

Approaches Manual

1. What is a manual?

A manual is a document recording an organisation's current thinking and the best practice it has developed over time. It thus serves to aid institutional memory and is also a compendium of the organisation's various interventions and learning to date.

2. What is this manual for?

The Mdukutshani Rural Development Programme (MDRP) has developed this manual as an aid for staff and farmers in the area of its operation. All staff of the project should be clear what the manual contains and how it affects their specific programme.

3. Aims and Hypotheses

Our Aims

1. To find and promote options for farmers in our area that use locally available resources wisely for long-term sustainability and that improve farmers' productivity.
2. To strengthen farmers' capacities to seek and try out new ideas so that they are better able to adapt to changing conditions.

Our hypotheses

1. Land reform communities who now have land under land reform programmes will be better able to farm this land than people without title in communal areas.
2. They will invest more in their land and livestock and environment.
3. We will be able to see and show the farming systems they use and the integrity of these in terms of sustainable livelihoods.
4. Working closely with specific farmers who can show others how to reduce costs will benefit local farming practices.
5. The creation of working examples of development without handouts will influence the state positively to take responsibility for scaling up the work we have done.
6. Sustainable agriculture is better for the soil and also reduces inputs and costs.

7. Negative power relations in communities, families and groups around gender, Aids, traditional authorities and levels of government need to be understood and constantly guarded against.
8. Resource management is no longer a question of choice but is now a constant part of a focus on sustainability.

4. Who we work with and how

We work with resource poor African farmers in the Weenen-Msinga area of KZN. We aim our work at establishing best practice examples for state institutions, as well as other NGOs to share and learn from.

We generally work with individuals through agreements. This is due to our experience of working with groups in ways that have proved unsustainable, as the group is often set up by a few individuals to leverage funding.

Agreements are drawn up between individual farmers and us. We use a draft that we developed previously. These drafts are in Zulu and renewed for each crop or annually.

These agreements define Mdukutshani Rural Development Programme (MRDP) and the farmers' responsibilities, roles and inputs/commitments.

The agreement shapes our relationship and commitments to each other, as well as changing the relationship from "NGO's are there to help farmers" to "MRDP has interests and is responsible to a board and funder and staff are salaried workers". This is important as the former attitude often prevents people from questioning NGO's for being late or disorganised, since they are seen as doing farmers a favour.

And groups and agreements in scaling up (Incomplete sentence – do you want to delete or complete it?)

MRDP also seeks to correct the perception that we are there to teach farmers, explaining that we want to work and learn together to find answers. We clarify that the farmers have ownership of the experiment and are experimenting for themselves.

They (**Is this referring to the agreements?**) also force farmers and staff into thinking about objectives at the farmer level and lay down indicators to evaluate if the purpose of the agreement is successful.

The development of the agreement is also a learning process in itself in which together with the farmers we decide on farmers' days, the number of visits and how learning happens for each party.

With each new agreement this evaluation of the previous objectives and outcomes then happens.

Our work with groups

MRDP still works with groups around community rules and commonage based issues but this is a diversion from the norm. **What about groups at dip days and or mthatheni** (Incomplete sentence??)

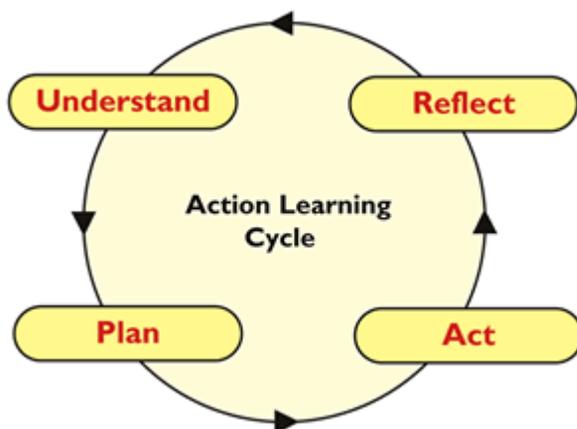
Handouts

Funding from other organisations or the state is a complicated and difficult issue. MRDP believes that money or handouts usually have the ability to compromise the success of any project. They destroy chances of replicability and attract people to projects as job creation rather than any sustainable issue that is being promoted.

When a farmer is approached with funding or free handouts we warn them about the implications and then step back and leave the decision to them. We lobby the department on being responsible with things like grants.

How learning happens

MRDP is adopting the action-learning cycle to development where, together with farmers, we follow the action reflection process for learning:



Thus experiments and training should be practically oriented and include aspects of self-discovery.

MRDP has developed its approach by drawing on its own experience. This is described in general below and in detail in relation to the specific project activities (It's not absolutely clear where this is below – let's add page or paragraphs numbers).

Experimentation

MRDP has adopted the Participatory Technology Development (PTD) approach to working with farmers. This involves a practical process of bringing together the knowledge and research capacities of the local farmers with that of outsiders in an interactive way. It involves activities where local producers work together with external participants in the identification, generation, testing and application of new technologies and practices. PTD therefore seeks to strengthen the existing experimental capacity of farmers and to sustain on-going local management in the processes of innovation.

It would help a lot here if you would give practical examples – or/and describe it on a lower level (Complete this?)

Roles of main actors in PTD:

FARMERS	DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS (NGO and government)	SCIENTISTS
Analysers of own situation	Identifiers of local innovations	Providers of information to complement farmers knowledge
Evaluator of new ideas	Facilitators of situation analysis	
Generators of site specific improvements	Moderators of different local interests	Advisors to development practitioners about appropriate on-farm experiment designs
Experimenters	Links between farmers and source of information inputs	
Communicators of own knowledge and findings	Advisors to farmer experimenters	
	Facilitators of farmer to farmer extension	

Solutions to address the problems raised are often found amongst farmers themselves. This, in itself, is an important reversal in thinking in agricultural extension. The assumption has been that only scientists carry out research; however, farmers adapting external innovations often use the same steps as scientists, namely: formulating a problem; formulating a testable hypothesis; empirically testing the hypothesis and validating or invalidating the hypothesis based on the results.

Local innovations address locally recognised problems and opportunities, which lead to questions:

- Do many farmers experience the same problems or have the same opportunities?
- What can local people try out with the resources available to them to solve this problem or take advantage of this opportunity?

Options that farmers can test:

- Identified local innovations (try it more widely or deeply)
- Other ideas developed by other farmers in their own and other areas
- Ideas from outside (research, extension)

5. Core Business: our rationale

These programmes are based on our assumption that after the Department of Land Affairs has transferred land, there needs to be a better understanding **and application** (OK with this addition?) of farming systems and land use. We focus on post transfer land reform beneficiaries as a group who have direct control over and access to land. We work intensively with a small portion of neighbouring communal farmers. This enables us to use these farmers as specific examples to aid and teach other farmers in the area based on the lessons learned there.

Farming for a profit is mainly centred in the valley (in a specific area? Nkaseni? Mtateni? Same place?) around a furrow irrigation system where mainly women farm plots and sell their produce. Their input costs are high and the soil is depleted from constant use of chemical fertilisers. MRDP is working on a participatory experimentation model with farmers using manure, green manures and other sustainable agricultural models to cut costs, create sustainability and maintain farmers' crop take-offs. At a later stage sustainable disease control will be added to this experiment.

- Objective 1: Mtateni (irrigated farming)
The farmers that MRDP works with will improve the soil conditions, equal their production to fertiliser alternatives and decrease the production cost of their crops. Farmers will also look at sustainable pest reduction processes.

We hold that **livestock farming** in its various types and scales is very widespread on these areas and is often why land is sought on land reform programmes **Do you mean farms? If not, then say sought from LR programmes.** Farmers do invest in their livestock but their understanding of western medicine is insufficient, so dosages and usage of drugs is less than perfect leading to increased costs. Their breeding strategy can also be improved, especially with indigenous gene pools. Rotational grazing using dryland stubble is part of this indigenous system and without this the winter grazing bottleneck cannot be dealt with. The reason that these dryland systems have collapsed is largely due to the depletion of fertility and degradation soil structure, as well as crop choices. Our objectives here are therefore:

- Objective 2: Dry-Land Farming
The farmers that MRDP works with will better understand and make their dry-land farming systems more productive in terms of crop and winter forage.
- Objective 3: Cattle
The farmers that MRDP works with will have a clear understanding of breeds and how to breed the desired Nguni traits into their cattle and will keep more cattle with the Nguni traits that are better able to handle drought, ticks and disease. Sales and the selling of stock

will be better understood and there will be value added through Nguni breeding. (Are you any clearer whether Nguni cattle as a whole able to better withstand drought, ticks and disease or are there specific sub breeds that can handle different aspects more efficiently?)

Women and livestock are a focus of ours as women are more centred on family welfare and are often the ones left in charge due to the migrant labour system and **deaths of spouse**. (Do you mean this or that women have to make decisions about rituals around deaths when men are not present?) Traditionally and currently they have chickens that they maintain in the household as well as small homestead gardens that they plant with pumpkins. However, the chickens are very prone to predation from wildlife and disease outbreaks. A programme of growing feed for the predator prone chicks so that they could be kept in predator proof enclosures for the 2 months that they are vulnerable (**is being considered? is being implemented?**). A vaccination programme as well as veterinary support and longer-term support around marketing is also needed to boost production.

- Objective 4: Poultry keeping
The women that MRDP works with on poultry will improve their systems, productivity and income.

As this knowledge of **animal health** involves outside expertise we will compile a book on this in Zulu as a resource to begin empowering the farmers to implement the knowledge themselves.

- Objective 5: Animal Health
Livestock owners (especially cattle, sheep, goat and chicken owners) and the people supporting them will enhance their veterinary skills and knowledge, such as how to keep animals healthy and how to deal with sick animals. This will be facilitated by the elaboration and sharing of a respective fieldwork handbook.

The farms and areas that these farmers have access to are what will sustain these families. The farmers need to always keep in mind the impact of their **livelihoods on the natural resource base** and to learn ways to better preserve and maintain it.

- Objective 6: Resource use practices
Environmentally friendly resource use practices will become more commonplace in the communities that MRDP works with.

The communities we work with need to better understand their ability to **lobby government** and challenge the issues surrounding them. MRDP's responsibility here is to ensure that they are empowered to exert this pressure without our presence.

- Objective 7: Empowerment and capacity building of our clients
The communities that MRDP works with will begin to make informed demands upon the state.

The staff who carry all these activities need **support in capacity** to be able to carry out these demanding responsibilities. Therefore, outside expertise and training will be employed.

- Objective 8: Internal capacity building to improve work practice
MRDP staff will be better equipped to work with the forces affecting the farmers.

All our work needs to be recorded and shared much more broadly than the organization to this end all our work must be actively shared outside the organisation and the area as only with this sort of spread are any lessons we are learning relevant

- Objective 9: Sharing and dissemination
MRDP work and experiences will be understood, reviewed, adapted and used by others in the same field.

As an organisation we believe in ongoing learning processes and to this end we need regular and systematic planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME).

- Objective 10: Effective internal systems
MRDP will improve direction and accountability and undertake regular monitoring and evaluation.

6. Consultants and outside expertise

MRDP uses both private and state consultants for various purposes whenever there is a gap in our knowledge that they can fill; this leaves us with the knowledge for future interventions. Outside expertise is also employed when there is a specific once-off short-term intervention that needs a high level of expertise that probably won't need to be repeated.

With longer-term transfer of skills expertise we will have a clear terms of reference (TORs) or memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and objectives that we can measure progress against. There will be at least an annual review of this agreement.

The following are questions we need to answer when considering the appointment of consultants:

- Do we make a planned program or do we call them when we need them – PME a schedule but there are issues like diseases we need them for on the day – **not sure what you're saying here. Surely you would plan for any paid or additional expertise – you would know what you want from them, how you want it, why you want it, how you'd know that you'd got it --- so even if it's one day, you'd still have a good idea of what you're wanting and how to get it.**
- What do we need the expertise for?
- How many consultants do we need?
- What sort of skills can provide this expertise and how do we identify them?
- Should we use international or local expertise? **Why would you use international if there is good local expertise?? It costs more, doesn't it?**
- When should we request site visits as opposed to telephonic advice?

- How do we decide what we need from this expertise? Resources, training or brainstorming ideas?
- How should such a person report to us?
- How long will they be contracted?
- What do they leave with us and what may they take?

7. Why we have good practice (made this a heading)

Good practice is a result of learning and experimenting. Where there are successes these can then be carried forward as tools we have learnt that we can share.

Good practice is important as we can then learn to evaluate our work in a better way with a view of sharing what works well.

How we meet

Meeting communities, farmers and others is our main method of interaction with both our clients and the world. These meetings need to be properly planned and run to get the best out of them. Communication skills can be fine tuned with understanding how people learn. The processes we consider important are:

- Process is as important as content so we agree on a plan and the objectives of our meeting/intervention beforehand.
- We always have our objectives and hopes for results clear in our work for both the clients and us.
- There is always a PME plan in our work. (at what level – every meeting?)
- We agree upon and set both an agenda and time frames for meetings? we plan.
- We understand all programmes and how each process fits into our project vision.
- We start from the knowledge and experience the clients have.
- We are not here to teach or help but to share.

7. Spread

The numbers of farmers, people, organisations and departments we share with and learn with are how we justify expenditure on the project.

As an NGO we see ourselves as a group who can try various alternative options of implementation and where we succeed we would like others to pursue these options. There are three different kinds of scaling up MRDP will pursue:

NGOs

We will share with NGO's who work in other areas in order for them to adapt our approaches for their local conditions. We are an active member of MIDNET and have initiated and maintained our links with other NGO's through the land use interest group.

In this forum we share ideas and visit each other's projects to look for good practice models and examples.

Government

The state is a strategically important partner as very few, if any, other institutions have the money or staff that the state can mobilise. We thus hope to get the state to adopt our approaches and implement them more widely.

Should we put them into chapter of who we work with and how (complete this?? – I think it's fine like it is btw)

Farmers

In order to stimulate learning and enhance farmer's exchange of experiences, MRDP promotes farmer exchange visits. We feel that farmers listen to each other much more carefully than they would listen to an outsider. Therefore the farmers we work with should be the ones who will share what we are doing with others. This sharing can occur at different levels:

- Exchange between farmers from within the same group.
- Sharing with their neighbours.
- Sharing with farmers from other groups and areas.

I would find examples again good (complete this?)

Thus, it is very important to have a specific strategy to reflect this audience as well as to continually expand it.

Currently we link extensively with Government departments, NGO's and a limited group of farmers.

MRDP carries their work in various ways to the outside world:

- Conference presentations
- Networking
- Joint projects with departments
- The press
- Documenting

Internal

In the Msinga/Weenen Area we are currently working with a group of farmers spread over the areas that are geographically close to our project. We reach agreements and work intensively with farmers who want to experiment with us and less intensively with a larger group that can learn from these farmers and our work. We also have:

- Farmers days

- Dip tank discussions where we meet the men at the dips and discuss livestock issues
- Cross visits
- Linking with traditional and local authorities
- Cross pollinate the people from our programmes with our other work programmes

Some of our thinking in this

This section is very unclear – you need either to write it out more fully or we can talk and clarify what you're saying

- *We understand that numbers are not everything as there is a field worker/ farmer ratio that is correct what about the next levels of farmers – we have agreement farmers but they are less than a percent and have no clear strategy of how, once they know how to take it forward to the larger group. (???)*
- *In a group we want to lobby tribal authorities, political councillors, community groups etc and ordinary people.*

Examples of what? are

- *On farmer days, where farmers visit each other, the farmer not the NGO talks. However, the farmer needs to express him/herself clearly.*
- *Master farmer what is this? – power relations are one sided and assumption that the whole is right. (???)*
- *Slate agric experiments – In the Department of Agriculture's approach, all the inputs are assumed to be able to be replicable. and its someone else. (???)*
- *The farmers we have worked intensively with are an example to other farmers, who come to see the work being undertaken and choose what to implement in their own farming practices.*

Youth Approaches

Traditionally the youth of the areas took part in all farming activities and learnt the relevant skills. Links to livestock for boys were part of manhood ([The entry to manhood?](#) [Manhood rituals?](#) [Ceremonies?](#)) and young women often performed threshing and hoeing activities on other farmsteads and were able to learn diverse skills during these times. However, with schooling taking precedence the time was no longer available for threshing, herding or any other agricultural activities, which therefore fell on the shoulders of the older generations.

The schooled youth expect well paying urban jobs and generally spurn agricultural and other physical work as for only the illiterate. These young men go to the towns to find jobs and lifestyles. However, after some years they come back, often prepared to work again. Unfortunately this leaves them without skills or experience, often causing them to leave again and resort to crime or apathy.

MRDP realises its responsibility to look at sustainability in terms of the youth as well and the challenge is to get them interested in our interventions and to work with their communities.

MRDP will start discussions to target this group and to try to reach agreements with them on how we will shape our interventions to include them. We will also make special provision for them in our target groups by starting youth specific activities in our work. **Any ideas as to put examples of these activities (shall I add the ploughing competition?**

Gender

MRDP understands gender as the power relationships both good and bad between different parts and sectors of the community and society, which includes women, the youth, authorities and others **(needs to be made more clear why the youth, authorities etc are important to gender)**. The vulnerability of different groups is often accentuated by this imbalance.

MRDP has been conscious of the fact that although our work with irrigated farming practices has been almost exclusively with women, our work with livestock farmers and historical work on land issues has, in the past, been mostly with men. This is due to a variety of social and cultural norms and expectations. We are thus looking for ways to work with women and livestock. A suggestion we took up is to work around women with livestock they both own and control: chickens. We believe that if women can control their own farming systems it will increase their independence from men's field practices and this will lead to their economic empowerment. We feel that our work to help women increase the productivity and profitability of their chicken farming will help them achieve increased economic independence that will improve household livelihoods.

MRDP is aware that we need more in-depth, context-specific understanding of gender issues in order to see how we can bring further gender awareness into our work.

Just as an idea for any “new” activity that is sprouting up CAP could ask and document the following questions and consider the answers and conclusions with respect to the planned activity (intervention):

Who perceives which problems?

Who does what? ()

Who possesses what? ()

Who decides what?

Who participates and how?

Who has what kind of needs?

8. Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

MRDP, as a learning organisation, understands the need for ongoing Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation processes. A plan has been developed where a PME cycle will happen in the organisation every six months on both the programmes and the staff's performance. A PME process will be conducted with the farmers prior to this so that this can feed into ours. A short term six month plan will be prepared, the objectives and indicators reviewed and then short term indicators agreed to. **A work plan will be**

compiled every second PME process will also involve yearly planning in a more strategic way. (Not quite sure what is being said here.)

The Format of this review will look at each indicator or output in this table format

Indicator or Output	Result	Why these are the results	Proof	What are the farmer's comments and opinions give a story (???)	The conclusions and the proposed next steps
Imphumela	Imiphumela	Isizathu sokuthi kwenzeke kanje	Ubufakazi	Chaza Imbono yabalimi xoxo indaba landa	Pho kukuchaze Lani lokho uzothatha ziphi izinyathelo
?want to put examples here?	?	?			

Also

- Not about *good or bad what??* but rather how it happened.
- Always keep the review questions when you do half yearly reviews – add on them as needed.
- It is essential to prepare a review report per programme and have documentation ready and prepared – a special folder with all copies.
- Be aware throughout the year that a review is happening – continuously prepare for it.
- Agree *with who?* on reporting and the presentation format.

Ideas on PME for farmers

What should be watched (Expectations and Fears)

- What changes do we expect (what do we hope to achieve?).
- What changes do we fear from the project (what do we want to avoid?).

How can it be watched?

- After choosing some expectations and fears, ask for concrete examples of how one can see if things change the way you want them to or not – these are the indicators.

Indicators can be measured by:

- Measuring or counting
- Scaling or rating (quality of goods: very good, good, average, bad, very bad)
- Classifying: yes/no (*salt available*) ??, women/men *explain?*
- Describing qualitatively in words

Determine beforehand how and where you will find the information for the chosen indicators.

Who should watch?

Election of group members / committee (only those present).

How can results be documented?

Keeping things in mind is sometimes difficult, so if you keep a record it helps to:

- Make data more accurate
- Serve as a reminder
- Make data accessible for others

What was observed?

At each group meeting or at agreed intervals the monitors will report (preferably visualised). What does this mean?

- Why these results
- Discussion and analysis

What action should be taken?

- Here usually it comes down to “what can we influence?”
 - Example for plan of action
 - What action needs to be taken
 - Who is responsible
 - Who else is involved

When should it be done by? (tails off, is this the end or did mine get snipped?)

- What are the time constraints? (added this – ok?)