A participatory approach is one where stakeholders are invited to contribute to a project. Wider consultation at all levels contributes to a better understanding of problems, the development of more appropriate solutions, and ultimately, improved resilience. In this project, an interactive workshop was used as the platform for re-designing the SUSFARMS® irrigation module. Key stakeholders from government, the catchment management agency, the Wildlife Environmental Society of South Africa (WESSA), irrigation specialists and, importantly, the end users, sugarcane growers and extension specialists, attended the workshop to consider improvements to the original irrigation module. Revisions to the module are based on recommendations in a recently completed Water Research Commission (WRC) report that was compiled by a team of irrigation specialists in South Africa. The WRC report represents the most up-to-date, comprehensive and cutting edge thinking on irrigation best management practices. The participatory approach ensured that material used from the WRC report was tailored for sugarcane farmers and presented in an easy-to-follow, practical and implementable format. Refinements were finalised based on feedback from stakeholders and specialists. Significant improvements include a better structured manual which lays out in a systematic manner the information necessary for sustainable water management on farms. The revised module is thematic and progresses logically from water legislation to irrigation planning and design, operation and maintenance, monitoring and evaluation and finally drainage. Selected examples are used to demonstrate the value proposition of the improved SUSFARMS® irrigation module.

Keywords: sustainable farming, conservation farming, irrigation performance assessment, technology transfer, SUSFARMS®