

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Challenges with the implementation and adoption of assisted reproductive technologies under communal farming system

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Received 27 July, 2018: Accepted 16 August, 2018

**This study aimed to assess the perception of cattle farmers regarding the challenges affecting implementation and adoption of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) such as oestrous synchronisation and artificial insemination under communal and emerging farming systems in South Africa. The study was conducted in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal provinces. A total of 27 cattle farmers who participated in the ARTs project were randomly selected, nine (9) from each province. The data were collected through in-depth interviews using semi-structured questionnaire. The collected data were managed and coded into themes using Nvivo Version 11 software programme. A total of 31 perceived sub-themes emerged that could compromise the implementation and adoption of Assisted Reproductive Technologies in the study area. Sub-themes were clustered into three major themes by the researcher, namely; those that arose from human interference, those that emanated from lack of resources and those that were the result of natural causes. The most prominent of the challenges that emerged during the interviews across the three provinces as mentioned were: drought and dry seasons (22), stock theft (21), diseases (21), inadequate infrastructure (19), lack of access to the market (16) and expansion of dwelling areas (13). Interviewed cattle farmers strongly agreed that the removal of these challenges would make the implementation and adoption of ARTs and any other livestock related technology easier for them.**

**Key words:** Artificial insemination, cattle farmers, oestrous synchronisation

## INTRODUCTION

Agriculture, and cattle farming in particular, form part of the traditional survival strategy of many rural farming

communities in South Africa. The productivity of cattle in those farming areas is low due to many reasons including

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those farming areas is low due to many reasons including the poor or non-adoption of best practices, new researched information and technologies advances. This challenge arises from human factors and not from the animal or lack of technologies. Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) mainly oestrous synchronisation and artificial insemination can be used to enhance genetic gains in breeding programmes. Additionally, ARTs can minimise the cost associated with buying and managing a bull, time and labour essential for heat detection in cow that graze in those areas with physical barriers such as mountains and bushes (Maqhashu, 2013; Nqeno et al., 2010). The adoption and use of these technologies by commercial dairy farmers is highly advanced. Communal and emerging cattle farmers in rural areas can adopt and use these technologies to address the shortage of bulls and the low calving rate that has become the norm.

The Agricultural Research Council – Animal Production Institute (ARC-API) in partnership with Technology Innovation Agency (TIA) and Provincial Departments of Agriculture (PDAs) rolled out the Livestock Improvement Programme throughout South Africa between 2012 and 2016. The project involved the application of ARTs such oestrous synchronisation and artificial insemination of beef cattle in communal and emerging farming areas.

The decision to accept and adopt a particular technology by rural cattle farmers is dependent on how the technology is perceived. Those technologies that are perceived negatively will have a low to zero adoption level (Adesina and Baidu-Forson, 1995; Tatlidil et al., 2009). Furthermore, the socio-economic attributes of the intended beneficiaries will influence the adoption process (Muzari et al., 2012; Tatlidil et al. 2009). Mphinyane and Terblanchè (2005) and Shields et al. (1993) found that the rate of technology adoption is directly associated to the level of education as well as information-seeking behaviour of the farmers. The high illiteracy level among rural livestock farmers can become a stumbling block to technology adoption (Kunene and Fossey, 2006).

In South Africa, the agricultural extension service is offered by the government at no cost to communal and emerging farmers. Development agencies that are agricultural based also play a part although on a limited scale. Gwala (2013) reported on the poor quality of extension services offered by the South African government agencies. According to Liebenberg (2015), 8 out of 10 extension officers in South Africa are insufficiently qualified to carry out their responsibilities. Additionally, there is a high extension personnel shortfall in South Africa taking into account the number of resource-poor farmers as well as projects emerging from land reform programmes as well as other initiatives. Despite the challenges, extension services still remain a major source of information and knowledge to rural farmers, and largely influence the acceptance and adoption of technologies, these in addition to technology

attributes. There is a generally low level of technology implementation and adoption in rural communities worldwide. This study was conducted to determine challenges that affect the implementation and adoption of assisted reproductive technologies under communal farming systems in South Africa.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study site

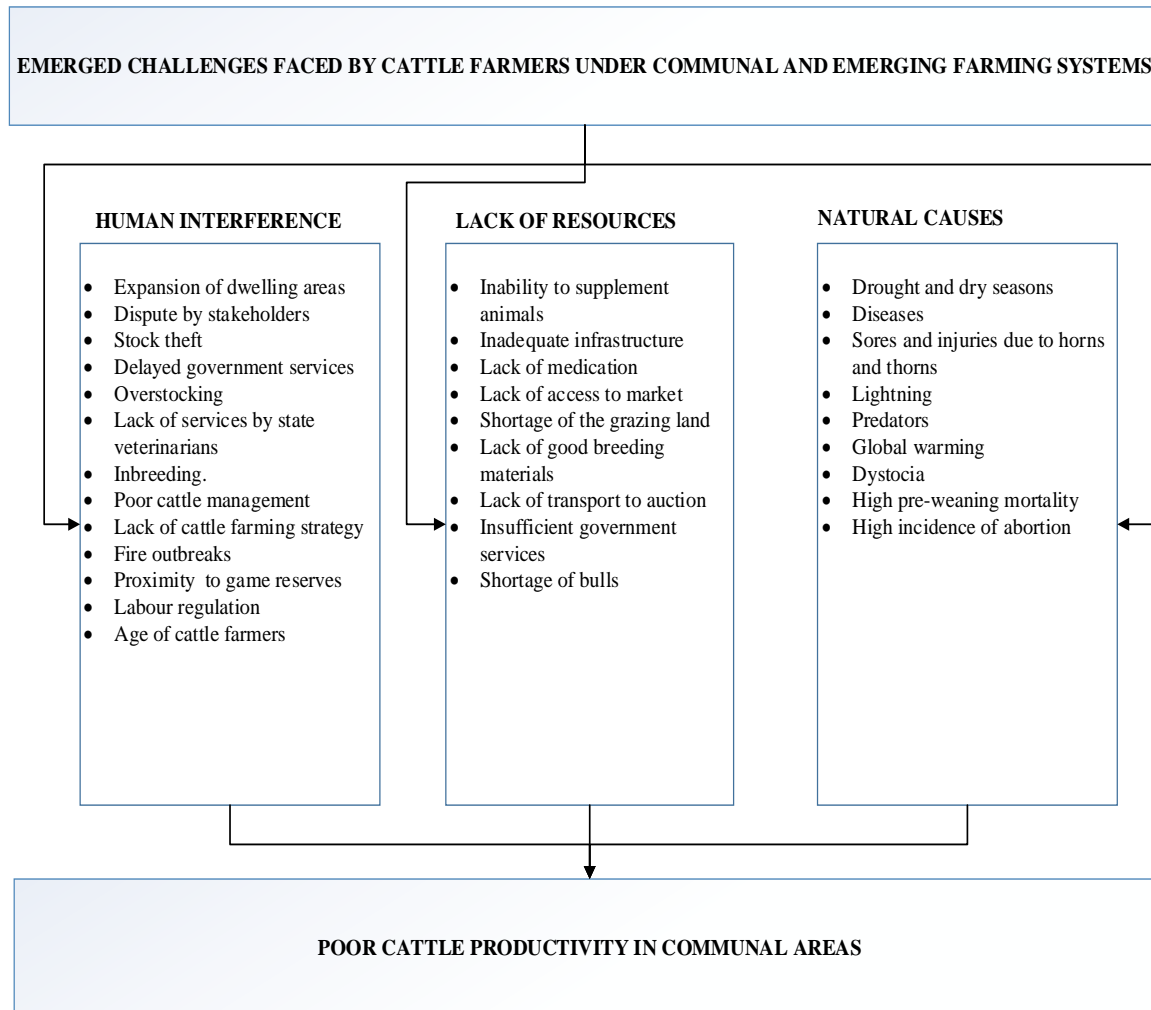
The study was conducted in three provinces of South Africa, namely; Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal. The provinces were chosen because of their rural nature and abundance of cattle under communal and emerging farming systems, in addition to the availability of cattle handling facilities and previous working relations with farmers. Limpopo is mainly rural and temperatures in the province average between 27°C in summer months and 15°C in winter months with an average range of 12.5 to 37.1°C. Rainfall in the province ranges from 346 to 1560 mm per annum with an average of 550 mm per annum (Nengovhela, 2011). Mpumalanga has a sub-tropical climate with hot summers and mild to cold winters where the average daily temperature in summer is 24 and 14.8°C in winter (Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Land and Environmental Affairs, 2012; Molefi et al., 2017). Furthermore, the province has an average rainfall of 767 mm per annum. The rainfall increases from West to East at 600 to 1600 mm or more annually (Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Land and Environmental Affairs, 2012). KwaZulu-Natal province is sub-tropical characterised by high humidity, warm wet summers and cool dry winters (Fairbanks and Benn, 2000). Summer temperatures average at 28°C and winter temperatures seldom fall below 17°C even in mid-winter (Census, 2011). The province collects an average of 1000 mm rainfall per annum with more rainfall towards the coastal areas (Fairbanks and Benn, 2000).

### Sampling process

Eighteen smallholder cattle farmers who participated in the Livestock Improvement Programme conducted by the Agricultural Research Council – Animal Production Institute were selected as model farmers for interview purpose. The model farmers were identified with the help of other cattle farmers and as well as project implementation co-ordinators in the respective provinces. According to Kundhlande et al. (2014), a model farmer is an experienced farmer who demonstrates improved farming and management skills. Other farmers look up to that farmer in terms of new knowledge and improved management skills. When in-depth interviews are to be conducted with targeted respondents, the sample size will have little bearing on the outcome of the studies (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006; Marshall et al., 2013; Small, 2009).

### Data collection and analysis

A semi-structured questionnaire was developed with open ended questions. The approach was aimed at eliciting inner views of the participants by probing their responses to get a better understanding of their reasoning. Data collected was fully transcribed and translated into English. Nvivo Version 11 designed and developed by QSR International Ltd was used to manage the final English transcripts. Whole sentences and paragraphs were coded as outlined by Straus and Corbin (2014) and categorised



**Figure 1.** Challenges that emerged faced by communal and emerging cattle farmers in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal provinces.

into themes.

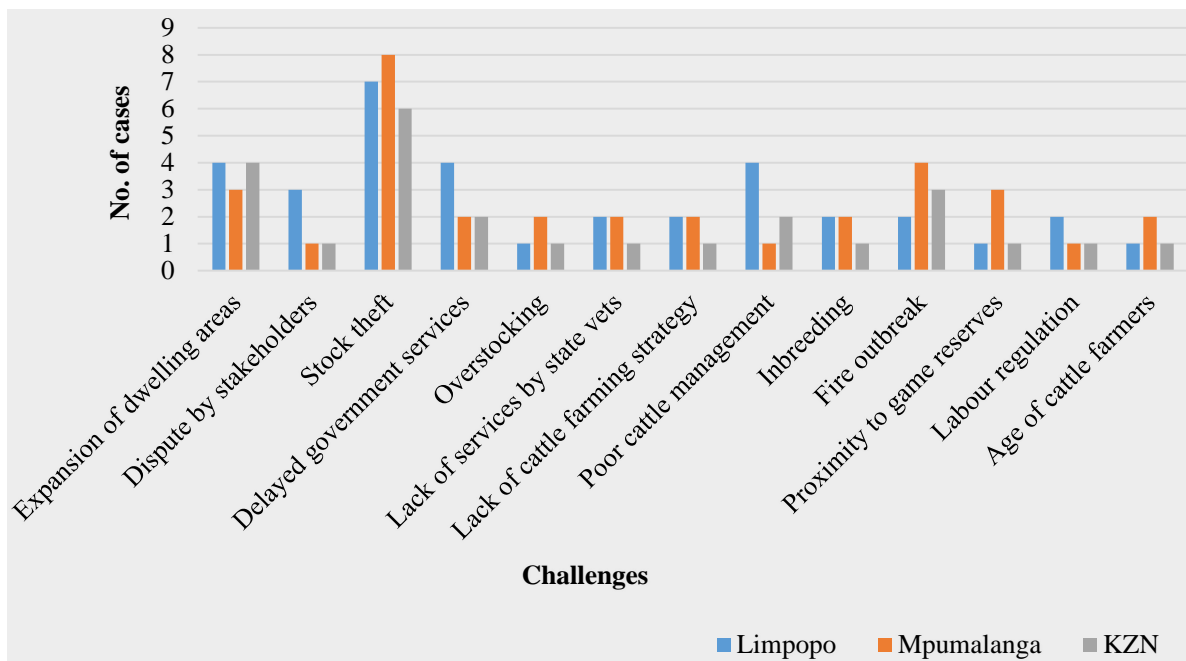
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 31 sub-themes emerged on the perceived challenges that could compromise or prevent the implementation of the Livestock Development Project under communal and emerging farming systems. The sub-themes were clustered into three major themes as reported crosscutting through provinces, namely: those that arose from human interference, those that emanated from lack of resources and those that were the result of natural causes (Figure 1).

### Human interference

The five most common constraints as perceived by respondents in order of rankings were: stock theft,

expansion of dwelling areas, fire outbreak, delayed government services and poor cattle management; however, only the first two will be discussed (Figure 2). Stock theft emerged as the number one challenge arising from human interference. Stock theft crime is a common feature in rural areas of South Africa and had been going on for years. Crime statistics reports and surveys in South Africa indicate that rural livestock farmers are mostly affected by stock theft (Maluleke et al., 2016). Hangara (2011) and Malekano (2000) reported about stock theft as a challenge facing communal cattle farmers in Namibia and Malawi, respectively. Stock theft takes place more often than other forms of criminality and it is a much more serious threat in South African regions bordering other countries, such as the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Limpopo (South African Police Service, 2012). Nengovhela (2011) reported that most farmers felt that there was better maintenance of the rule of law during



**Figure 2.** Perceived challenges arising from human interference as given by respondents.

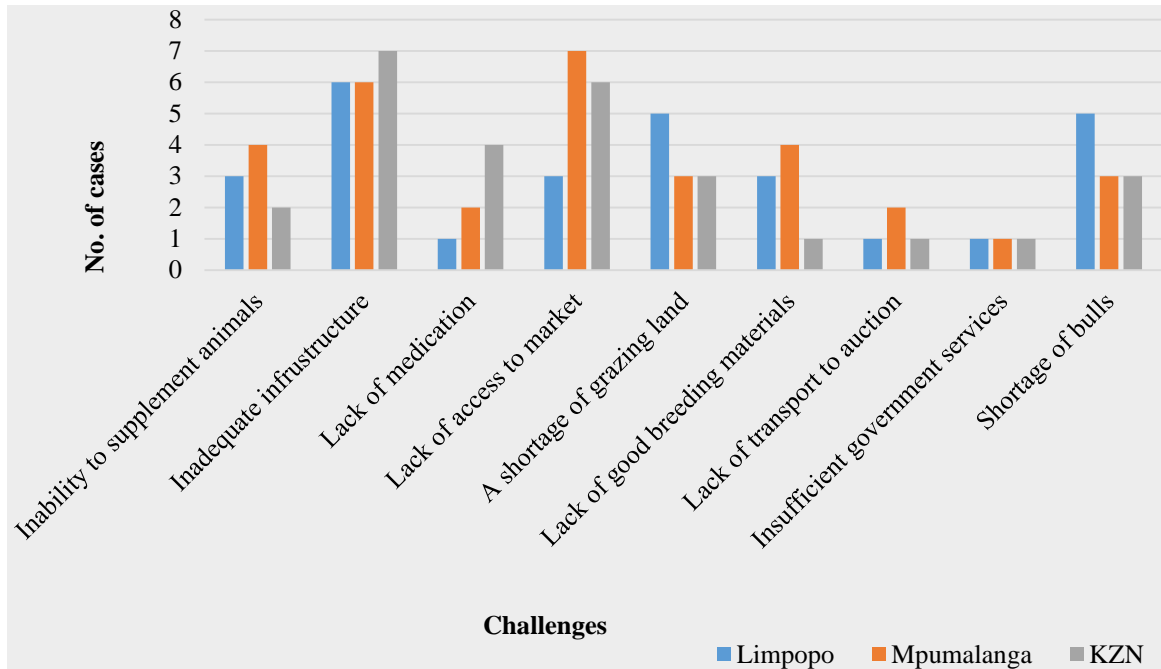
apartheid than it is now. The costs paid by these farmers to boost safety in the vicinities of their livestock roughly preceded the fiscal planning destined for production. To restore order and trust in the cattle farming sector, the government needs to seriously increase the penalties that are associated with stock theft. Furthermore, the Animal Identification Act (Act no. 6 of 2002) which makes provision for a permanent identification mark to be put on the animal for identification purposes need to be enforced.

The expansion of the dwelling areas was mentioned as a challenge that reduces the land originally available for cattle grazing. Ever since the fall of apartheid, there has been a rapid expansion of villages and dwellings. Many small, medium and large enterprises, along with tourist attraction businesses such as overnight accommodation and holiday resorts have also been on the rise. These mushrooming businesses are all at the expense of land originally allocated for grazing and field crops. Local governance was also not spared as they were accused of expanding industrial and residential areas in order to generate more income through rates and taxes. Management committees at the chief's kraal that manage applications for the development process are seen as dysfunctional entities often open for manipulation by ambitious traditional leaders who feel that they have more power over land and people (Buthelezi and Yeni, 2016). This is augmented by a raft of laws such as the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003 that still fails to define the functions and powers of chiefs. The government needs to intervene and

provide leadership to ensure the rule of law and accountability before the situation gets even worse.

### Lack of resources

The five most common constraints that emerged as perceived by respondents in order of ranking were: inadequate infrastructure, lack of access to the market, shortage of grazing land, a shortage of bulls and inability to supplement animals, again, discussion will be limited to the first two (Figure 3). Challenges associated with inadequate infrastructure dominated this category. Inadequate infrastructure merely takes away the limited incentives that are available to rural farmers (Nkosi and Kirsten, 1993). Gwala (2013) reported about the poor state of access roads and lack of transport facilities in rural Eastern Cape Province. Almost all the cattle infrastructure currently in existence in the Eastern Cape province was built by the Department of Agriculture (Tada, 2012). According to Frisch (1999), in communities that have facilities, they are either in a poor state or non-functional because they were erected some 50-60 years ago and farmers do not have the cash to maintain them. The facilities make it easy for farmers to carry out the basic animal husbandry activities such as castration, animal identification, vaccination, animal treatment, artificial insemination, pregnancy diagnosis and live-weight measurements. The lack of infrastructure can seriously hinder development initiatives such as the implementation of ART in rural farming communities.



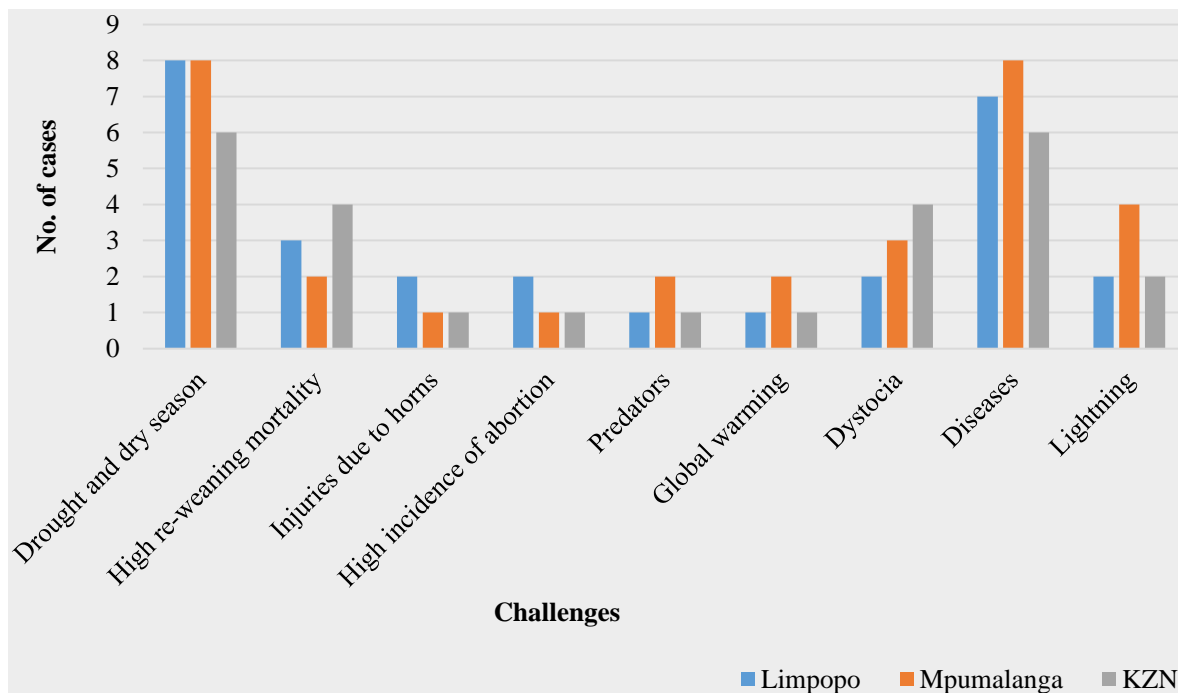
**Figure 3.** Perceived challenges arising from lack of resources as given by respondents.

Because of competing and limited available resources, the government is unable to provide adequate services such as the repairs of crush pens necessary for cattle handling. Farming communities need to organise themselves into functional groups so that they can carry out their own repairs. Interviewed cattle farmers complained about the lack of market and high transactional costs when they take their animals to the auction. Nkosi and Kirsten (1993) found that farmers prefer informal markets with no transaction cost, with poor market information pertaining to price and lack quality requirement. This finding is also supported by a study conducted by National Emergent Red Meat Producer's Organisation (2005) for the National Department of Agriculture. Montshwe (2006) and Musenwa et al. (2007) identified poor market infrastructure, increasing market price variability, high transaction costs and low purchasing power of buyers as major problems resulting in limited market participation. Ainslie et al. (2002) identified cultural values and poor production practices rather than market failures as major causes of limited market participation. The challenge for most rural cattle farmers is that sometimes they cannot sell their animals on any specific day they want because of a lack of buyers. Furthermore, most of their animals are in poor body conditions due to poor nutrition for the most part of the year except during the rainy seasons and this result in lower farm gate prices especially during the dry spells (Makhura, 2001); also, more often producers will refuse to sell their livestock. Animals under rural farming are often too old when farmers sell them and this

contributes a great deal to low prices (Nkhori, 2004). Respondents felt that any technology that would increase cattle productivity with no access to formal markets was less likely to be adopted since farmers were able to meet the demand of the rural market.

### Natural causes

The five most common challenges that emerged as given by respondents in order of ranking were: drought and dry season, diseases, lighting, dystocia and high pre-weaning mortality; again, our discussion will be limited to the first two (Figure 4). Interviewed stakeholders reported drought as one of the key challenges to livestock productivity and could impact negatively on the implementation of the ART project under communal and emerging farming systems. Drought and dry seasons are regular and recurrent features of the South African climate (Mathieu and Yves, 2003). The results of drought are severe water and feed shortages, and the death of animals. These in turn will affect the body condition score and the ability of animals to cycle and conceive, negatively impacting on the implementation of the ART. South Africa experienced severe drought in 2015 through to 2016, and a large number of cattle died during this period. Motiang and Webb (2016) found that farmers do not dispose-of their animals even when there is an anticipation of drought. Though this challenge is recurrent, communal and emerging cattle farmers had no strategy at all to deal with the challenge. Cattle farmers



**Figure 4.** Perceived challenges arising from natural causes as given by respondents.

need to devise strategies that will ensure their herd survival during drought and winter (May to July) season. Parasites and diseases were among the constraints faced by communal and emerging cattle farmers as raised by respondents during the interview. The most problematic diseases listed by respondents were tick-borne diseases such as heartwater and redwater, lumpy skin disease, Foot and Mouth Disease and sores resulting from abscesses. This is comparable with many authors (Mapiye et al., 2009; Rajput et al., 2006; Swai et al., 2010) who reported tick-borne diseases as the main cause of substantial losses in cattle production, reduced productivity, the decline in fertility and often death. High incidences of diseases in developing countries are due to a number of reasons including the unavailability and high cost of drugs and medicines (Ndebele et al., 2007). Some drugs and vaccines such as the Teramycin and Lumpy skin disease vaccine can be purchased from farmer's co-operatives and NTK stores throughout South Africa. Respondents were aware that indigenous cattle breed such as the Ngunis are tick and disease resistant, and that they should be promoted since they will fit the low-input, low-output production system common in rural setups. Again, respondents also indicated that in the past, during the apartheid era, they were provided with all vaccines free of charge and questioned the motives of the current government as being too corrupt and selfish. Not all cattle farmers vaccinate their animals and unvaccinated herds become the source of reinfection due to poor control of movement under communal setups.

Diseases, especially reproductive diseases can impact negatively on the implementation and adoption of ART under communal and emerging farming systems. It is important for cattle farmers to know and understand their role and that of the government in cattle farming.

## Conclusion

Respondents were aware of the many challenges facing cattle production under communal and emerging farming systems. The general feeling amongst cattle farmers is that government should address these challenges. However, due to limited resources, government programmes should target cattle farmers who are serious about farming, and those who are willing to change their traditional farming methods. The dependency syndrome will not advance cattle farming, and government cannot initiate and support all aspects of cattle farming in rural areas. Cattle farmers with the help of Provincial Department of Agriculture officials need to devise strategies to survive drought and dry winter periods in order to keep their animals in shape. There is also a need for the development and maintenance of infrastructure such as cattle handling facilities in rural areas by all cattle stakeholders involved.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interest..

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Technology Innovation Agency (TIA) for funding, the Agricultural Research Council – Animal Production Institute (ARC-API) and Provincial Departments of Agriculture in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal for assistance with data collection, the University of Limpopo for funding the data collection process and the University of Fort Hare for providing study opportunity.

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