was constituted of the following stakeholders:

- National Department of Agriculture
- Department of Labour,
- Department of Education
- Department of Science and Technology
- South African Qualifications Authority
- Agricultural Public Entities
- Farmer Unions

These structures engaged in a process of consultation, research and analysis, which resulted in ten reports outlining the status, issues and recommendations for each province and the DoA. The ten reports form the basis and the foundation upon which the National Agricultural Education and Training Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development in South Africa was formulated.

The two outcomes of the consultative process are:

- Greater collaboration among the provincial and national agencies concerned with agriculture in general and with AET in particular.
- Information about the status of AET in all the provinces in terms of needs, providers and outcomes which can be used as a benchmark for the implementation of the strategy.

FINDINGS ON AET PROVISION FROM PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORTS

The findings from the Research reports indicate that AET is in many cases characterized by lack of coordination, difference in quality standards and curriculum in different education institutions as well as poor linkages between AET and the agriculture industry. Non - formal AET is almost completely lacking in quality control, while formal AET has some quality control in place, however, the application of quality control varies and so does its efficacy in providing a reliable quality product.

The reports also indicate that previously disadvantaged communities experience some barriers such as admission requirements, affordability and other barriers to access AET.

In addition, agriculture has a negative career image among the youths. There are large numbers of unemployed agriculture graduates, while on the other hand there is a shortage of critical skills in agriculture. These challenges resulted in a need for the development of the AET Strategy.

CHALLENGES FACING AET PROVISION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Based on the research and consultation conducted by Provincial and National Research Officers, the provision of AET in South Africa is faced with many challenges.

Research indicates that there have always been inadequate links between agricultural education and training institutions and relevant role-players who provide strategic information about employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in the agricultural sector.

Previously disadvantaged communities and in particular women and the disabled continue to have poor access to quality agricultural education and training. This is as a result of various barriers, including affordability, admission requirements, physical distance from training centres, literacy and numeracy, language of instruction and scant resources available to those charged with the responsibility of providing agricultural education and training to these communities.

Agriculture has a negative image as a career choice in the eyes of the youth. It is seen as the “work” of the poor and the elderly and not as something that can be profitable. Furthermore, agriculture is seen in a very narrow context and is equated solely with primary production as opposed to a profitable business, incorporating value-adding elements. In addition, a large number of learners who have diplomas and degrees in agriculture are, for a variety of reasons, unable to find jobs.

There is poor access of AET by emerging farmers and new entrants into the agriculture sector. Other challenges include shortage of critical skills such as Veterinary Science, Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Engineering and Agricultural Development.

PURPOSE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AET STRATEGY

Based on the above background of AET provision before the democratic dispensation, and the challenges indicated above, the purpose of the AET strategy is therefore to:

- Guide the development and provision of a nationally coordinated, effective, responsive and quality assured AET that is accessible to all South Africans
- Foster a unified vision by all AET service providers
- Instill public accountability, guide policy formulation, and create a framework for the maintenance, coordination, implementation and review of AET
- Instill public confidence in the AET system as a crucial element of its success
- Address the many challenges facing AET identified through the competitive analysis of the present system
- Address the historical emphasis on primary production and widen the spectrum of disciplines included in AET to incorporate current and future trends and opportunities, for example, agro-tourism and game farming
- Facilitate the adoption of appropriate legislative and regulatory framework necessary to protect the education and training rights and interests of agricultural and rural role players

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AET STRATEGY

The strategy envisages the creation of a National Agricultural Education and Training (NAET) Forum, which will coordinate the implementation of the activities and programmes of the strategy at all levels. The Forum will be constituted of representatives from Education Institutions, Department of Education, Department of Labour; Department of Agriculture, Farmer Unions, Agricultural Research Council, SETAs and other stakeholders interested in AET provision.

CONCLUSION

From the research findings and the history of Education in South Africa, AET was severely affected by the policies of apartheid. The Department of Agriculture in collaboration with the Food agriculture Organization developed the AET Strategy as a response to the above challenges and as part of the transformation agenda for the agriculture sector, to realize the vision of a united and prosperous agriculture sector.

While some of the constraints to attaining the full potential of agricultural performance are known, there has not been an appropriate response in formal education and training curriculum content to address the required improvement in areas such as marketing, management, value-adding and other practical skills. Positioning agriculture as a market-directed business can be profitable as opposed to being taught only as a production enterprise.