IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION OF THE SMALLHOLDER FARMER SUPPORT PROGRAMME AND ITS LIKELIHOOD OF INCREASING FARM PRODUCTIVITY: A CASE OF “ABALIMI PHAMBILI PROJECT”, JOZINI, KWAZULU-NATAL

By

PHUMELELE NONDUMISO NGCOBO

DISSERTATION

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DECLARATION

I, Phumelele Nondumiso Ngcobo, declare that this work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree in this or any other university. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____ Signed by candidate **Date:** _____

DEDICATION

To my late father, Bonginkosi Mdlalose. I miss you every day and I hope you are proud of your daughter.

To my loving mother, Busi Ngcobo. Thank you for sacrificing your dreams so that my brothers and I could have a better life.

To my younger brothers, Philani and Sithembokuhle Ngcobo. I hope this motivates you.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
APP	Abalimi Phambili Programme
BATAT	Broadening of Access to Agriculture Thrust
CASP	Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
DBSA	Development Bank of Southern Africa
DPME	Department of Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation
Dti	Department of Trade and Industry
ECDC	Eastern Cape Development Corporation
FSP	Farmer Support Programme
IDC	Industrial Development Corporation
LIMA	LIMA Rural Development Foundation
MAFISA	Micro Agricultural Financial Institutions of South Africa
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SEDA	Small Enterprise Development Agency
SHF	Smallholder Farmer
ToC	Theory of Change

ABSTRACT

Farmer support programmes are aimed at assisting in unlocking barriers faced by smallholder farmers. These programmes were implemented many years ago by the public and private sector. However, research continues to show that the increase in the number of these initiatives and in budgets/expenditures have not equally translated into an increase in the number of smallholder farmers advancing to commercial status. Therefore, this evaluation research is focused on assessing the implementation progress of a farmer support programme being implemented in Jozini, KwaZulu-Natal. The aim is to assess whether or not the programme is implemented according to the theory of change and to assess the likelihood of the programme achieving its intended outcomes.

Both the quantitative and qualitative approaches were applied to collect and analyse data. Quantitative data was made up of project data and qualitative data was obtained through conducting in-depth interviews with farmers currently participating in the programme. Findings from this paper are expected to add to the existing body of knowledge in terms of strengthening and improving the design of farmer support programmes; to emphasise the importance of conducting implementation evaluations to assess programme performance early in implementation; to better understand what is working or not during implementation; and to understand why this is so.

Key Words: Farmer support programme, smallholder farmers, monitoring and evaluation, implementation evaluation, theory of change, agriculture.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

In South Africa, farmer support programmes are not new. The history of farmer support programmes (FSPs) dates back to the 1980s when the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) introduced this initiative with an aim of supporting smallholder farmers. The main developmental objective of the FSP was to provide support to farmers in the homeland areas who had previously been disadvantaged and had no resources to farm successfully (Vink, Van Rooyen & Karaan, 2012). The South African history played a major role in shaping the agricultural sector and creating a divide between white commercial farmers and small-scale black farmers. The apartheid government devised policies that favoured white commercial farmers over black farmers (Lepheane, 2007). These strategies included, among others, the decline in the landownership by black people. The dispossession from land and the restrictions on buying or renting land left people with no choice but to abandon their land to seek employment (Lepheane, 2007). The Land Act of 1913 allowed for only 8% of the country's farmland to remain in the hands of blacks (Lepheane, 2007).

According to Van Rooyen (1993), it was only towards the late 1960's to 1970s that the apartheid government recognised the magnitude of the inequality gap between black and white farmers. Following this realisation, they then made efforts to support black farmers (Van Rooyen, 1993). Various interventions by the government, such as the introduction of "capital projects" and "Betterment Planning" were part of the efforts aimed at supporting farmers in homelands. These initiatives were aimed at providing support to a group of farmers instead of providing individual support and larger plots of land was allocated to a group of farmers instead of small plots to individual farmers. However, these initiatives were not successful in providing the required support and creating successful farmers (Van Rooyen, 1993, p. 263).

The failure of the above-mentioned interventions led to the introduction of the DBSA farmer support. This initiative was different in that it aimed at providing comprehensive support, i.e. addressing a variety of challenges facing smallholder farmers, such as lack

of access to finance, lack of skills, information, production inputs, and lack of access to markets. The initiative was also aimed at providing support to individual farmers instead of groups. The initiatives aimed at supporting farmers continued to be implemented and more initiatives were introduced post-1994 when the government of the African National Congress (ANC) came into power. These initiatives included the Land Reform Programme, Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), and the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP). These initiatives were also aimed at supporting farmers who were previously disadvantaged and to increase the number of smallholder farmers advancing to commercial farmer status.

The report presented by the Ministry of Finance (National Treasury) supported the assertion that the government had increased its focus on the development of black smallholder farmers. In its provincial budgets and expenditure review report for the period 2010/11-2016/17, the National Treasury (2014) presented figures showing an increase in the national expenditure on agriculture. The report indicated that the national expenditure had risen from R4.6 billion in 2013/14 financial year to R4.9 billion in 2016/17. The expenditure was also expected to increase by 2.7 % annually as a result of an increase in the allocation of the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP) (National Treasury, 2014, p.151). CASP is a farmer support programme aimed at providing comprehensive support services to farmers to aid their growth and development (Vink et al., 2012). The report further stated that the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) had allocated R7 billion of its budget towards initiatives aimed at supporting smallholder farmers for the period 2014/15 - 2016/17. The types of support included infrastructure support, access to finance (grants), advisory services, marketing, and training (National Treasury, 2014, p.151). The report indicated that the South African government had and continued to increase its focus on the development and support of smallholder farmers.

Contrary to the increase in government expenditure, the contribution of the agricultural sector to the economy seems to be in decline. The performance of the sector has not been stable, due to, among other things, the decline in the sector's contribution to the GDP (figure 1) and its inability to produce enough food to meet the demand (Department

of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries [DAFF], 2016a). An analysis conducted by Vink and Van Rooyen (2009) on the economic performance of the agriculture sector in South Africa for the period 1994-2008, also showed that production by smallholder farmers had declined and they concluded that the gap between commercial and smallholder farmers was widening instead of narrowing. They also reported that smallholder farmers continued to face persistent challenges that limited potential for increased production and productivity. DAFF, 2016b, also reported that the number of farmers advancing from smallholder to commercial farmer status was not increasing, as shown in table 1. This was despite the increasing number of farmer support initiatives. Okunlola, Ngubane, Cousins and du Toit, are also of the view that farmer support programmes in South Africa have had very little success. This is further supported by Sikwela and Mushunje (2013), who argued that the increase in the number of farmer support initiative and the budgets attached to them have not resulted in a substantial increase in the number of farmers receiving support, due to resources being overly stretched and lack of coordination among national departments.

Table 1: Number of commercial farmers between the period: 1993 – 2007

Year	Total commercial farming units	Difference	Percentage drop / increase
1993	57,980	-	-
1996	60,938	2,958	5%
2002	45,818	-15,120	(25%)
2007	39,966	-5,852	(13%)

Source: DAFF (2016b)

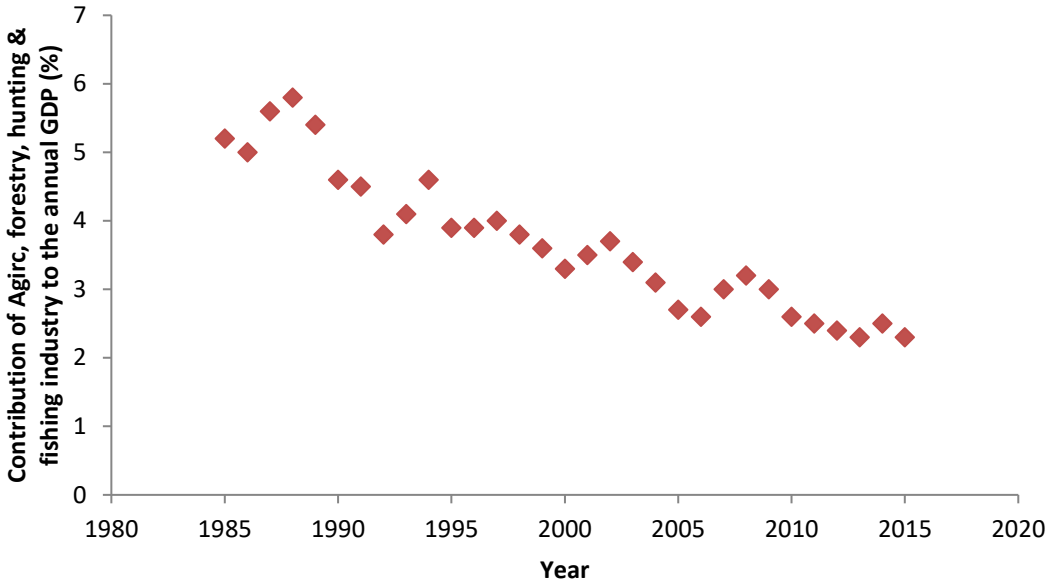

Figure 1: Contribution of the agriculture sector to the GDP

Source: DAFF (2016b)

Agriculture remains an important contributor to the economy in both the global and Africa context (International Finance Corporation, 2014). In the South African economy, the agricultural sector can play an important role in promoting food security, employment opportunities, poverty alleviation and realising economic development and improved gross domestic product (GDP) (National Treasury, 2014). Smallholder farmers have a potential to meaningfully participate in the sector should the challenges they face be addressed. It is hoped that this evaluation research will add valuable contributions to the existing body of knowledge in order to ensure that the sector increases its contribution towards the country's economic growth through increasing efforts towards the development of smallholder farmers.

There is a vast amount of literature available on agriculture and the role of farmer support programmes in developing farmers (van Rooyen, 1993; Kirsten & van Zyl, 1998; Ortmann and King, 20017; Sikwela & Mushunje, 2013). The literature also reveals that there have been more failures than successes in the implementation of farmer support programmes (van Rooyen, 1993; Sikwela & Mushunje, 2013). Therefore, this prompts for more research to be conducted to come up with policy recommendations that would be useful

in designing comprehensive farmer support programmes, which are informed by existing lessons and are aimed at doing thing differently and ensuring that the gap between black smallholders and white commercial farmers is minimised.

This study seeks to conduct an implementation evaluation of a farmer support programme implemented in Jozini Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal. The aim of the evaluation is to assess whether the programme is implemented according to the theory of change (ToC) and to assess the likelihood of the initiative achieving its outcomes, such as increasing farm productivity and providing market access. The study applied both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Ten farmers were interviewed for the purposes of this research. Thematic analysis approach was applied to analyse data and present farmer's experience of the initiative.

1.2 Background to the Abalimi Phambili Project (APP)

The Lima Rural Development Foundation (LIMA) has been implementing farmer support programmes for the past 15 years. The project is implemented across four provinces, namely KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. Farming activities supported by APP include dryland cropping, irrigated cropping, small livestock production, poultry (broilers and table eggs) production, piggeries, and deciduous fruit production (LIMA, 2017a). LIMA implements a farmer support programme aimed at addressing some of the constraints faced by smallholder farmers that hinder them from increasing productivity, accessing lucrative markets, and becoming sustainable farmers (LIMA, 2017a).

1.2.1 The key elements of the APP Farmer Support

The APP programme offers the following mix of support elements to farmers as detailed in the project proposal (LIMA, 2015):

(a) Provision of agricultural technical training to farmers;

(b) Mentorship: on-site extension advice provided by project facilitators;

(c) Input supply: assist farmers to access certified production inputs (i.e. seeds/seedlings, fertilizer, and chemicals) from reputable suppliers and assist with the delivery of these inputs;

(d) Revolving Credit Loan: Through a revolving credit system and facility, qualifying farmers will have access to production loans which they would otherwise not have access to. Credit allows farmers to slowly increase production levels and quantities, thereby growing agriculture and business. Loans are not provided to farmers in the form of cash, but the funds are paid directly to suppliers of inputs;

(e) Access to market through linking farmers to local markets and establishing Agri-Hubs; and

(f) Access to graduation grants: these grants are offered to farmers to allow them to graduate from the programme as part of the exit strategy. Grants are in the form of providing small capital for farm infrastructure, such as a rainwater harvesting system; fencing or tools required to improve productivity, and assisting farmers to attain the next level of farming.

For the purposes of this evaluation, the farmer support elements comprise training, mentorship, and access to finance (to buy inputs). The evaluation will assess how the farmers have experienced the implementation of training, mentorship and access to finance.

Following an assessment of reliability and quality of implementation, the evaluation will determine the likelihood of the elements being assessed contributing to increased productivity and market access.

1.2.2 The programme's theory of change

The problem statement that the APP programme responded to was the challenges faced by smallholder farmers, such as a lack of access to credit, lack of information, lack of access to quality inputs, lack of extension services, and that these challenges were structural and required government intervention to address. The programme's ToC was built on the assumption that providing emerging farmers with credit to buy inputs; that

training on farming techniques and mentorship would increase farm productivity, improve their agronomic practices (ability to maintain soil quality, safe application of fertilizers), and improve the quality of produce. Should this be achieved, farmers would be able to gain access to better-paying markets and generate better revenues. Overall, the impact of the initiative would be to create self-sufficient farmers who are able to create additional jobs (diagram attached as Appendix 1).

1.2.3 The programme's implementation plan

The initiative may be classified as a public-private partnership as it brought together partners from both the public and the private sector. LIMA is a not-for-profit organisation (NPO). Project partners contributed just under R120 million towards the implementation of the APP. The main objective for LIMA was to support and create self-sufficient farmers. The project got underway on 1 October 2015 and implementation will continue for four years until 30 September 2019. The project has completed eight quarters in implementation, that is, two years.

1.2.4 Programme success indicators

The project was expected to track the following outputs in all four provinces for the entire project duration (four years).

Table 2: Abalimi Phambili Programme Indicators

Item	**Target (for the duration of the programme)**
Total number of farmers supported	4 700
Loans Issued	R 30,855,124.00
Grants disbursed to successful farmers	R 5,126,555.00
Number of beneficiaries trained	12,800
Increase in the number of hectares put into production (ha per farmer)	Increase from 1 to 2 ha
Number of farm visits (per farmer, per month)	2

Source: LIMA (2017b)

The project was expected to support a total of 4,700 smallholder farmers with a mix of services stipulated in 1.2.1 above. The project advanced loans and graduation grants to farmers; trained a total of 12,800 farmers on topics, such as land preparation, pest and disease control; record keeping and financial management; increasing the land put into production from one to two hectares per farmer; and conducted farm visits twice per farmer per month (LIMA, 2017b).

1.2.5 Programme performance

The project performance, from inception (October 2015) to September 2017, was as follows:

Table 3: Programme performance for the period under review

	Target	Actual	Percentage
No. farmers supported & deemed sustainable	1 050	1 004	96%
No. of trained beneficiaries (farmers & farm workers)	4 400	5 157	117%
Loans issued	R 14,470,707.00	R 7,769,342.00	54%

Source: LIMA (2017b)

The table above shows that two years into implementation, the project has performed well in supporting the targeted number of farmers (96%), and training them and their farm workers (hence the higher number of beneficiaries trained vs. farmers supported). However, the project has only disbursed 54% of the loans targeted for the two-year period, indicating that there could be challenges in the implementation of the farmer support element. The graph below (Figure 2) also indicated that the project has had challenges in terms of loan repayments[1]; farmers seemed to have had difficulties in repaying loans.

[1] Note that there were no loans disbursed in year 1. Therefore, no repayments recorded in year 1.

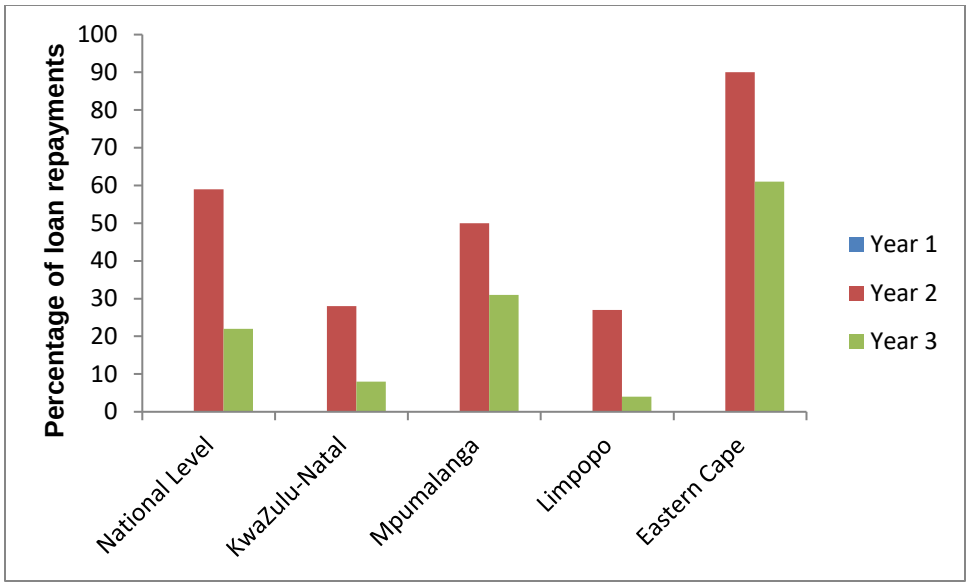

Figure 2: Percentage of loan repayments at national and provincial level

Source: LIMA (2017b)

1.3 Problem Statement

While the APP project reported that 96% of farmers were supported and 117% of farmers and their farm workers were trained, it had only achieved 54% of the loan disbursement target for two years. This meant that 46% of loans were not issued to farmers. The loan repayment rates were also low in many instances, for example, repayment rates in the third year were 4% and 8% for Limpopo and KZN, respectively. A number of reasons could explain why farmers were struggling to repay loans, hence the interest in selecting a case study and investigating further. The programme's ToC assumed that the ability of a farmer to repay the loan was an indication of their likelihood to achieve sustainability and would increase the amount of land they put into production. The questions, therefore, are whether the Abalimi Phambili's theory of change is valid; how is it being implemented in Jozini; and what is the likelihood of delivering the intended results (outputs and intended outcomes).

1.4 Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to appraise the implementation of the Abalimi Phambili farmer support programme in Jozini, KwaZulu-Natal. The evaluation will focus on three

elements of the farmer support provided by the APP, namely access to credit, training and mentorship. The purpose of the evaluation is two-fold:

(a) To gain a better understanding of whether or not the APP elements (access to credit, training and mentorship) are being implemented in accordance with the programme's ToC. This will be done by interviewing the beneficiaries of the programme; and
(b) The likelihood of the APP resulting in the intended outcomes, that is, increase farm productivity and access to market.

1.5 Evaluation Questions

The study will seek to answer the following questions:

(a) Is the programme implemented according to the theory of change?

(b) What is the contribution of each of the farmer support elements towards programme implementation?

(c) What does the majority of evidence say about the likelihood of the programme producing intended outcomes? Is it making a difference?

1.6 Significance of the Research

In most developing countries, agriculture is believed to have the ability to play a huge role in poverty reduction while also providing employment opportunities in rural areas (Machethe, 2004). Delgado (1998) as cited in Machethe (2004, p. 2) argues that "smallholder agriculture is simply too important to employment, human welfare, and political stability in sub-Saharan Africa to be either ignored or treated as just another small adjusting sector of a market economy…". The same sentiments have been echoed by Black, Conradie and Gerwel (2014), acknowledging that agriculture, compared to other sectors, plays a critical role in raising the income of the poor in low- and middle-income countries. The sector is also labour intensive and contributes towards employment creation. However, the success of the smallholder farming is determined by the ability of the smallholder farmer to farm the land in a viable and sustainable manner, producing

high-value output and linking into the agriculture value chain (Jobs Fund, 2015). Therefore, the researcher has conducted an evaluation research to assess programme implementation of an agricultural programme that has a potential to add value to the sector in accordance with the above assertions. Mamburu (2004) defines programme evaluation research as a way of assessing the performance of social programmes, to investigate whether they are achieving the objectives of the initiative, and positively impact on the intended beneficiaries. He further states that conducting programme evaluation research is a required necessity for public funded initiatives.

The significance of the study is as follows:

- It is increasingly recognised that knowledge on **how** programmes work is as important as knowing **that they work**. In the evaluation sector, process/implementation evaluations are closing the gap between knowing **what works** and knowing **why it works** and, therefore, contributing to a better understanding of what supports successful implementation and what does not. This type of knowledge is very important in South Africa where public service has experienced weaknesses in implementing different programmes.

- The results of the study would determine whether or not the implementation of the farmer support model is effective. The results might also suggest whether the project's ToC requires revision or not.

- The study will add to the existing body of knowledge in relation to the provision of support to smallholder farmers, farmer support programme designs, and programme implementation evaluation. The study will also make recommendations that would inform policy with regards to effective and efficient ways of providing support to farmers.

1.7 Overview and the Structure of the Research Report

Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Background: This chapter provides a background introduction to the study. It highlights the evaluation research problem, objectives and questions, and the significance of the research.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows:

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks: The chapter provides the conceptual and theoretical framework for the research through an analysis of the relevant literature and theories, focusing on key concepts of smallholder agriculture, the history of farmer support initiatives, and evaluations conducted on these programmes.

Chapter 3: The Research Design and Methodology: The chapter provides detailed information regarding the evaluation design, sampling, study area and population, data collection, data analysis, as well as the research ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4: Presentation and Discussions of the Research Findings: The chapter presents the research findings and discussions of its interpretations with reference to the evaluation questions stipulated in 1.5 above.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations: The chapter concludes the research paper with a summary of the research report and presentations of recommendations based on the analyses of the findings and insights from the literature review.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter points to the fact that the implementation of farmer support programmes is not a new phenomenon in South Africa. Whilst these initiatives are aimed at correcting the wrongs of the past and are focused at supporting previously disadvantaged farmers, they have not been successful in closing the gap between white commercial farmers and black smallholder farmers, despite the increase in the number of initiatives that have been implemented and the budgets injected towards implementation. The aim of the study is to evaluate the implementation of the Abalimi Phambili Programme, a farmer support programme aimed at supporting black smallholder farmers, and to assess whether or not it is making a difference.

The next chapter presents a detailed analysis of the literature relevant to the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on how the history of agriculture in South Africa has shaped the sector to what it is today. It explores how this history created what is referred to as the “two agricultures”, that is, comparing commercial (white) and the smallholder (black) agriculture. The level of support afforded to both groups has for a long time been different,

favouring white commercial farmers. Smallholder farmers have been, and continue to face, a number of challenges inhibiting them from proceeding to commercial status. While smallholder farmers face a number of challenges, the sector still remains very important to the economy. In order to address challenges faced by smallholder farmers and to close the gap between smallholder farmers and commercial farmers, farmer support programmes (FSPs) have been designed and adopted as vehicles to address these issues within the sector. Therefore, this chapter highlights the insights gained through literature reviews about FSPs, their challenges and successes pertaining to improving farm productivity (yield), and creating sustainable farmers.

2.2 Overview of the Smallholder Agriculture

According to the World Bank (2018), people in rural areas compose about 80% of the world's poor, mainly deriving their livelihoods from agriculture. A similar trend is observed in South Africa and the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) concurs that:

> Smallholder farmers can play an important role in livelihoods creation among the rural poor. Even though the smallholder production is important for household food security, the productivity of this sub-sector is quite low. Poor yield may be one of the reasons why urban and rural households either abandon or are uninterested in agricultural production. There is, therefore, a need to significantly increase the productivity of smallholder farmers to ensure long-term food security… (DAFF, 2012, p.1).

It is on this premise that the smallholder sector is largely promoted and/or funded in order to reduce poverty and promote development.

Based on contributing factors, such as farm-size, productivity, relationships, economies of scale, and competitive advantage, international empirical evidence indicates that smallholder farmers in developing countries are considered to be at least as efficient, if not more efficient, than large-scale commercial farmers (Kirsten & Van Zyl, 1998). In this regard, Wiggins and Keats (2013) are of the opinion that smallholder farmers have the potential to play an important role in enhancing household food security. Similarly,

international organisations, such as the United Nations, have recognised the significant role of the smallholder farmers as a major contributor to food security and world food supply (Thamaga-Chitja & Morojele, 2014).

Examples of smallholder farmers performing better than (or at least similar to) large-scale farmers, include the Zimbabwean experience between the years 1981–1982 where smallholder farmers recorded 4,067 kg/ha for maize compared to 4,164 kg/ha for large-scale commercial farmers (a difference of only 97 kg/ha). Smallholder farmers were also able to triple maize surplus and increased their share of the national market surplus from 10% in 1980 to 40% in 1987 (Eicher, 1994, as cited in Machethe, 2004).

In Kenya's "Million Acre Settlement Scheme", which was perceived to be favouring progressive[2] farmers, it was found that smallholder farmers who owned farms of less than two hectares managed to increase their share of national agricultural production from 4% in 1965 to 49% in 1985 (Machethe 2004). Overall, the output per hectare of non-progressive farmers was 19 times higher and employment 30 times higher on smaller holdings of under 0.5 ha as compared to larger holdings over 8 ha.

While the literature suggests consensus among researchers that the smallholder sector has a lot to offer in terms of economic growth and create employment and income opportunities in rural areas, researchers also note that for this sector to achieve all of this it requires improving smallholder farmers' ability to compete and market access (Kirsten & Van Zyl, 1998). Kirsten and Van Zyl (1998) argue that the ability of small-scale farmers to meaningfully contribute towards job creation and income opportunities in South Africa is hampered by barriers inhibiting growth, preventing them from becoming vibrant commercial farmers.

Ortmann and King (2007) suggest that access to land and capacity to cultivate available land are some of the major challenges of the smallholder farmers in South Africa. Although researchers differ slightly on the sum of agricultural land occupied by smallholder farmers compared to commercial white farmers, the message is clear:

[2] A progressive farmer is defined as a farmer who has prospects of running a commercially viable farm (Davies, 2014).

Ortmann and King (2007) posited that only 14% of the agricultural land was occupied by smallholder farmers, compared to 86% in the hands of 46,000 commercial farmers, while a study by Hart and Aliber (2012) put the figures at four million black farmers having access to 13 % of the land, compared to 87% owned by 35,000 commercial white farmers.

Besides the fundamental problem of access to sizeable cultivable land, smallholder farmers in South Africa confront the challenges of lack and/or inadequate agricultural production inputs, such as seeds/seedlings, fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides. Smallholder farmers have little or no access to the markets, limited access to credit and information, as well as access to factors of production, for example, production inputs and labour. Smallholder farmers are limited by high costs of transactions, production resources, extension services, supportive trade partners and reliable contractors as well as unmatched competition from better-placed commercial farmers (Ortmann & King, 2007).

On the contrary, Okunlola, Ngubane, Cousins and du Toit (2016) argue that conditions faced by farmers in the homelands are no different to what smallholder farmers in other African countries are subjected to, in fact, they believe that conditions in South Africa might even be better. The question they are asking is “why has there been so little success here?” (Okunlola et al., 2016).

The section above has highlighted the importance and the role of the smallholder sector in economic development and job creation. It also brought attention to the success stories of smallholder farmers as reported in other African countries. Therefore, there is merit in conducting further research around the smallholder agriculture, assess its current potential, and how this may be improved going forward. The research will also seek to provide some insights into the question raised by Okunlola et al., (2016) namely, why has there been so FSP success cases reported in South Africa. The following sections will attempt to address the issue of a definition of smallholder farmers for purposes of this research, unpack the challenges faced by farmers, and the various interventions that have been designed and implemented in attempts to unlock these barriers.

2.2.1 Defining the smallholder farmer

Aliber et al. (2009) assert that in defining who qualifies as a smallholder is not straightforward. For the purpose of this research, it is important to clarify what is meant by smallholder farmers. This section highlights the various terms that have been used to define smallholder farmers, ranging from the scale of operation to race, gender and farm size. The definition that will be used in this paper is provided and the end of this section (2.2.1).

Jacobs (2008) as cited in Thamaga-Chitja & Morojele (2014) submits that South African smallholder farmers (SHF) are those who live in rural communities; are considered to be poor with little or no education; and operate with basic farm infrastructure. Kirsten and Van Zyl (1998) oppose this kind of negative and value-laden labelling of smallholder farmers, and consider it “a misrepresentation of the facts”.

Therefore, socio-economically, smallholder farmers could be considered to be “emerging farmers, subsistence farmers in the homelands, black farmers, small-scale white farmers, previously disadvantaged farmers, farmers on small pieces of land, or farmers with a small turnover” (Kirsten & Van Zyl, 1998, p. 552). Using scale as the keyword and without regard to race or gender, the authors recommend the following definition: “a small farmer is one whose scale of operation is too small to attract the provision of the services he/she needs to be able to significantly increase his/her productivity” (Kirsten & Van Zyl, 1998, p. 555). The authors conclude by saying that smallholder farmers are in need of government support and should be empowered to participate in the agricultural sector (Kirsten & Van Zyl, 1998).

Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele (2014) argue that gender is an important variable in understanding the smallholder farming sector because a majority of households in South Africa are headed by women. They argue that women and children are among the vulnerable groups; therefore, programmes aimed at smallholder farmers should also cater to empower women and ensure their meaningful participation in the sector. This argument above is supported by the results of the Statistics South Africa’s Labour Force Survey (2000-2007), which indicated that more than six million South African households were involved in smallholder agricultural activities, and over two million of them were women.

Aliber and Hall (2012) point to the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries' differentiation of categories of farmers to include 'subsistence', 'smallholder' and 'commercial' farmers. However, Aliber and Hall (2012) suggest that the terms 'small-scale farmer', 'subsistence' and 'smallholder farmer' should be used interchangeably.

While public opinion suggests that the smallholder farmer is black, Raphela (2014) argues that the smallholder farmer category is a continuum of farm types, ranging from subsistence to commercial. He exemplifies his argument with Van Averbeke and Mohamed's (2006) three categories of smallholder farmers, namely subsistence farmers mainly limited to household food supply; emerging or smallholder farmers whose activities lean towards commercial scale of production; and commercial smallholder farmers, who are largely driven by commercial profit.

Chipokolo, (2006) suggests that in some parts of the southern African region the smallholder farmer is defined in relation to the amount of land at the disposal of a farmer for cultivation. In Zambia, for example, smallholder farmers are identified on the basis of land size, which is usually less than 2.0 hectares. In contrast, smallholder farmers in South Africa are located in the urban and peri-urban areas, on municipal property, as well as in rural areas, which consist of the former apartheid designated homelands.

For the purposes of this evaluation, the definition by Kirsten and Van Zyl (1998) has been adopted, namely "a small farmer is one whose scale of operation is too small to attract the provision of the services he/she needs to be able to significantly increase his/her productivity" (Kirsten & Van Zyl, 1998, p. 555).

2.3 The Dual Nature of the Agriculture Sector

Van Rooyen (1993), Kirsten and Van Zyl (1998), and Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele (2014), are in agreement on the dual nature of the South African agriculture. Kirsten and Van Zyl (1998) draw from Lipton's (1976) description of "two agricultures" and identify two categories of South African farmers: the mostly black subsistence farmers and the white-dominated large-scale commercial farmers. In the same vein, Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele (2014) also perceive this duality in the agricultural system in South Africa.

Van Rooyen (1993), Kirsten and Van Zyl (1998), and Thamaga-Chitja and Morojele (2014), describe a commercial agriculture that is highly developed and capitalised and which contributes significantly to national food security, as opposed to smallholder and subsistence agriculture, which is less developed and capitalised, has limited operations and are limited to the periphery of the agricultural sector.

According to Williams, Mayson, de Satge, Epstein and Semwayo (2008), the dualism of South African agriculture stems from the discrepancy of the apartheid regime that provided support for white farmers and regulated access to land and agricultural production to the disadvantage of black people in the former homelands. Van Schalkvyk et al. (2012) as cited in Thamaga-Chitja & Morojele (2014) aver that this historical duality in South Africa agricultural economy is responsible for the relegation of the smallholder farming to subservience and subsistence. Therefore, the researcher argues that post-1994, the government has not been successful in closing the gap between typical smallholders and white farmers, despite the shift of government support from commercial to smallholder farmers.

2.4 Challenges faced by Smallholder Farmers

Smallholder farmers in South Africa face a number of challenges that negatively impact on their ability to grow and significantly contribute to curbing high levels of food insecurity (Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries [DAFF], 2012). According to the DBSA (2009), constraints faced by farmers may be classified into two categories, namely endogenous and exogenous constraints. Endogenous constraints are defined as constraints that may negatively impact on the farmer's ability to operate efficiently, regardless of their high farming potential and knowledge of utilising resources efficiently. Farmers generally have some level of control over these, for example, shortage of labour, knowledge, education (DBSA, 2009). On the other hand, exogenous constraints are defined as those that are most likely to be beyond the farmer's control, for example, lack of access to credit, agricultural inputs, mechanisation, markets, and insecure land tenure (DBSA, 2009).

In addition to the above, there are various other challenges that smallholder farmers face, such as lack of skills, lack of extension services (lack of information), poor institutional arrangements, and poor infrastructure challenges. However, for the purposes of this research, the focus is on those challenges which the farmer support programme under evaluation was designed to address, namely lack of access to finance, production of inputs, lack of information, and extension services.

2.4.1 Lack of access to credit

"Access to financial services, while not a means to an end, is critical to provide funds for farm investments in productivity, improve post-harvest practices, smooth household cash flow, enable better access to markets and promote better management of risks." (International Finance Corporation, 2014, p. 7). Access to credit/capital gives farmers buying power. Farmers rely on credit to purchase farming inputs, such as seeds, fertilizer, and investment in machinery needed for expansion (Lepheane, 2007). However, the International Finance Corporation (2014, p. 7) reported that banking institutions only lend about 1% of their funds to the agricultural sector. This means that the majority of farmers in Africa are struggling to obtain finance from banking institutions.

2.4.2 Access to markets

Aliber, Kirsten, Maharajh, Nhlapo-Hlophe and Nkoane (2006) are of the opinion that there is a positive correlation between access to formal markets and the shift to becoming a commercial farmer. The more farmers participate in the formal markets the greater the chances of becoming commercial farmers. Poulton, Doward and Kydd (2005) also assert that the reasons for the exclusion of smallholder farmers from high-value markets include, among other things the historical legacy and poor produce. According to Makhura (2001), the successful inclusion of smallholder farmers in the agricultural value chain will be denoted by the increase in the number of smallholder farmers who have access to markets.

The common aim of government-funded interventions is to create an enabling environment for farmers to advance from subsistence production to producing for markets (Lepheane, 2007). Market demands in terms of quality and quantity are high, making it

difficult for smallholder farmers to meet the required standards, especially the development export markets, such as the United State of America (USA) and European Union (EU), are difficult to penetrate (Lepheane, 2007). Kirsten and Sartorius (2002) also attest that losses in agricultural produce post-harvesting are often high due to poor quality of produce, spoilage due to, among other things, lack of access to cold storage and difficulties in accessing lucrative markets. Therefore, the information above gives a clear indication of the role that access to markets could play in the development of smallholder farmers.

2.4.3 Lack of infrastructure

Smallholder farmers are predominantly located in remote areas and away from markets (Machethe, 2004). These farmers lack physical infrastructure, such as well-maintained roads to transport their produce to markets; they mostly use public transport to take their produce to the closest markets (Machethe, 2004). According to Lepheane (2007) transport contractors are not keen to do business with smallholder farmers due to the poor state of feeder access roads to and from farms. Therefore, poor infrastructure has been cited as a contributing factor to the high transaction costs associated with accessing markets (Machethe, 2004; Lepheane, 2007).

2.4.4 Poor access to agricultural inputs

Smallholder farmers are perceived to be generally poor, hence their labour-intensive production systems, and they often lack access to expensive inputs like fertilizers, chemicals and machinery (Van Zyl & Vink, 1998). According to Lepheane (2007) there have been cases where smallholder farmers were required by project funders to provide some form of collateral as security against the loans they require to purchase inputs. However, these farmers did not succeed in satisfying this requirement, therefore, farmer support programmes should prioritise the provision of farming inputs at affordable rates.

2.4.5 Lack of access to skills development

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2006), smallholder farmers from the rural villages of South Africa are predominantly unskilled, illiterate and have low education levels. OECD (2006) is of the view that the

ability of farmers to contribute towards achieving high economic growth is dependent on addressing the skills issues, which according to Vink and Van Rooyen (2009), should be the main objective of the agricultural extension services. This study differentiates between extension services provided to white farmers and those provided to farmers in the former homelands. They underline that white farmers had access to well-qualified extension officers who were often in possession of university qualifications; the services they provided were well organised and well-resourced whereas black farmers received support from a few, overstretched, and low-skilled officers. This legacy continues to compromise the provision of quality of extension services. Vink and Van Rooyen (2009) also state that farmers are fully aware of the lack of capacity of officers and they are generally wary of their support. In fact, some farmers are of the view that they are more experienced than the officers.

2.4.6 Access to land

According to Boto and La Peccerella (2009, para. 1.2), “access to land is broadly defined as the processes by which people individually or collectively, are able to use land, whether on a temporary or permanent basis”. The challenge black smallholder farmers face is that they do not possess landownership titles; land is communally owned (Southern Africa Trust, 2013). Lenders are aware of the lack of land titles and this further constrains access to formal credit. The farmers are not able to use land as collateral to obtain credit and they also do not have the incentive to invest and improve land they do not own (Southern Africa Trust, 2013).

The section above has focused on some of the challenges faced by smallholder farmers and how these are negatively impacting on their ability to compete with commercial farmers. The next section distinguishes between the types and levels of support that was afforded by the apartheid government to white commercial and black smallholder farmers and the impact of such differences on the success and development of these farmers.

2.5 The History of Farmer Support Programmes in South Africa

During the apartheid era in South Africa, agriculture enjoyed support from the government, especially commercial farming (Van Rooyen, 1993). The farmer support

elements ranged from policies favouring the development of a vibrant commercial sector - to name but a few - the 1936 Land Act, the 1937 Agricultural Marketing Act, and other support services (Van Rooyen, 1993). These policies ensured that white commercial farmers had possession of 87% of the land, controlled markets to influence price, and enjoyed the benefits of state-owned research and extension services (Vink & Kassier, 1990). They also benefited from a wide range of subsidised functions, such as soil conservation, boreholes, fencing, and disaster management. Other advantages over smallholder farmers were the provision of infrastructures, including roads, electricity, telecommunication, and water through working with state-owned entities, such as Eskom, roads authorities and the Department of Water Affairs (Williams, et al., 2008).

According to Lipton (1976) as cited in Williams et al. (2008) about 90,000 commercial farmers had an excess of 3,000 extension officers supporting them. They benefited from continuous injections of cheap credit, marketing facilities, and guaranteed prices. On the other hand, about 600,000 black farmers had access to less than 1,000 extension officers. The latter had small budgets and extension officers had no capacity to provide support to individual farmers, and therefore, they were grouped into irrigation schemes. According to van Averbeke, Denison and Mnkeni (2011, p.797), the term ‘smallholder irrigation scheme’ was used to refer to small plots of land, usually 1.5 ha, allocated to black people.

Vink, Van Rooyen and Karaan (2012) further state that commercial farmers had various options for meeting their financial needs. Finance was obtained from various financial institutions, including the Land Bank, commercial banks, and private financial institutions. Funding was used, but not limited to, land acquisition and to provide production loans. Other subsidies were also made available to ensure optimal use of resources, for example, to fund the costs of land preparation, building dams, and fencing. Disaster assistance was also part of the support services provided by the government (Vink et al., 2012). According to Van Rooyen (1993, p.263), the amount of support was worth it “since production growth significantly exceeded that of population growth and consumption”.

The section above has highlighted the types and scale of farmer support that was provided to white commercial farmers. The support was comprehensive, that is, farmers had access to land, finance, production inputs, research and extension services, market

access and policies favouring their development. The amount of support they received correlated positively with high production growth.

In contrast to white commercial farmers, black smallholder farmers encountered various bottlenecks in their quest to becoming commercial farmers (Van Rooyen, 1993). These included insecure and disjointed land rights, small farm units, lack of infrastructure, financial support, extension and research services (Van Rooyen, 1993). In addition to the above-mentioned constraints, the ability of farmers to compete in agricultural markets was restricted to, among other things, high transaction costs. Their participation in policy-formation lobby groups was also restricted, meaning they were not able to influence market processes in any way (Van Rooyen, 1993).

During the apartheid era smallholder farmers received government support first through a programme called “Betterment Planning”, and secondly, in the form of capital projects or agricultural schemes (Van Rooyen, 1993, p. 263). The “Betterment Planning” programme was aimed at raising welfare in rural areas and introducing admin control processes. The emphasis was placed more on planning and less on the provision of farmer support services (Van Rooyen, 1993, p. 263). This approach was neither successful in attracting people into farming, nor did it empower rural communities (Van Rooyen, 1993).

Capital projects were then introduced, based on an assumption that farmers in the homeland lacked entrepreneurial and managerial ability and for this reason, should participate in large-scale projects that were centrally managed, for example, irrigation schemes (Van Rooyen, 1993). However, this approach was also not successful in promoting independent, self-sufficient farmers (Van Rooyen, 1993).

Following the failure of these programmes in meeting their objectives, a new approach was sought and this approach was aimed at providing comprehensive support to individual farmers (Van Rooyen, 1993).

2.6 The Introduction of the Farmer Support Programme: DBSA - 1980's

Two key aspects were noticeable during this period (1980s). Firstly, white commercial farmers started losing the state support that they had benefited from for many years. By the end of the 1990's, these farmers barely received any support from the government (Vink et al., 2012). Secondly, the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) introduced an FSP, which was another robust attempt to provide homeland farmers with the support and service they required to become independent and self-sufficient (Vink et al., 2012).

The philosophy behind the DBSA's FSP was presented by the Rural and Agricultural Divisional Management Committee and it read as follows:

> The philosophy of the FSP was simple. People who lived in the homeland areas of South Africa faced many constraints that affected every part of their lives. One of the results was that it was almost impossible to farm successfully, as farmers did not have access to the kind of support services (infrastructure, research and extension, rural finance, farm inputs) that farmers all over the world needed. Thus, the aim of the FSP was to ensure that farmers had access to all these support services (Vink et al., 2012, p. 6).

According to Vink et al. (2012, pp. 6-7), the FSP elements were as follows:

- The supply and funding of inputs and production assets;
- Mechanisation services;
- Marketing services;
- Extension services, demonstration and research;
- Training; and
- Policy formulation, including access to *de facto* production rights, and bulk infrastructure.

2.6.1 The supply and funding of inputs and production assets

This element of the FSP was aimed at ensuring that farmers had easy access to inputs that they needed. DBSA emphasised that these inputs were to be delivered to farmers in

the right form, at the right time, and in the right place. DBSA had proposed that depots, or services centres, be established to meet the above requirements (Vink et al., 2012).

2.6.2 Mechanisation services

The main objective of this element was to address challenges that farmers faced due to lack of access to mechanisation, for example, mechanisation required for land preparation activities and the transport of inputs and crops (Vink et al., 2012).

2.6.3 Marketing services

This component of the FSP catered for all the activities that needed to take place to remove produce from the field and take it to the market. The service also took into account storage facilities and market quality requirements; opportunities to access both local and external markets; and that farmers were paid within accepted timelines for the produce they had delivered (Vink et al., 2012).

2.6.4 Extension services, demonstration and research

This element of the FSP was aimed at transferring knowledge and information to project beneficiaries. However, DBSA was of the view that the role of extension services was largely a role of the public sector. Therefore, they ensured that in cases where both the public and private sector are offering this service, roles were clearly identified to avoid duplication (Vink et al., 2012).

2.6.5 Training

An interesting aspect of the training component of the FSP was that it was not only focused on transferring skills to farmers but included training programmes for extension officers as well. The process also included conducting a detailed skills analysis for both farmers and extension officers (Vink et al., 2012).

2.6.6 Policy formulation

DBSA argued that policy formulation was required to address the various elements and appropriate institutional arrangements needed to facilitate the effective application of an

FSP (Vink et al., 2012, p. 9). DBSA cited examples, such as appropriate pricing policies, marketing, financing, and technology (Vink et al., 2012).

Evaluations were conducted to assess the impact of the FSP, i.e. assess whether or not the farmer support elements discussed above contributed positively in addressing some of the constraints faced by smallholder farmers. The section below highlights some of the evaluation results.

2.7 Evaluation of the DBSA Farmer Support Programme

Van Rooyen (1993) highlighted the evaluation results of the DBSA FSP after seven years of implementation. The evaluation paper was based on an extensive literature review and documents obtained from the DBSA. Below are some of the observations reported by the author.

Although the programme was targeting individual farmers, the majority of projects remained large-scale in nature. In 1993 the programme had already supported a total of 35 FSP projects; ± 350,000 ha was put into production; ± 25,000 farmers supported; and ± 30,000 jobs created. Most beneficiaries of the project were women and older men, and a trend was observed that younger men increasingly joining the programme (Van Rooyen, 1993).

Access to land remained a stumbling block to the expansion of farming in homeland areas. Land purchases were not possible at the time. Farmers were informally leasing land and this prevented any form of meaningful investment (Van Rooyen, 1993; Vink et al., 2012). This observation prompted DBSA to think about the option of formalising lease arrangements through the provision of financial support to lease land, coupled with a formal lease agreement. At the time of this evaluation, the pilot project was still under consideration (Van Rooyen, 1993) and results were not available for analysis.

The table below shows the project's allocation of funds. Of the funds, 43% was used to finance infrastructure and marketing related costs, 31% on production inputs, 23% on movable assets, 2% on policy formulation related costs, and 1% on training and extension (Van Rooyen, 1993). This shows that the project regarded infrastructure development,

marketing, and production inputs as important. The balance of the funds was used to support policy formulation and training.

Table 4: Expenditure: DBSA FSP

FSP Elements	Training & extension (R)	Production inputs (R)	Infrastructure & marketing (R)	Movable assets (R)	Policy & preparation assistance (R)	Total (R)
DBSA	1,074,946	32, 277,878	45, 092,604	23, 837,680	1, 736,299	104, 019,407
(%)	1%	31%	43%	23%	2%	100%

Source: Van Rooyen, (1993, p.226)

Coetzee, Kirsten, and Van Zyl (1993) evaluated the financial element of the DBSA FSP and published a paper which highlighted the issues raised below.

The finance component of the FSP was premised on an assumption that farmers needed credit to facilitate production and that farmers in rural areas were too poor to save (Coetzee et al., 1993). In addition, provision of credit was aimed at steering farmers away from obtaining credit informally, for example from loan sharks, and the expectation was that this would encourage farmers to adopt new technologies (Coetzee et al., 1993).

The short-term results of the credit component of the FSP indicated that it was successful, measured by the increasing number of new lending institutions that were established and the high number of loans processed (Coetzee et al.,1993). However, the perceived success was short-lived since the programme started experiencing challenges, such as poor loan recovery rates. Default rates ranging from 40% to 90% were recorded (Coetzee et al., 1993). According to Coetzee et al. (1993), the programme largely benefited the “elite” and large-scale farmers instead of the targeted rural poor.

Results showed that the largest portion of credit was used to purchase farming inputs, such as fertilizers and seeds, and farmers had an option of using a portion of the credit to finance ploughing services (Coetzee et al., 1993). However, results also showed that farmers who had failed to repay their loans were excluded from continuing to benefit from credit to fund the next season’s production requirements (Coetzee et al., 1993). The rules

were designed such that no loans may be granted until outstanding loans were repaid in full (Coetzee et al., 1993). Over time, this practice started concentrating benefits to those farmers who had large tracts of land or other sources of income. The DBSA FSP ended up benefiting more emerging farmers compared to subsistence farmers (Coetzee et al., 1993).

According to Coetzee et al. (1993), most farmers saw credit as the only FSP element. There were some cases where the FSP was associated with that which the implementing agents were promoting, such as placing an emphasis on credit or training, while others promoted mentorship. Overall, farmers associated FSP with the provision of credit (Coetzee et al., 1993).

The section above highlighted the introduction of the DBSA FSP in the 1980's, showing that FSPs were not new; they have been in implementation decades ago.

The next sections seek to assess the FSPs introduced post-1994 and the results of the evaluation studies that have been conducted on these programmes.

2.8 The History of Farmer Support Programmes: Post-1994

Vink et al. (2012) argued that many of the government land redistribution policies have only succeeded in land transfer but have not been efficient in terms of empowering support to the beneficiaries towards a more productive use of the land.

The following section is focusing on the various initiatives that the post-apartheid government introduced with an aim of developing black farmers. It assesses the various support elements of these programmes; recorded successes and failures of these initiatives; and how they compare to the support that was provided to white commercial farmers pre-1994.

2.8.1 The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)

The RDP was introduced in 1994, with its main focus to couple land reform initiatives with agricultural development. While the objectives of the RDP were sound, the programme did not add value towards agricultural development (Vink et al., 2012). The programme

largely focused on land reform without the development component (Van Rooyen, Nqganweni, & Njobe, 1994).

2.8.2 Broadening of Access to Agriculture Thrust (BATAT)

In order to address the weaknesses of the RDP, the government introduced BATAT in the same year. BATAT was meant to address the agricultural development aspect and to focus on the developmental needs of black farmers (Vink et al., 2012). However, this initiative was also unsuccessful in developing the targeted farmers. According to Oettle, Fakir, Wentzel, Giddings, and Whiteside (1998), the policy failed to meet this target mainly because of administrative problems with the implementation of the farmer support aspect of the initiative, which was put under the control of the provincial government by the then National Department of Agriculture.

2.8.3 Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP)

Once more, the failure of BATAT resulted in another initiative as a remedial policy, encapsulated in CASP. The programme was launched in 2004, and as the name indicated, the programme was aimed at providing comprehensive support services and facilitate agricultural development (Vink et al., 2012). CASP falls under schedule 4 conditional grants, that is, conditional grants allocated to provinces and municipalities to supplement their own budget allocation for CASP (Financial and Fiscal Commission, 2013, p.61). The targeted beneficiaries of CASP were land reform beneficiaries, women, youth and people with disabilities. The purpose was to enhance and avail these farmers with support services to promote and facilitate agricultural development (Aliber & Hall, 2012; Business Enterprises, 2015).

For the period 2004/5- 2012/13, CASP had spent 87% of the allocated budget supporting a total of 7,448 projects and 408,467 beneficiaries (Business Enterprises, 2015). With a budgetary allocation of R1 billion for the 2011/12 fiscal year, CASP had a huge financial muscle to provide much-needed support to farmers (Aliber & Hall, 2012).

CASP has six elements or pillars, as follows:

- Information and technology management;

- Technical and advisory assistance, and regulatory services;
- Marketing and business development;
- Training and capacity building;
- On/off farm infrastructure and production inputs; and
- Financial assistance

2.9 The evaluation of CASP

The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), in partnership with the Department of Rural Development, commissioned an evaluation of CASP to assess whether or not the programme was achieving its objectives. The evaluation was conducted by Business Enterprises and the University of Pretoria. The evaluation focused on the impact of the programme on its beneficiaries, the impact on production, marketing, farmer development and livelihoods of both farmers and their families (Business Enterprises, 2015). The aim of the evaluation was to also draw lessons on how the programme may be strengthened. The evaluation covered the period from programme inception (2004) to the 2012/13 financial year. The study was limited to the agriculture sector, excluding forestry and fisheries (Business Enterprises, 2015).

In summary, the evaluation highlighted the following:

Table 5: Evaluation results of CASP

CASP element assessed	Results
Targeted beneficiaries	15% youth, 42% females, 3% people with disabilities, and 70% of farmers falling under the emerging to commercial category. This shows that project beneficiaries were mainly older people, males and well-established farmers.
Access to agricultural information	77% of the respondents indicated that their level of satisfaction with the information received was medium to high. However, only 58% indicated that the information provided, was sufficient. The information provided was

CASP element assessed	Results
	largely on production-related information and less focused on market-related information.
Access to extension and advisory services, and training	As a result of CASP, the number of beneficiaries who had access to extension and advisory services increased from 67 – 84%. The number of people trained, increased from 60-70%.
Access to agricultural inputs	61% of respondents indicated that they had benefited from input assistance, 74% of the 61% further indicated that they had requested the inputs they received while the rest (26%) had received inputs without asking for them. Only 57% of the respondents indicated that the inputs they received were sufficient, with 43% indicating that inputs were insufficient. 83% of the respondents were satisfied with the quality of inputs received. Lastly, 67% of the respondents indicated that they received inputs on time, meaning 33% received their inputs late.
Access to markets	13% of the respondents indicated that they were assisted by the programme to access markets, meaning 87% of respondents continued to struggle finding markets.
Access to infrastructure	This is one element of CASP where respondents indicated that it has had a significant impact. There has been an increase in on-farm production infrastructure development with the highest numbers recorded in the establishment of chicken houses (rising from 8-21% after CASP).

CASP element assessed	Results
Skills transfer/capacity building	The programme has had a positive impact on skills transfer. 64% of the project managers benefited from skills and knowledge transfer.
Impact on agricultural productivity	Results showed that the amount of land put into production increased from 8 to 14 ha. Livestock production also increased in CASP-supported projects.
Impact on livelihoods	The programme had a positive impact on food security in about 50% of the beneficiaries, and employment also increased. However, jobs created were part-time in nature. 33% of the beneficiaries graduated to commercial farmer status.

Source: Business Enterprises (2015)

2.10 Micro Agricultural Financial Institutions of South Africa (MAFISA)

The main objective of the MAFISA programme was to make finances available for purposes of uplifting smallholder farmers/micro producers in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors. MAFISA was regarded as the component of the 'financial assistance' pillar of CASP (Carter, Mitchell, Barberton & Abdoll, 2014). The programme was launched in 2005 and was allocated a budget of R1 billion. The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) was nominated to champion this project and the Landbank was appointed to manage the MAFISA account. MAFISA offered loans to farmers for the purposes of procuring production inputs (Carter et al., 2014).

It is acknowledged that there was a huge gap between policy development and project implementation. The same holds true for MAFISA. Following concerns from DAFF that the programme was not being implemented according to plan, an Expenditure and Performance Review (EPR) was commissioned by the National Treasury (Carter et al., 2014). The programme had been in implementation for eight years.

The results of the EPR highlighted, among other things, the lack of capacity to implement and oversee the projects. Both national and provincial departments of agriculture mismanaged funds, that is, funds used for activities not related to MAFISA; low loan repayment rates due to poor lending practices; and the farmers' belief that it was unfair for them to repay loans while other farmers were obtaining grants from the government (Carter et al., 2014).

Farmer support initiatives were also implemented at the provincial level. Many FSP initiatives have been adopted to address challenges facing smallholder farmers, for example, the Siyakhula/Massive Food Production Programme (Massive) and Ilima/Lestela (Aliber & Hall, 2012).

2.11 Siyakhula/Massive Food Production Programme (Massive)

Massive was launched in the Eastern Cape in 2003. The initiative provided grants and loans to participants over a 4-year period (Aliber & Hall, 2012). The financial support was provided as follows:

- Year 1: participants received 100% grant
- Year 2: 75% grant, 25% loan
- Year 3: 50% grant, 50% loan
- Year 4: 25% grant, 75% loan

The project was successful in increasing maize yield per hectare from an average of 1 – 3.75 tonnes (Aliber & Hall, 2012). However, the project encountered challenges, such as delayed transfer of funds to farmers, which led to high levels of indebtedness among farmers, who subsequently left from the programme (Aliber & Hall, 2012). In the end, the initiative proved to be unsustainable.

Based on the above trend, the researcher observed a repetitive cycle of new initiatives being introduced, which did not achieve most of their objectives, if at all. This was followed by the introduction of another initiative to make up for the previous one, without a clear demonstration that the newly designed initiative was built on lessons learnt from previous projects. Therefore, scholars such as Khapayi and Celliers (2006), and Hall and Aliber

(2010), have submitted that the challenges and gaps of the past efforts demand re-strategizing spending priorities and approach to support smallholder farmers in South Africa. Khapayi and Celliers (2006) further state that despite policies and programmes to support or facilitate migration from smallholder to commercial status, farmers are still facing the same bottlenecks and in fact, they are in a worse state now than before. Projects are either misaligned or poorly managed.

In support of their argument, Khapayi and Celliers (2016), further state that a growing number of policies, programmes and budgets have not equated to an increase in the number of the smallholder farmer success stories. This is contrary to the experience during the apartheid era where the high investment in white commercial farmers resulted in increased food production (Van Rooyen, 1993). Aliber and Hall (2012) also concur with Khapayi and Celliers's (2016) argument and said that in most cases both government and agency farmer support initiatives have left emerging farmers worse-off. They are still battling to migrate to commercial status and some are even below the poverty line.

It is on this premise that this research is seeking to evaluate the implementation of the APP farmer support programme, assess whether it positively or negatively affected farm productivity (yield), and whether or not lessons from the previous projects have been incorporated into the APP. This research will further assess the individual elements of the FSP and the likelihood of the programme achieving its objectives.

2.12 Case Studies of Farmer Support Programmes

The following three research papers were selected to highlight the existing work aimed at assessing the impact of FSPs and/or the individual elements of the FSPs. These studies were also used to shape the structure and methodology of this evaluation.

2.12.1 A case study of Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal farmers, South Africa

Sikwela and Mushunje (2013) conducted a study in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, seeking to understand the impact of support services to farmers which were aimed at facilitating access to markets. Sikwela and Mushunje (2013) found that smallholder farmers have received limited attention after the transferring of farms in 1994, despite a

number of policies and programmes aimed at addressing farmer challenges. The reality is that these challenges persisted.

Sikwela and Mushunje (2013) also observed that government budgets aimed at farmer support services have been increasing over the years to provide access to financial services through grants and loans for agricultural inputs, infrastructure, and extension services to enable farmers to get market access. However, the increase in budgets has not translated into a higher number of farmers accessing farmer support services. This is because of the unequal distribution of resources in favour of certain farmers, for example, limited support to subsistence farmers without access to land. This same observation was made by Khapayi and Celliers (2016). This discrepancy/gap has resulted in commercial development banks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private sector organisations coming up with different farmer support initiatives to address the farmer challenges, alluded to above.

According to Oettle and Koelle (2003) as cited in Sikwela and Mushunje (2013, p. 2503) “the other reason for this failure is that most national programmes explicitly targeting smallholder farmers, fall short because they were not designed to impact at the scale required to make a difference at a socio-economic level of the farmers. Furthermore, they acted in isolation of each other, leaving beneficiaries seeking support from a fragmented array of projects and programmes”.

Sikwela and Mushunje (2013) noted that there has been an increasing interest to have the government and private sector farmer support initiatives evaluated to assess their impact in improving farmer access to these services and on their living conditions. These programmes include, among others, the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC) and programmes implemented by NGOs, such as LIMA.

Sikwela and Mushunje conducted the research to assess whether the investment in smallholder agriculture will give farmers a competitive edge and improved incomes through the farmer support programmes. Their interest was also to understand whether

these various initiatives work or not, based on interactions with farmers, and also if these initiatives have a potential for scaling.

The study by Sikwela and Mushunje applied quantitative data collection methods. A database from the local municipalities in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal was used to select smallholder farmers. The researchers relied on local extension officers to facilitate contact with farmers. A total of 89 farmers were selected for the study, of which 50 were members of cooperatives and 49 were farming individually. Farmers were asked questions ranging from their farming history, the agricultural output, and produce markets. Focus group meetings were also held. Researchers applied a Tobit regression data analysis method to assess the impact of the farmer support programmes.

The findings from the study implied that FSPs contributed significantly to improved incomes and the welfare of smallholder farmers. Results showed that farmers with access to larger pieces of land were most likely to become beneficiaries of a farmer support programme. Participating in the farmer support programme was also found to have a positive impact on the likelihood of marketing cooperatives to access markets. Cooperatives had a better chance to gain access to markets when compared to individual farmers and this is due to the sharing of resources, risks and costs, and economies of scale enjoyed by these groups.

Sikwela and Mushunje (2013) concluded their study by saying that the role of NGOs and other organisations implementing farmer support programmes have not been accessed to its full potential. They are of the view that NGOs have a huge role to play in fast-tracking the development of previously disadvantaged smallholder farmers. Therefore, this study will build on this foundation as it seeks to access a farmer support programme implemented by an NGO in partnership with the government (financial partner).

2.12.2 A case study of King William's Town area of the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

Khapayi and Celliers (2016) conducted a study aimed at investigating the main reasons for a limited transition from subsistence to commercial farming. The study was conducted in the King William's Town area of the Eastern Cape Province. The area was chosen due

to its high agricultural potential. A questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of 50 farmers engaged in livestock farming. Personal interviews were held with farmers on their farms and at convenient times. Farmers were asked questions ranging from demographic related questions, socio-economic factors and other questions, focusing on the farming skills of respondents, production and marketing challenges that farmers face.

The researchers applied descriptive statistical methods to analyse data that involved coding of data, capturing coded data on MS Excel, and using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and statistical software to analyse data. The results of the study showed education levels of farmers were low; 62% had less than grade 10 schooling and none had a tertiary qualification. Most of the farmers interviewed had no farming skills or experience, or their experience was found to be inadequate. For example, 90% had no experience in irrigation and mulching, and only 3% to 7% of farmers had outstanding experiences. Farmer's management skills were found to be mostly adequate but, in some cases, inadequate. For example, 74% had adequate marketing skills, 68% entrepreneurial skills, and 66% labour management skills. Of the respondents, 55% reported that they had no access to information, and 64% were receiving farmer support. Farmers also indicated that extension officers visited them once in a while and none of them could recall the visit schedule/routine. The study also found that only 28% of farmers had access to land in excess of 10 ha, and 72% had access to land less than 10 ha.

The researchers concluded that farmer support intervention would need to address the issues of lack of skills and extension service support for emerging farmers to grow and contribute towards employment creation and poverty eradication in rural areas. They also raised the issue of emerging farmers not participating in high-paying markets, which negatively affected their ability to become commercial.

2.12.3 A case study of farmers in the Germiston region, South Africa

Maoba (2016) conducted a study, analysing the provision of extension services, which is one of the farmer support elements. The study was aimed at assessing farmer perceptions of the effectiveness of the provisions of extension services and the impact of these services on farmers' livelihoods. The study was conducted in the Germiston region,

in Gauteng province. A questionnaire was used to collect data from 78 respondents. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency counts, percentages, and standard deviation. Research results showed that farmers perceived training and farm demonstrations to be highly effective in the study area. Of the farmers, 42.31% indicated that they had received at least one visit by the extension officer. The study also revealed that extension activities had a low impact on improving farm production yield and profitability.

These research studies indicated that there were positive and negative scenarios in the implementation of FSPs. The onus is on both the government and the private sector, therefore, to stress that FSP evaluations needed to take place to assess progress and the impact of funded initiatives. In most cases, initiatives were assessed late in the implementation phase, or after the project's end date, which was evident from the evaluations discussed above. For example, the CASP impact evaluation covered a period of 10 years from inception in 2003-2014. The same applies to the DBSA FSP impact evaluation, which covered almost 12 years of implementation. In this study, the researcher took the view that long-term evaluations were problematic. Instead, FSP projects will benefit from mid-term implementation reviews as compared to the usual practice of waiting till the end of the project when failure cannot be mitigated and impacts cannot be harnessed. This evaluation research will, therefore, conduct a mid-term project implementation review of the Abalimi Phambili Programme. This evaluation approach contributes to the government's knowledge of effective evaluation of FSPs, and by extension, the justification of continuation, enhancement. or discontinuation of FSP initiatives and is, therefore, relevant. This study will conduct in-depth interviews, focusing on obtaining farmers opinions in terms of how they view the various elements of the farmer support programme.

2.13 Conclusion

The potential of the smallholder sector cannot be disputed; it plays a huge role in the country's development and economic growth. However, compared to their commercial counterparts, smallholder farmers face a number of challenges preventing them from progressing to commercial status. Farmer support programmes have been designed with

an aim of supporting smallholder farmers to overcome these barriers. The literature reviewed showed that FSPs are not new but have evolved over the years in attempts to close the gap between smallholder and commercial farmers.

The literature also shows that evaluations to assess the impact of these programmes have been few. In cases where evaluations were conducted, they were conducted late or at the end of the implementation phase, leaving little to no room to rectify mistakes. The studies conducted have also been quantitative in nature, targeting large numbers of farmers, in the region of 50, 89 and 78. The research mostly assessed the FSPs holistically and did not assess the impact or the contribution of each of the elements of the FSP.

To close the identified gap, this evaluation research is aimed at evaluating the implementation progress of the Abalimi Phambili Programme, implemented by LIMA Rural Development Foundation (LIMA) in Jozini, KwaZulu-Natal. The project has been in implementation for two of the four years (mid-term) determined by the programme. The progress implementation reports are showing that loan repayment rates are low in some of the regions, including KwaZulu-Natal. The evaluation focuses on assessing whether or not the theory of change (ToC) is working, assess what is working and what is not, and to make recommendations on ways to enhance the programme.

The next chapter will focus on the methodology applied to collect and analyse data.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the evaluation design and the methodology applied in the study. It provides information about the target population, sampling process, and the design of the interview schedule. The chapter also explains the data collection process, data analysis, issues of validity and reliability, limitations of the evaluation, as well as the ethical considerations.

3.2 Evaluation Design

An evaluation design is a detailed plan for conducting an evaluation of a programme (Meyer, 2015). It provides structure and the plan to collect the information required to answer evaluation questions (DiTommaso, 2015). Patton (2002) defines programme evaluation as the systemic gathering of information regarding programme activities, outputs and outcomes to assess progress, propose improvements where necessary, and/or inform decision-making about future programmes. The evaluation sought to gain insights into the lived experiences of farmers participating in the Abalimi Phambili Programme (APP). The aim was to assess whether or not the programme's theory of change (ToC) was being implemented as planned, and assess the implementation of three farmer support elements, i.e. access to credit, training and mentorship. Lastly, to assess the likelihood of the programmes achieving the intended outcomes, such as farmers accessing markets and increasing their farm incomes, thereby achieving the overall impact of creating sustainable farmers. To achieve this goal, an implementation evaluation of the APP was conducted.

DPME (2014, p. 1) defines an implementation evaluation as "an assessment of programme delivery, strategies, procedures and processes. An implementation evaluation can answer questions about what is happening in practice, how it is happening, and why it is happening."

While on-going performance monitoring can provide useful information and progress on implementation, it does not provide in-depth and comprehensive information about the quality of the initiative (DPME, 2014).

DPME (2014) further defines an implementation evaluation as follows:

> An implementation evaluation typically focuses on the activities undertaken, how these are likely to contribute to the outputs, whether the assumptions and the theory of change seems to be working in practice, and may well suggest whether it is likely that the planned outcomes will be achieved (p. 2).

Therefore, the implementation evaluation of the APP is based on the theory of change (ToC) presented by the implementing agent at the beginning of the programme. “The theory of change describes the causal mechanisms of how activities and outputs will result in the anticipated outcomes and impacts” (DPME, 2014, p. 7). The study is aimed at assessing whether or not the ToC is implemented accordingly and the likelihood of programme activities resulting in the achievement of intended outcomes.

The evaluation seeks to answer the following questions:

a) Is the programme implemented according to the ToC?
b) What is the contribution of the different elements of the ToC?
c) What does the majority of evidence say about the likelihood of the project producing intended outcomes? Is it making a difference?

To answer these questions, both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied.

3.2.1 Rationale for the application of both quantitative and qualitative data

The evaluation applied quantitative methods in the collection and analysis of project data. Project data was obtained through the implementing agent’s quarterly reports to project funders. It provided information, such as the number of loans disbursed to farmers, number of training sessions offered, and number of farm visits (mentorship services). This information was useful in assessing whether or not the programme activities were being implemented during the evaluation period (October 2015 to September 2017). Project data was also used to collect sample demographic information.

The study also applied qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the farmers' personal experiences and perspectives regarding the implementation of the APP. Patton (2002) asserts that qualitative methods are commonly applied in evaluation studies because they tell the programme's story as described by the participants. For this reason, participant's responses (qualitative data) provided background and context to better understand project data (quantitative data).

3.2.2 Description of the study area

The study was conducted in Jozini Municipality under Umkhanyakude District in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Umkhanyakude District Municipality is located in the north-eastern region of KwaZulu-Natal. In addition to Jozini Municipality, the district is also home to Mtubatuba, UMhlabuyalingana and the Big 5 Hlabisa Local Municipality (KwaZulu-Natal Top Business, 2017). Jozini Municipality is located in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal and borders Swaziland and Maputo. Large tracts of land are still under communal tenure, managed by Amakhosi (traditional leaders) under the jurisdiction of the Ingonyama Trust. The region is regarded as rich in local resources, including water. The area is well located, close to the Pongolapoort dam, also known as Jozini dam. The dam has an estimated capacity to supply over 80,000 hectares of agricultural land with irrigation water (KwaZulu-Natal Top Business, 2017). Jozini is characterised by a subtropical climate, meaning that crops that are planted during the rainy seasons in summer, could be planted under irrigation all year round (Mjindi Farming, 2015).

The main economic sectors in the region include tourism, agriculture, wholesale and retail. The district is well located in that it is surrounded by provincial markets of KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, and neighbouring market of Swaziland. However, the farmers mainly market their produce informally through "bakkie traders[3]" who typically come to the field to buy and collect the produce (Proceedings of the market access learning journey, 2013).

[3] Bakkie traders buy agricultural produce directly from farmers and sell in informal markets from the back of their bakkies/vehicles e.g. sell alongside busy roads, and social grant pay points.

Jozini is mostly rural and associated with lack of development, poverty and poor service provision. The population in Jozini is 186,502 of which 55.3% are between the ages of 15 and 64 (Census, 2011, p.60). Of the population, the highest level of education is grade 12 (25%), and 27.1% has no schooling. Only 5.5% is in possession of higher education (Census, 2011, p. 68). In 2011 (Census, 2011, p. 70), the unemployment rate was recorded at 44,1%. Aliber et.al (2009) note that some of the "hungriest" municipalities are those where the majority of households are engaged in agriculture, including uMkhanyakude. According to the Census (2011), the number of households engaged in agriculture was 2.9 million nationally, of which the highest number (24.9%) is located in KwaZulu-Natal. KwaZulu-Natal is the second largest province in South Africa and is one of the provinces with the highest agricultural potential. However, there have been concerns about the decline in the agricultural sector's contribution to the economy of the province. The province continues to strengthen initiatives aimed at supporting farmers, thereby hoping to unlock the agricultural potential (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2016).

Figure 3: Jozini Map

Source: Google Maps (2017)

The study area was selected for three primary reasons: 1) its agricultural potential; 2) it is among the regions in KwaZulu-Natal where the APP is being implemented and an area that had not been badly affected by the drought (hence farmers would still be actively farming). In addition to the above, the implementing agent staff stationed at Jozini had indicated their willingness to support the researcher for the duration of the study.

3.2.3 Population of the study

The project evaluated is the APP, which is being implemented among smallholder farmers in Makhathini Flats, a rural area of the Jozini Local Municipality. The project has a total of 350 participating farmers. These farmers were all farming under the Mjindi irrigation scheme (hereafter referred to as Mjindi). The irrigation scheme is under the management of Mjindi Farmers (Pty) Ltd, which is 3,500 hectares in total (Mjindi Farming, 2016). Farmers have access to between 1 and 10 ha of land that most are renting from landowners who have retired from farming, and a few are landowners, paying rent to Mjindi for water services. However, the APP support is limited to the first hectare and there is a potential to increase the support, depending on the farmer's performance. Farmers in the scheme are planting mainly maize, cabbage, and butternut.

Therefore, the selected study area and the farmers participating in the APP programme form the research population.

3.2.4 Sampling method and size

The study applied a non-probability, purposive sampling method. Respondents were selected because of their knowledge and experience of the programme being evaluated. A sample of 10 farmers was selected to participate in the study. The sample was randomly selected from a population of 100 farmers from Makhathini flats in Jozini.

Patton (2002) argues that purposeful random sampling increases the credibility of results. Respondents were all IsiZulu-speaking black South Africans. Seven of the farmers were born and bred in Jozini, while the balance of three moved to Jozini for farming purposes. Further information on the sample demographics is detailed in chapter 4.

According to Creswell (1998), in qualitative research sample sizes are usually smaller and it is recommended that the researcher continues interviewing people until nothing new comes from analysing the data. The researcher also identified a similar pattern. By the fifth interview, similar responses and patterns had started to emerge. This gave a good indication that the sample of 10 was going to be sufficient to answer the evaluation questions. Since the study used a non-probability sampling method, the findings of this research were limited to the interviews with smallholder farmers, and were not generalisable to the broader population of small-scale farmers. Patton (2002, p.230) also states that in purposeful sampling, "respondents are selected because of the richness of information they possess. However, no generalizations may be made to the population."

3.2.5 Data collection instrument

The study applied both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. Quantitative data, such as the number of loans issued to selected farmers, uses of the loan, and training attended, was collected through project reports. Project data was also used to collect demographic information.

Qualitative data was collected through using an interview schedule containing both open and close-ended questions (attached as Appendix 2). It is important to note that the interview schedule did not constitute all the questions asked during the interviews. The interview schedule was used for the purpose of framing the discussion to avoid preventing respondents from telling their story in a manner that is comfortable for them. Braun and Clarke (2013) also argue that while the interview guide is prepared prior to conducting interviews, it does not mean that the interviewer is expected to follow the exact wording of the questions, or ask questions in the order that they appear on the schedule. The interview schedule was divided into three sections. Section A focused on the respondents' farming background and their experience of the APP project. Section B of the schedule focused on information about any other assistance from other organisations or people within or outside Jozini and additional comments. Section C required respondents to rate the LIMA APP out of 10, where 10 was the best support and 1 worst support. The score of 10 was selected to give respondents wide options to choose from and then support the score they have provided. Respondents also rated the 4 elements of the FSP in order of

importance, or the contribution towards farm productivity, from the highest (1) to lowest (3).

The researcher commenced by asking participants to report on their farming background before joining the LIMA project. The question was intentionally posed as a first question to allow participants to warm up to the interview and speak openly about their farming experiences. This was followed by having a discussion about the implementation of the APP, the kinds of support they have received and their view on how the farmer support elements have been implemented. In most cases, farmers voluntarily talked about the elements of the farmer support that they value the most and those they think have not added value to their farming operations. In cases where they did not volunteer such information the interviewer probed further and asked how they viewed the implementation of the various elements of the farmer support (that is, access to finance, inputs, training, and mentorship).

3.2.6 Pre-testing of data collection instruments

Before undertaking fieldwork, the interview schedule was pre-tested to gain experience, check for consistency and clarity of questions asked. This was done by interviewing two colleagues who were part-time farmers and full-time employed as Agricultural Specialists. They both have a farming background and experience working with smallholder farmers. One of the colleagues is black and his home language is IsiZulu, the other one is white and his home language is English. This was done to test whether or not questions carried the same meaning if asked in English and when translated from English to IsiZulu. The results of the pre-test interview assisted the researcher to adjust the interview instrument to frame the discussion better by asking a few but specific questions and allowing the respondents to do the talking. The respondents emphasised the importance of taking field notes and they both understood the questions in their respective languages. Both participants were happy with the manner in which the discussion was framed. However, they advised that the researcher minimises lengthy explanations when asking probing questions. They advised that questions must be clear and non-directive so that responses are shaped by the participants themselves. The final pre-test interviews were conducted in Jozini. Two farmers (one with high levels of education and farming experience and one

with limited education but extensive experience) who were also receiving support from LIMA, were recruited for this second pre-test.

The second pre-test did not require any changes to the interview schedule. However, the researcher realised that the duration of the interview would vary based on the farmer's experience and level of education. The farmer with low levels of education and extensive farming experience had more to report and his responses were lengthier, thereby taking more time. However, his responses were very insightful. On the other hand, the farmer with high levels of education and reasonable farming background had direct views without lengthy explanations; his views were thorough and provided in less than 30 minutes. This knowledge assisted the researcher to come up with a daily interview schedule that allowed for sufficient time between the first and last interview of the day, taking into account the age, education, and experience of the farmer. The researcher also picked up that it was difficult for farmers to provide information related to the income from sales. However, they had information on the number of hectares under production.

3.2.7 Data collection

Data collection was scheduled to last for 10 days, made up of one day to run further pre-test interviews, four days to interview 10 farmers and the last five days to listen and replay audio recordings and finalise interview transcripts. The researcher contacted the farmers to make an initial introduction and to make interview appointments. This was done to eliminate the element of associating the researcher with the implementing agent. The researcher introduced herself as a student from the University of Cape Town conducting a study on the farmer support programme. Respondents were not required to travel to the interview, thus the interviews were conducted where it was convenient for farmers, whether in the field or at their homes.

After introductions the purpose of the interview was explained, respondents were requested to complete and sign the consent form (as per section 3.5 below). Consent to record the interview was also sought from the respondents and none of them rejected the request. The researcher followed the interview guide and the pre-tested interview schedule to collect data. While the interviews were recorded, the researcher took detailed

field notes, capturing her impressions of the respondents during and after the interview, taking note of the points which they emphasised most, those they repeated constantly, the gestures they made, and so forth. These notes were useful in linking some of the responses with the observed behaviours (excerpts of the field notes are attached as Appendix 3).

Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour; respondents were offered bottled water since the weather was hot in Jozini.

3.3 Data Analysis

The researcher used tables, and graphs (bar graphs) to analyse quantitative data i.e. the respondent's demographic information and project data, such as the number of loans issued to farmers and training conducted. A thematic analysis was applied to analyse themes and sub-themes, identified from interview transcripts.

Data analysis started during the four days of conducting interviews. Interviews were conducted during the day and the initial transcribing of interviews happened later in the day to ensure that all the interview details were still fresh in the researcher's mind, with a clear picture of the respondents, their characters and gestures (facial expressions, emotions). Microsoft Word was used to capture all 10 transcripts; a sample of an interview transcript is attached (Appendix 4). After all the interviews were concluded, the researcher replayed the audio recording twice within five days to fill in any gaps in the initial transcripts and ensuring that the conversation with farmers was captured verbatim; the aim was to recognise each and every voice.

3.3.1 Thematic analysis

In order to identify and analyse themes, the researcher applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step guide of thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that the guide must be treated exactly like a guide i.e. the process is not cast in stone and requires a level of flexibility, taking the research question and data into consideration. The six steps of thematic analysis are as follows:

Step 1: Familiarising oneself with data

This phase involves transcribing interviews – a verbatim account of both verbal and non-verbal, such as utterances made by respondents. This phase also involves immersing oneself in the data, getting familiar with the content, and gaining a deeper understanding of the data. In order to achieve this, the research has to re-read the data.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

Once the researcher is familiar with the data, has a better understanding of the content, and has developed ideas about the points of interest in the data, then the process of generating initial codes from the data commences. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.18), “codes identify a feature of the data (semantic or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst…” Coding may be “data-driven” i.e. themes are dependent on the participant’s responses or it may be “theory-driven” i.e. themes are centred around specific questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the context of this evaluation, the coding was theory-driven as it was aimed at answering specific evaluation questions about the implementation of the farmer support programme.

Step 3: Searching for themes

This stage involves sorting the various codes identified in step 2 into potential themes. The researcher starts analysing codes and combining these into themes; some codes may be used as sub-themes whilst others may be removed completely.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

This phase involves re-examining all themes identified in step 3 and a detail analyses of the predominant themes that emerged in the data. At this stage, some themes might have to be combined as one theme, some would have to be broken down into separate themes, some would not qualify as themes in the absence of supporting data. The researcher, at the end of this stage, should have developed themes that fit well together and are unambiguous to tell a coherent story about the data.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

At this stage, the researcher has to identify what each theme is about, clearly identify the interesting features of each theme and its importance. This involves writing a detailed analysis for each theme which is expected to provide answers to the research question(s) or tell a story. The naming of themes may be concluded at the end of the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.23) advise that "names need to be concise, punchy, and immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about."

Step 6: Producing the report

The final stage involves finalising the analysis and completing the report. The end goal is to tell a complete story about your data in a simplified manner whilst also convincing the reader that the analysis is valid and credible (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.4 Limitations of the Study and the need for further research

Owing to limitations, such as time and finances, the evaluation study targeted one region in KwaZulu-Natal and a sample of 10 smallholder farmers was selected. The sample of 10 was selected purposefully in order to have detailed engagements with farmers and learn from their lived experiences. However, if time and finances had allowed, I would have selected a sample of 10 farmers in each of the 4 provinces where the project is being implemented. Therefore, there is an opportunity for the implementing agent to appoint a dedicated team of professionals that would conduct a similar evaluation at the different sites across the 4 provinces.

Conducting a full implementation evaluation involves engaging project beneficiaries, the implementing agent, and other key stakeholders involved in the implementation phase. For the purposes of this evaluation, the targeted sample was limited to project beneficiaries (farmers) in order to listen to their views as the recipients of the service. However, the researcher engaged various documents compiled by the implementing agent, i.e. project design documents, theories of changes, and quarterly progress reports.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

According to Greener *(*2008), ethics relate to moral choices affecting decisions, standards, and behaviour during the primary research process. Throughout, the

processes of conducting this research, the researcher observed a number of measures relating to ethical considerations.

The University of Cape Town's ethical clearance form was completed and submitted to the Graduate School of Development Policy and Practice. All the necessary arrangements were made to obtain consent from the implementing agent (LIMA) to conduct the study. An approval by the National Project Manager was received via email, and she connected the researcher to the Regional Manager and the project team stationed in Jozini. A simple and brief consent form was designed for farmers participating in the study to read and sign (attached as Appendix 5). The consent form was written in English; however, the researcher explained the contents to the farmers in their home language, that is, IsiZulu. IsiZulu is the researcher's home language and English her second language, therefore, there were no challenges translating from English to IsiZulu. The respondent's real names were not used, instead, they were referred to as "farmer 1", "farmer 2", up to "farmer 10" to protect their identity.

3.6 Conclusion

"Qualitative research is frequently criticised for lacking scientific rigour with poor justification of the methods adopted, lack of transparency in the analytical procedures and the findings being merely a collection of personal opinions subject to researcher bias" (Noble & Smith 2015, p.34.). The researcher is of the view that the manner in which the evaluation research was conducted met with standards of integrity and rigour.

- The selection of participants was purposeful to ensure that they had rich information of the programme being evaluated and they were randomly selected to minimise bias.
- The interviews were audio recorded to allow the researcher to re-visit the recording and transcribe verbatim.
- Face-to-face interviews were conducted to minimise disruptions, to make additional observations concerning the respondents and not only rely on their voices.

- Transcribing and analysis started during the week of interviews to ensure that the data was captured as early as possible while the conversation was still fresh on the researcher's mind.
- The study applied both qualitative and quantitative methods. Flick, von Kardorff and Steinke (2004, p.180) referred to the linking of qualitative and quantitative methods as "between-method triangulation". This involves combining narrative interviews and analysing materials such as documents. The study also used qualitative data (interviews) to contextualise project data (quantitative data).
- Patton (2002) argues that the credibility of qualitative research is most likely dependent on the researcher's skill and experience in conducting evaluation research. Therefore, the researcher engaged as many books and journals to familiarise herself with key concepts, the work of other researchers, and qualitative studies. The researcher also relied on guidance and feedback from both her supervisor and co-supervisor.

The next chapter provides the presentation, analysis and discussion of the evaluation findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the project data sourced from the implementing agent's reports and the presentation of themes and sub-themes identified from semi-structured interviews (qualitative) and the analysis thereof (thematic analysis). The chapter begins with the presentation of project data (quantitative), highlighting what the three farmer support elements being evaluated entailed, and how they were implemented, i.e. whether or not loans were issued to farmers, the amount of loans, the number of training and mentorship sessions delivered to the participating farmers. The analysis of project data is followed by the analysis of qualitative data, i.e. presentation and analysis of themes and sub-themes identified from the interview transcripts.

4.1.1 Sample demographics

A total of 10 farmers participating in the programme were interviewed for the purposes of this research. Farmer demographic information was obtained through the implementing agent's database (Table 7). The results indicated that the sample was made up of six males and four female farmers, aged 26, 30, 32, 33, 41, 47, 47, 49, 54 and 71, with an average age of 42. Four of the respondents had tertiary qualifications, three had

secondary education and the last three had primary education. The farming experience of respondents varied as follows: farmer 1 had 21 years of farming experience, farmer 5 and 10 had ten years farming experience, farmer 6 had eight years of experience, farmer 9 had six years of experience, farmer 8 had five years of experience, farmer 3 and 4 had two years of experience and lastly, farmer 2 and 7 had one year of farming experience. Therefore, the average was 6.6 years of farming experience.

Table 6: Sample Demographics

Farmers	Gender	Age	Education	Years of Farming Experience
Farmer 1	Male	47	Primary	21
Farmer 2	Female	26	Tertiary	1
Farmer 3	Male	47	Tertiary	2
Farmer 4	Male	32	Tertiary	2
Farmer 5	Female	30	Secondary	10
Farmer 6	Male	71	Secondary	8
Farmer 7	Male	41	Secondary	1
Farmer 8	Female	49	Primary	5
Farmer 9	Female	54	Primary	6
Farmer 10	Male	33	Tertiary	10
Average		***42***		***6.6***

4.2 Presentation and Analysis of Results

The evaluation was aimed at assessing whether or not the programme's theory of change (ToC) was being implemented accordingly, i.e. assessing how the three farmer support elements were being implemented. Therefore, the results are presented such that they start to answer the following evaluation questions:

a) Is the programme implemented according to the ToC?
b) What is the contribution of each of the farmer support elements?
c) What does the majority of evidence say about the likelihood of the project producing intended outcomes? Is it making a difference?

4.2.1 Presentation of quantitative data

The following section will present the analysis of quantitative data which was used to answer evaluation questions (a).

a) Is the programme implemented according to the ToC?

The analysis of project data presented below indicated that the Abalimi Phambili Programme had implemented all three farmer support elements as per the ToC.

Access to credit

The results showed that the project had approved and disbursed loans to qualifying beneficiaries during the evaluation of the implementation period (October 2015 to September 2017). According to the programme's ToC and reports, the programme aimed at providing affordable credit to farmers. Credit was used to procure production inputs and this was paid directly to input suppliers. Results showed that loans disbursed across the interviewees increased from R11,000.00 in year 1 to R58,900.00 in year 2, and to R81,700.00 in year 3. The results were predictable as the project was expected to disburse more loans as more farmers were recruited, year-on-year.

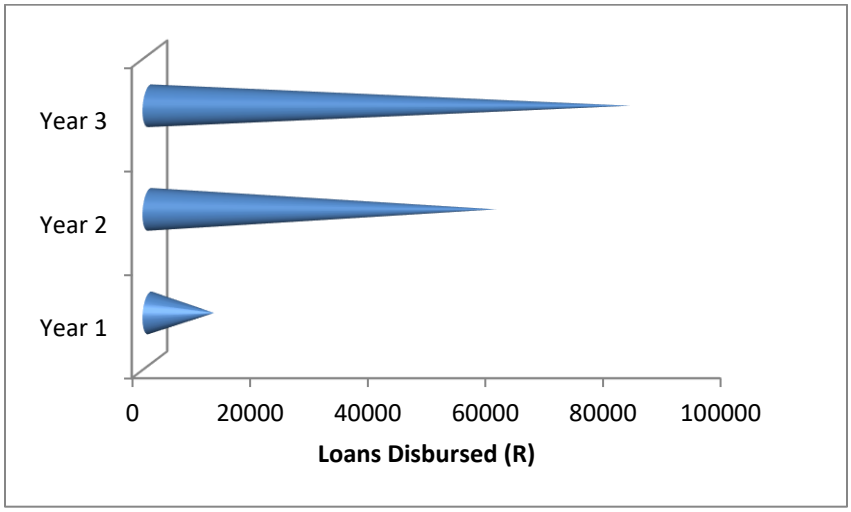

Figure 4: Amount of loans disbursed to farmers annually (2015 – 2017)

Farmer training

The project has delivered on the training activity as per the ToC. Three training sessions were delivered to farmers in year 1 and 2, respectively. The programme only offered one training session in year 3. The training sessions focused on training farmers on topics such as land preparation, pest and disease control. Training was rolled-out in the first

year, as and when new farmers joined the programme. Training sessions from year 2 onwards included record keeping and financial management training.

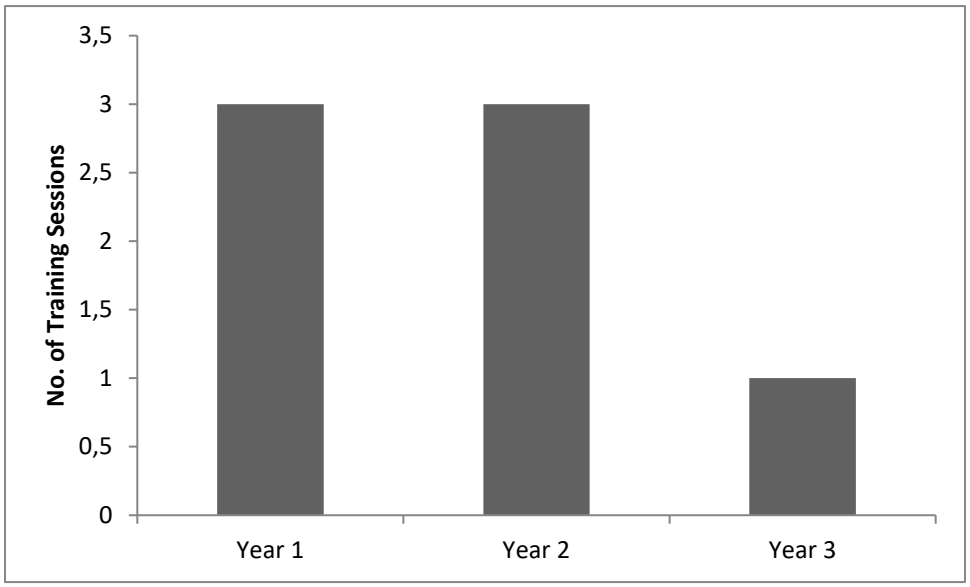

Figure 5: Number of training sessions attended by farmers annually (2015-2017)

Mentorship service

The project has also delivered mentorship or advisory services to beneficiaries during the implementation period. Mentorship services, also referred to as extension services, were aimed at providing close technical support and monitoring to farmers from the point of joining the programme to the point of selling their produce. Examples of the support included ensuring that farmers have planted correctly (according to the training received); assessing their crop for potential pest and disease attacks; and advising on the correct application of chemicals. The results showed that in year 1, each farmer was visited twice per month in year 2 three times per month. However, in year 3, the number of visits decreased from three to one per month. The results from farmer interviews were expected to provide some insights into the reasons for the decrease in the number of visits, as depicted in Figures 6.

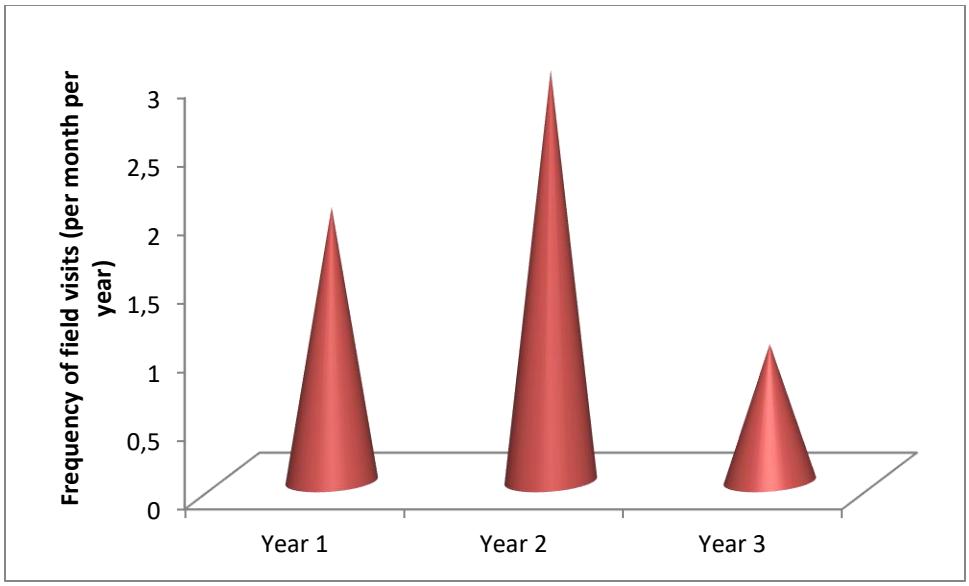

Figure 6: Frequency of monthly field visits by LIMA officers

4.2.2 Presentation of qualitative data

The analysis of qualitative data will be used to answer the following evaluation questions:

b) Was the programme implemented according to the theory of change?
c) What did the majority of evidence say about the likelihood of the project producing intended outcomes? Did it make a difference?

The format is such that the evaluation questions became sub-titles and the themes and sub-themes that emerged are presented under each sub-title. Each theme/sub-theme highlights the views, experiences and perceptions of respondents, and includes direct quotes (in bold). The selected quotes are referenced using the farmer number, e.g. farmer 1, to make it possible to trace the views back to a specific interview transcript. Each sub-theme is presented and discussed in detail to fully unpack the emerging story. As indicated in chapter three, the aim was to recognise each and every voice. While the analysis of common themes among all respondents took precedence, the evaluator also made efforts to analyse key information provided by one or two respondents. The analysis was also applied to put the project data and the reviewed literature of some results into context.

b) What is the contribution of each of the farmer support elements?

Farmer support element 1: Access to credit

Under this topic, farmers discussed their farming background, how their farming experiences led them to join the programme and the role played by this farmer support element.

Theme 1: Lack of means to start farming

1) Lack of funds

Accessing agricultural finance is a challenge for smallholder farmers. Commercial banks consider lending to smallholder farmers a risky exercise. These farmers generally do not own assets and, therefore, have no collateral to secure loan finance from banks. Lack of access to finance inhibits farmers from procuring production inputs and other supplies required to start farming and thus constrain their growth prospects and ability to access lucrative markets for their products. As a consequence, smallholder farmers do no advance from subsistence farming to commercial farming.

There are various ways to provide financial support to smallholder farmers including:

a) **Access to credit**: providing microloans for production inputs at cheaper rates than conventional lenders/bankers (concessional loans). These loans usually have relaxed terms and conditions, including not requiring farmers to use their own assets as collateral.
b) **Access to grants**: proving grants for inputs and agricultural infrastructure to farmers with no requirement to repay the money.

For the purpose of the study, the focus was mainly on the provision of credit as a means to support the development of small holder farmers.

Respondents first described the difficulty of being passionate about farming but not having the means, such as money, to do so. They explained how they had made numerous attempts to start farming and were not successful. Some had joined farming with the hope that they would become profitable farmers; some attempted farming on

their own. They were all unsuccessful in putting more land in production. Farmer 2 explained how farming had her eating humble pie. She started farming vegetables in 2016, using her own funds but faced challenges, such as securing a farm plot and water shortages. She said that she did not make any money but also lost all the money she had invested in the farming business. She explained that she had suffered from depression and ended up being hospitalised. Farmer 3 also talked about the difficulties he faced before joining the programme and said:

> **I started farming in 2015. The first crop went well, but when I attempted the second time, the second crop had too many problems. It was a technical issue; the water pump engine broke, unfortunately, it was during December and it was very hot. I lost everything. In 2016 I decided to take a break because I had lost a lot of money. I had a projection of about R300k return, but I lost everything. Then I approached LIMA in August 2016.**

The common reason that attracted farmers to the programme was that they lacked start-up funding for farming. Farmers asserted that they would have not been able to plant without the programme's assistance, or they would have farmed at a lower scale, e.g., half a hectare. As farmer 8 puts it **"I was in a very tight financial situation before joining LIMA. It was very difficult. I could only manage to plant half a hectare using my money. However, with LIMA finances I planted a full hectare".**

The assertions above indicated that a lack of finance to buy inputs was a major hindrance towards increasing productivity. Farmers were also requested to rank the three farmer support elements according to their importance and they unanimously ranked access to credit as the most important element. The results were further supported by Lepheane (2007), who asserts that access to credit give farmers buying power and it allows them to buy the production inputs they need to farm. Van Zyl and Vink (1998) also supports the argument and say that smallholder farmers are generally poor and often lack access to expensive inputs like fertilizers, chemicals and machinery.

Theme 2: Finance as the starting point

1) **Common uses of finance**

In theme 1 above, farmers highlighted the challenge of a lack of access to funds as the main reason for their inability to plant vegetables. Therefore, the evaluation sought to understand whether or not access to finance had assisted in resolving the challenge of lack of access to funds and also to understand whether or not funds were used as intended. The results were positive and showed that the finance element of the project was used only as intended, namely to purchase agricultural inputs (excluding the cost of labour) and in some instances to fund other costs associated with land preparation.

> **You tell them which inputs you require, e.g. manure, seeds, and chemicals. When they buy for you, you direct them in terms of what you need from where and the cost, so you know exactly how much money they spent buying inputs. They then deliver those inputs at your home or in the field and you sign (Farmer 1).**

The results showed that some consultation took place before farming inputs were procured. Farmers had a say in terms of what they needed, from which supplier. Therefore, the process is regarded as transparent.

However, there were some contradicting views in terms of what credit was used for. Some respondents understood that credit should be used only to buy farming inputs (seeds/seedlings, fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides). These farmers raised concerns about the assumption that having access to production inputs, such as seeds and fertilizer, would be sufficient to start farming successfully. In addition to seeds, fertilizer, and chemicals, they said farmers still required funds to cover the cost of labour. According to farmer 3: **"They give you inputs, such as seedlings, chemicals, and other expenses such as labour are your baby."** Farmer 6 concurred by saying: **"LIMA will give you seedlings, chemicals and manure and the rest is still dependent on you, e.g. farming implements, labour, etc. So, if you don't have own money, then you are risking if you take the LIMA loan."**

While farmers agreed that funds were used as intended, they also identified the gaps in the funding model. The programme does not cover the cost of labour. However, farmers also require labour to put the land into production.

Other farmers indicated that they had benefited from other uses of credit other than buying inputs. A portion of their loan was used to fund the cost of land preparations (i.e. hiring a tractor to plough the fields) as farmer 4 explained: **"This is our first loan we have received and used to plant. We have received inputs, seedlings, and chemicals and also paid for land preparation."** This was further supported by Farmer 5 who said: ***"LIMA paid for land preparation, and bought inputs."***

This resulted in a disparity of information among participants. One group of farmers was under the impression that credit must only be used to buy production inputs, while the other group was allowed to use a portion of the loan to fund costs related to land preparation. In both cases, LIMA paid tractor drivers directly, instead of giving the farmers cash. The researcher observed that only the farmers who had joined the programme recently benefited from using the loans to pay for land preparation. The explanation for this could be that the implementing agent was responding to earlier concerns by farmers regarding the lack of funds to cover land preparation costs.

Theme 3: Terms and condition of the loan

Farmers agreed that what attracted them to the programme was the fact that there was no exchange of cash involved, the loan was bearing no interest, and the repayment terms were negotiated and flexible.

1) **Cashless transactions**

The programme does not give cash to farmers following the approval of the loan. Funds are paid to suppliers of inputs directly. This practice was well received by farmers and no one raised any concerns about not managing the funds themselves. In fact, they applauded the implementing agent for this practice. They believed that this practice ensured that funds were used for the intended purposes and for nothing else.

> **"They don't provide cash, which is good. Money cannot be diverted to things irrelevant to farming." (Farmer 3)**

This is further supported by Van Zyl and Vink (1998), who said that farmers were generally poor. The likelihood of them using the cash to fund other household needs instead of

farming inputs was high. Therefore, the programme had been designed in such a manner that this practice was eliminated and funds were used as intended.

2) **Loans bearing no interest**

The programme provides loans at zero per cent interest, which is one of the aspects that attracted farmers to this programme. Farmer 2 stated that this programme provided interest-free loans which does not compare to the exorbitant interest charged by banks. Farmers 6 also concurred and said: **"I was attracted by low interest."**

There was one case of a farmer who thought that the project was charging interest but stated that the interest was manageable: **"LIMA's interest is manageable, it is bearable."** The programme does not charge interest. Farmers are only charged an initiation fee of about five per cent of the total loan amount; this fee is not required upfront but repaid upon earning income from sales. It seems that the communication to farmers has been distorted in some cases. The implementing agent has a duty to ensure that farmers understand the difference between interest and the initiation fee.

3) **Negotiated/Flexible loan repayment terms**

Respondents indicated that they were only expected to repay the loan after they had harvested and sold their produce and that they were trusted to do the right thing and repay without being chased by the implementing agent staff. Farmer 8 was not able to repay the full amount after sales, due to crop losses. She also concurred with other respondents that repayment terms were negotiated. She said: **"LIMA was aware of the challenges we faced and understood that we will not repay the full amount. They don't want you to be left with nothing; you pay a portion and use some to continue."**

The terms of the finance element of the project seemed to be aligned with the needs of smallholder farmers in that it offered them loans although they had no collateral or assets to put in as surety, and there were no upfront payments required, as Farmer 1 puts it **"…they said come for free, we will help you".** The repayment terms were also flexible and took into consideration the total income from sales, or if any sales were made:

> **"…you only pay once you have sold your produce. If your sales did not yield a lot of money, you can tell them but you have to pay in the end." (Farmer 2)**

Farmer 2 further stated that the fact that the financial support was offered as a loan **"keeps them on their toes"** as she would want to make sure that her credit record is clean and **"you work hard, knowing you owe someone"** she explained.

The negatives of access to credit

Whilst all farmers agreed that access to credit was important to increase productivity, namely to put more land into production, they also shared some of their negative experiences regarding the provision of the credit element. The sub-themes that were identified are as follows:

1) **Loan size**

According to respondents the size of the loan offered by the implementing agent was not sufficient to cover the full costs of production, labour, farming machinery and land preparation costs (as detailed above). Farmers were also of the view that the loan size restricted the hectares of land they could put into production. The programme limited assistance to a maximum of 2 ha and farmers with access to more than 2 ha had no choice but to leave the remainder of the field lying fallow.

> **"The programme provides assistance for 1 ha and if you have 10 ha, 9 ha would be left fallow."** (Farmer 3)

However, Farmer 3 explained that while the loan size is small, there was a possibility to apply for a bigger loan, based on your performance in repaying the previous loan. Similarly, new farmers received support for only one hectare and this may be increased to 2 ha, depending on performance. This was supported by farmer 2 who said: **"The loan amount is limited, only when you repay, they may consider increasing the support."**

Farmer 1 has been farming for over 20 years and he wanted to grow his farming operations by buying farming machinery, such as tractors and ploughing equipment.

However, the loan amount provided by the programme was not sufficient to realize his goal.

2) **Delays in loan approvals**

Respondents described the process of approving loans as a lengthy exercise that had a negative impact on the timely delivery of inputs. The delays had resulted in some farmers planting late in the season and losing their crop. Farmer 6 described his experience and it was clear from the tone of his voice and facial expressions that he was still very upset about the delays:

> **I applied for a loan towards the end of January and indicated that I wanted to plant in March 2017, so that by September I'll be harvesting. I started preparing, hoping programme assistance will come. February to March nothing happened. Then it went quiet. In May [2017] they delivered chemicals and manure and it took them another 30 days looking for maize seeds, which they delivered towards the end of June [2017]. That was very late, but once they deliver you have no choice but to plant. Now the challenge is that from July to August, maize start to flower but it's also the start of a windy season which brings a number of airborne diseases. I had a challenge of army worm** [the pest that attacked mainly maize fields in SA]**.**
>
> **This outbreak affected the whole hectare of maize. Some of the maize survived. I planted another hectare of maize but it was not growing. Upon assessing I realized that the maize seeds had been eaten by rats. That was really bad for me and that was my fall. Only a quarter of the hectare was left. (Farmer 6)**

Farmer 6 was not the only farmer that was negatively affected by the delays in the loan approval process. Farmer 8 and 9 were equally affected during their second term in the project. They asserted that the first term went "smoothly" and they made profits from sales. However, the second term did not go as planned.

> **The second term we planted late, way past the planting season. Inputs were received in June whilst the right timing is between February and April.**

> **Anything outside that period, you are doomed…The climatic conditions were unfavourable and we didn't make money. Our yield was poor and we couldn't pay the full loan. (Farmer 8).**

Participants further described that they felt obliged to accept the inputs although they knew it was too late for planting: **"I would like to put the blame on LIMA for delivering the inputs late; it was late for planting but I planted anyway because they had delivered. They want their money but you face the challenges alone and they don't have plans to bail you out." (Farmer 6).**

Farmer 8 described a similar feeling of being expected to accept inputs that were delivered late:

> **Mentors just need to improve communication, ask farmers what they need, if they should deliver or not, and they must check whether or not the timing is still okay. This would avoid delivering inputs after the season has passed. Just because you had applied and they deliver whenever, as a farmer you take those inputs knowing it's very late.**

Contrary to the views shared by Farmer 1, who said that the process of buying and delivering inputs was consultative and transparent, the above assertions indicated that there had been instances of a breakdown in communication between farmers and the extension officers. Five of the respondents became victims of the delays in loan approvals and delivery of inputs, and they all lost their crop due to heavy winds, pests, and diseases. These unfortunate events forced farmers into a position where they were not able to repay the loan and also did not qualify for new loans until the first loan was fully repaid. Farmer 6 referred to this as a **"vicious cycle".** He described how he had applied, was approved for a loan, planted, and in the end, lost most of his crop due to pest attacks. He harvested the crop that survived and the income from sales was just enough to pay back the loan. He further stated that **"it is a sin that after three years farming, I'm not making profit. I make enough to repay the loan and then I am left with nothing."** This finding is corroborated by Coetzee et al. (1993). The evaluators conducted an evaluation of the DBSA FSP and found that the finance component of the FSP was a success. However,

there was a high number of farmers who failed to repay loans and these farmers were excluded from continuing to benefit from the programme.

3) **Reckless lending**

The respondents were of the view that in some cases the programme was lending funds "recklessly". They raised concerns that the project was lending to people who did not deserve the support and in the process excluded deserving farmers. The issue that came up the most was that some farmers joined the project, qualified to receive finance, they planted and harvested, sold the produce and then left without repaying and thereby creating a bad name for other farmers.

> **"…at least there must be a workshop for six months to ensure farmers know what they need to do before they get money. What if they give inputs and I sell them to other people and not use them for farming purposes?"** (Farmer 2)

Respondents further stated that in most cases these beneficiaries were not originally from Jozini and it is easy for them to move in and out. These results were further supported by the fact that three of the respondents were not originally from Jozini. Whilst this gave an indication that the project was supporting anyone who is interested in farming, whether they hold a permanent or temporary residency, it carried a substantial risk to the programme and could exacerbate cases of non-repayments.

> **"LIMA's challenge is that they trust people and give support to people who are not from Jozini, who are only renting land for that specific season, they benefit from inputs, harvest, sell, take the money and leave."** (Farmer 1)

Farmer support element 2: Training

Training is aimed at building the capacity of farmers to farm the land efficiently and effectively for optimum results. The assumption is that farmers, especially subsistence and smallholder farmers, are not able to produce quality produce and run profitable enterprises due to lack of farming skills, management and financial skills. Therefore,

farmer support programmes are designed such that a training component is included in the basket of support elements provided to farmers.

Respondents had conflicting views on how this support element had contributed to their capacity to farm. However, a majority of farmers were of the view that the training offered by the implanting agent had too many shortcomings and, therefore, deemed irrelevant and inadequate. However, there was a group of farmers who appreciated the training.

1) **Training not adequate and irrelevant**

Respondents indicated that training was not necessary or efficient and it was not adding value to their farming practices. They were of the view that their knowledge and experience were sufficient and that they were more experienced than the extension officers.

> **What I know about LIMA training is that it is lacking…The extension officer recently came to me asking if I had the chemical [steward] for cabbages, she wanted to help another farmer. But I was very confused because she already had ampligo [another chemical]. If you have ampligo you don't need anything else because it is a very effective insecticide…you see she doesn't have knowledge? She is looking for a pistol while carrying an AK47. (Farmer 1)**

The respondents' perceptions could be as a result of knowledge gained by over five years farming experience. One of the respondents participated in the DBSA Farmer Support Scheme, known as Makhathini Cotton, which was implemented in the 1990's. Some of the respondents were also in possession of tertiary qualifications in agriculture. This was an indication of the calibre of some of the farmers participating in the programme and warranted an approach where programmes offered different training interventions to farmers, depending on their farming experience and education levels. For this reason, it was not surprising to see the results, showing that training added no value to the knowledge they already possessed. These findings are similar to those in a study by Vink and Van Rooyen (2009), which showed that farmers were of the view that they were more

experienced than the extension officers and that farmers were wary of their support as they were fully aware of the extension officers' lack of capacity.

Respondents added that training would only be useful if it covered new information on how to improve planting and focused on pricing and markets. Training in its current form was deemed irrelevant. Farmer 4 said:

> **Naaah, we know planting procedures, spacing and so on, even the farm workers know. Farmer training started years ago, people know how to farm, and even elderly people here know how to farm. Unless you train on something different. We also know how to apply chemicals.**

Farmer 4 was in possession of a tertiary qualification in agriculture and grew up in a farming-orientated family. Therefore, his views were expected.

Farmer 3 shared quite a strong view, and in his opinion, training should not be part of the farmer support elements:

> **Training is one of the things I would say they must drop. There are places where we buy seedlings and chemicals. Those suppliers are able to provide you with a complete planting and management plan for a specific crop – the plan covers everything from planting to harvest.**

However, his views could have been influenced by the fact that he had other sources of information outside the programme, which is unlike other farmers who are solely dependent on this programme for all their information.

The views above could provide some explanations as to why the project reduced the number of training sessions from three in year 1 and 2, to one session per farmer per year in year 3 (Figure 5).

2) Training lays a foundation

In contrast to the views mentioned above, some of the respondents were of the view that the training offered by the programme laid a good foundation. However, the common characteristics of this group were that they had not been trained before and had less

farming experience. These respondents indicated that training improved their understanding of farming and enabled them to bring more land into production. They were of the view that the training had given them a good foundation as they were taught how to sow seeds, correct application of chemicals, and weeding.

> **Yes, the training assisted me a lot. The extension officers helped me to produce high-quality vegetables. Like I said, other farmers could not believe when they saw my produce. (Farmer 5)**

Respondents who appreciated training were farmers with farming experience between one and two years and/or those who were receiving farmer support for the first time through the APP programme. This was to be expected, namely that those respondents relied heavily on the project and would appreciate most of the training offerings. Also, they were not comparing the project to any other project.

One respondent with a tertiary qualification (not agriculture related) and one year of farming experience, was not sure of the usefulness of the training. She acknowledged that she had learnt a few things about farming, but was not confident about what she was being taught.

> **Training is practical in the field and you can go to their office as well. However, I feel the training is not sufficient. To be honest, I don't really understand farming or soil types. I feel exposed when attending workshops with other farmers. I fear I would be asked things about my farming that I would not be able to answer. (Farmer 2)**

Farmer 2's perception of training and her being unsure whether or not training was useful could be influenced by her expectations. The respondent explained that she started farming with the view that she was going to get rich quickly. In fact, she was inclined to join the APP project because her first attempt at farming was unsuccessful and she was ready to give up. She joined the project with high expectations and it seemed that these expectations have not been met. Therefore, it might be difficult for her to see the benefits of the project as yet.

Farmers were asked to rank the farmer support element in their order of importance. Training was ranked last in terms of its contribution to farm productivity. The majority of farmers, especially those with farming experience and tertiary qualifications, clearly disputed the existence of any positive relationship between training and increased farm productivity. In fact, they were of the view that this part of the ToC must be dropped as it was unnecessary.

Farmer support element 3: Mentorship

In the context of the Abalimi Phambili Programme, mentorship or extension services are offered as a post-investment support service, i.e. to conduct farm visit and ensure that farmers are applying good agricultural practices, such as the correct application of chemicals, weeding, and preparations for harvesting.

Under mentorship services, a total of two sub-themes emerged as detailed below:

1) **Mentorship as a hand-holding process**

Again, the common views shared by new farmers (with fewer years in farming) and those who have only benefited from the APP project, seemed to be more appreciative of the care demonstrated by the extension officers, as one said: **"it is baby steps for me, they are holding my hand". (Farmer 2)**

Farmer 7 also said: **"LIMA monitoring has been very helpful to me since I just started farming. They started with me from scratch, they monitored from planting, they came back when plants first germinated, took me through the spraying process. Even the new extension officer is playing the same role. She came and visited the garden and I showed her the plot. I have no complains".**

The views shared by some of the respondents indicated that providing mentorship services was important as it incubated farmers who were new at farming by holding their hands from start to finish until they were able to do most farming activities on their own. This service seems to be more relevant to new farmers, a view supported by farmer 10, who said: **"They tell me what I know, so it doesn't add value. People who need that are the new farmers."**

2) Mentorship services are inadequate and resources are overstretched

Divergent views of the extension officers were expressed by some of the respondents, saying that the officers were not passionate about their job since they were not dressed appropriately for farm work, which limited the depth of the monitoring they could perform. One respondent (Farmer 1) said: **"look at what they wear; you cannot work with farmers wearing like you are going to the office…"**

These respondents expected extension officers to wear appropriate protective clothing and scout the entire field to check the quality of produce and to identify pests and diseases early on in the process. As a result, some respondents deemed mentorship inadequate because of unmet expectations. This finding was interesting, showing the farmers paid attention to what extension officers were wearing, expressing the view that if they did not dress appropriately, they would not be able to do a thorough job. Farmer 1 went on to say: **"They just park the car and then the farmer has to go to them, when do you see progress in the field? You don't know which one is my plot, they don't follow up".**

Respondents also raised concerns that project extension officers were overstretched and, therefore, not visiting as often as they should. Project offices are based in Jozini town and there is only one extension officer serving them. This, according to one respondent, has a negative impact on the existing farmers needing help, and the aspiring farmers interested in joining the programme.

> **"…I do have a challenge with the way they work. LIMA has one vehicle, their offices are in town, farmers see the bakkie [van] passing by and they wish to know about LIMA operations but it's not easy. They are not easily accessible." (Farmer 2)**

Respondents were of the view that this limited the project from reaching out to as many farmers as possible. These results were supported by the trend observed in Figure 6, showing that mentorship sessions had reduced from three to one per month. The decline could be as a result of the increase in the number of farmers joining the programme year-on-year. Therefore, the more the farmers, the more overstretched the extension officers

would become. These results are further supported by a study conducted by Ortmann and King (2007), who revealed that extension officers in KwaZulu-Natal visited farmers only once a year and their education levels were found to be very low. Almond and Hainsworth (2005) also argue that extension officers are not well informed about local markets and are, therefore, not capacitated to advise farmers on such issues.

Farmers ranked mentorship services as the second most important farmer support element. They acknowledge that the service had played a role in increasing farm productivity through the useful advice provided by APP facilitators. However, the acknowledgement came mostly from new farmers who had just joined the programme. Farmers with more farming experience agreed that extension officers were indeed conducting site visits but they viewed this service as a tool used by the implementing agent “to follow their money” or “follow their investment”, as farmer 3 put it.

The above results have shed light on how each of the farmer support elements had performed according to the experience, views and perceptions of the farmers currently participating in the project. In the following section, the evaluator responds to the third evaluation question, namely assessing the likelihood of the programme achieving the intended outcomes.

c) What does the majority of evidence say about the likelihood of the project producing intended outcomes? Is it making a difference?

The evaluation focused on assessing the likelihood of the programme achieving two intended outcomes, i.e. increasing farm productivity and creating self-sufficient/sustainable farmers.

Outcome 1: Increasing farm productivity

Parts of the programme’s ToC seemed to be working. The activities, such as providing access to credit, mentorship and training, had been implemented by the implementing agent. The manner in which the credit facility was structured provided a better alternative for farmers who did not qualify for commercial funding. The loan terms were flexible, repayment plans were negotiated, and loans were interest-free. Respondents

also indicated that credit was used to buy the production inputs they required to start planting. Therefore, access to credit made it possible for farmers to put more land into production, however, the evidence suggests that an increase in hectares of productive land has not resulted in an increase in crop yield and/or farm income because of crop losses due to bad weather, pest and diseases, as well as difficulties in market access.

There was unanimous agreement that access to credit (used to buy production inputs) played a role in increasing farm productivity, yet, the delays in approving loans resulting in production inputs delivered late to farmers had detrimental effects on them. Farmers that received inputs late and planted off-season lost most, if not all, their produce due to adverse weather, pests and diseases. They have not been able to recover and are still struggling to repay loans but at the same time, they do not qualify for new loans.

Very few farmers had success stories of how the programme had a positive impact on their livelihoods. Only two of the respondents shared life-changing success stories, however, these successes were short-lived as it was immediately followed by a period of challenges undoing the success. Farmer 8 received her first loan in 2015 and was able to harvest quality produce. She used the income from sales to repay the full loan amount and used the remaining amount to extend her one room to a two-room house. However, the second term did not end well for the farmer due to delays in the delivery of inputs, planting off-season and losing produce. Farmer 5 also shared her success story. She explained that her produce was of high quality and she had visitors (project funders) coming to see her vegetable plot. She managed to repay the loan in full long before payment was due, but then encountered difficulties, also due to planting off-season.

Outcome 2: Creating self-sufficient/sustainable farmers

Farmers raised issues of lack of access to market and production losses as the main issues that were preventing them from increasing income from sales and graduating from smallholder to commercial farmer level.

The results showed that there were three groups of farmers in the programme. One group (dominant, made up of six farmers) was approved for a loan, planted and lost most, if not all, of their crop due to delays in the delivery of production inputs and/or adverse weather

conditions. The second group (made up of three farmers) has managed to plant the full two hectares, however, they had difficulties in finding a market and feared that their quality produce could be rotting in the fields. Some had already experienced crop losses in the past due to lack of access to a market. The third group, one farmer, has managed to utilize the loan to plant within the season and has been able to sell his produce and repay the loan without any challenges. He seemed to have succeeded in creating a solid client base. Buyers buy directly from him, bringing their employees to harvest and load the bakkies/vans and paying him immediately. This could be as a result of his experience in a number of years in farming. The farmer started farming in 1993 in the very same area and in the past has participated in various farmer support programmes, which probably have assisted in creating a solid track record and attracting a reliable market. Unfortunately, the latter is an exception to the norm.

One respondent (Farmer 4) said: **"…you pay the loan after harvesting. Now the challenge is that your ability to pay is dependent on production and the market, so as much as the programme is assisting, sometimes we are left hanging due to market challenges."** The difficulties of securing a market were further described by Farmer 2 as follows: **"The implementing agent gives loans but there is no stable market. How are we going to repay loans? LIMA has to find a stable market and coordinate supply for farmers they are supporting. It is difficult for farmers to secure these markets."**

As a result of lack of access to markets, respondents also explained how their produce has ended up rotting in the fields. Respondents further reported that the project was not comprehensive since it has not provided the much-needed market access and this was one of the reasons why they were not able to repay loans. According to Kirsten and Sartorius (2002), farmers in South Africa face challenges of huge losses in agricultural produce post-harvesting due to poor quality and inability to access lucrative markets. Aliber et al. (2006) concur with the view that market access is very important for the development of smallholder farmers. He asserts that smallholder farmers need to have access to better-paying markets to grow their enterprises and stand a chance of becoming commercial farmers.

It seems the issues of lack of markets and losses in production have left some of the farmers worse-off. Two of the respondents described the pain of planting and end up not selling because they had lost everything, or when they sold their crop, had to use all their income to repay the loan: **"The crop started growing and started sprouting, and then we had strong winds which blew all the flowers away. Each flower is a tomato, you know that? This means once again I lost everything. Now I owe LIMA, they need their money but none of this was my or LIMA's fault." (Farmer 3)**

The severity of the impact of production loses is further exacerbated by the fact that smallholder farmers do not have access to affordable insurance packages to cover the risks associated with loses due to natural disasters and damaged irrigation equipment. Farmers carry a huge risk of falling victim to natural disasters and yet they are expected to repay the full loan. Kirsten and Van Zyl (1998) argue that access to insurance is either imperfect or absent. An example cited by Ziervogel (2004) is that of Lesotho households who were found not having any form of insurance. Linnerooth-Bayer and Mechler (2007) further assert that insurance is expensive in developing countries, where only one per cent in low-income countries have catastrophe coverage compared to three per cent of households in middle-income countries. Respondents also indicated that they had lost their produce due to natural disasters related to unfavourable weather conditions. The project does not have measures in place to assist farmers should they become victims of natural disasters. The result was that farmers who had lost their crops were in dire straits, and indebted to the project.

In contrast, farmer support programmes aimed at supporting white farmers during the apartheid era, ensured that farmers benefited from a range of subsidised functions, including disaster management (Williams, et al., 2008). The project is currently not making a huge difference to farmers and has limited its potential by not ensuring that farmers are provided with comprehensive support, that is, support from when inputs are purchased until the produce is sold.

Due to the farmers' inability to access markets and increase income from sales, coupled with the fact that they are not able to obtain new loans from the programme, they had to seek other credit sources to re-plant in the hope of making a decent income from their

produce, such as using “omashonisa” (loan sharks) to obtain additional funding. Farmer 8 obtained a loan of R8,000.00 from a loan shark and in the end, she had to repay a total of R19,000.00 (more than double the capital amount). After repaying the loan and interest, she was left with nothing. Farmer 6 faced a similar dilemma. He asked his wife to take a CAPFIN loan of R6,000.00 from PEP Store but regretted that due to the required high monthly instalments and high-interest rate. In trying to improve the status of smallholder farmers, in some cases, the programme has further burdened them with more debt.

Respondents raised salient questions by asking how were they expected to repay loans when they could not sell their produce. The success of smallholder farmers graduating to commercial status is linked to their ability to increase productivity and having access to better-paying markets. Researchers such as Kirsten and Van Zyl (1998). Aliber et al. (2009) and Schirmer (2000) agree that smallholder farmers have a huge potential to positively contribute towards the economic growth but they require support to improve their ability to compete and have access to lucrative markets. Based on the evaluation results it seems the programme is currently not making a difference in the status of the sampled farmers. The programme offerings are still fragmented and are not comprehensive, similar to the previous farmer support programmes (FSPs) discussed in Chapter 2. It seems the programme has not built its foundation based on the lessons learnt from other FSPs.

The programme is not likely to create commercially-oriented farmers, that is, to facilitate farmers progressing from smallholder to commercial farming. Respondents said the level of support was inadequate for farmers who were ambitious and wanted to grow. They felt that the support elements were limited, especially because the project provided support for only one hectare even if a farmer had more land, and farmers were struggling to access machineries, such as tractors. Respondents said they were still poor after many years of farming. One of the respondents attested to this and said some of the farmers who started farming while he was still young, were still regarded as a smallholder farmer and he was still poor. Another respondent concurred by saying that farmers were not doing well; they were not setting a good example for the youth, and they were failing their children who do not find the agriculture sector attractive.

Overall performance of the programme during implementation

Based on their experience, respondents were asked to rate the programme's overall performance during implementation. The score was out of 10, with one showing poor performance and 10 regarded as very good. Five of the respondents gave the overall project a score of five, three respondents gave a score of 10, and two respondents gave a score of eight.

In scoring the project, respondents rehashed previous grievances and stronger emphasised the points they had already raised pertaining to the individual elements of the farmer support. Respondents that gave a score of five highlighted reasons of the such as that the project was limited as it only provided them half of the support they required; support was limited; farmers did not have access to mechanisation; and the biggest challenge was the lack of access to markets.

"I will give them 5/10 because we don't have a market, so the support is not comprehensive. You produce and then the crop rots in the field then you cannot repay" (Farmer 4). Farmer 3 also said: **"5/10 - yes assistance is there, and it's good that they are charging a bit of interest, there is no free meal. The big issue is poor access to markets."**

One respondent said that in addition to the APP support, the farmer would need to have his own cash to fund the cost of renting land, paying for land preparation, and labour costs. Without own funding the investment is a wasted opportunity.

"I would give them 5/10 because they also give me 50% of the support. We have knowledge but not capital. However, if you have nothing, no money at all, you don't benefit from LIMA's assistance because you need to match LIMA's assistance, it's a 50/50 split." (Farmer 6)

This argument is also supported by Ortmann and King (2007), who say that farmers have limited access to factors of production, such as land and labour. The views of respondents were that microloans were too little and did not assist in addressing the lack of funds to

rent land and to cover the cost of labour. This group of respondents was of the overall view that the programme was not offering comprehensive support.

Three respondents gave a score of 10, citing reasons that some of the respondents were, for instance, receiving assistance for the first time and appreciated the care demonstrated by extension officers. Farmer 7 said: **"For me, since I have only been assisted by LIMA, I give them 100% [10]. They know how to take care of you from the start, from planting and even when I had challenges, they were there."** The common characteristics of these respondents were that they were either new to farming or to the programme, meaning that programme was the only farmer support programme they have benefited from, or that they had failed to repay the loan, and there was a possibility that they were feeling guilty.

Two of the respondents that gave a score of 10 were still battling to repay the loans they obtained in 2015. One respondent said that the sight of a LIMA bakkie/van was now frightening because she felt that she had failed the programme for not repaying. Farmer 9 gave a score of 10, however, her reasons indicated that she was not happy about the delays in the delivery of farming inputs which resulted in her not being able to repay the loan: **"We need LIMA but sometimes, they are part of the challenge because they delivered my inputs late. By the time I planted it was very late which means you will harvest when there is no market for your produce and you make a loss. By the time other farmers are harvesting and selling, you are only starting to plant. Those are the big challenges. Communication is very important. I like the way they care about farmers, even when you have problems they come and see you. I would still give them 10/10 for all they have done for me."**

It is under this premise that the evaluator reached a conclusion that while it was highly likely that the respondents gave the highest score based on what the programme had offered but it is also likely that the score was as a result of the feeling of guilt for having failed to repay the loan.

Lastly, two respondents gave a score of eight because they were of the view that the programme had done well but needed to improve their training and mentorship offerings.

They also highlighted that the programme was not easily accessible to new farmers who wanted to join the project.

Assessment of other factors that might be contributing to the success/failure in implementation

The evaluation also assessed whether or not there were other factors outside the programme's ToC that contributed positively or negatively towards the programme achieving its outcomes.

Landownership challenges

Results showed that respondents were facing numerous other challenges relating to their land rental arrangements. As indicated before, all the respondents were renting farmland and some reported that they had lost their produce due to water challenges, which was as a result of poorly maintained irrigation equipment, in lieu of the fact that they were required to pay rent upfront to have access to water. However, when there were challenges with the irrigation equipment, for example, farmers were left on their own to deal with those issues and it took a while to have those problems resolved. Two of the respondents reported that they lost a hectare of produce due to water issues. One of them was still trying to repay the loan after losing all his produce. The cost of renting land was also highlighted as a major stumbling block for existing farmers and those wanting to join the project. Currently, the programme neither fund costs associated with land rentals, nor played any role in negotiating rental terms on behalf of farmers. Ortmann and King (2007) found that access to land and the capacity to cultivate it were among the biggest challenges faced by smallholder farmers. Southern Africa Trust (2013) argued that smallholder farmers do not possess landownership titles, and therefore, they do not have the incentive to invest and improve the land they do not own. The challenges of land rental arrangements were also identified by the DBSA during the implementation of their FSP in the 1990's. Van Rooyen (1993) reported that the DBSA was planning to provide financial support to lease land, coupled with a formal lease agreement, as part of the FSP offering. However, these amendments to the programme were not evaluated.

Support from other organisations

Respondents were asked whether or not they were receiving support from any other organisation apart from LIMA. Research has shown that government initiatives competing with one another, or with the private sector initiatives, made it difficult to assess implementation success as contributions by other initiatives needed to be factored in. The results showed that the implementing agent (LIMA) was the only organisation providing support to the respondents; no cases of duplication of services were identified. One respondent indicated that the extension officers from the Department of Agriculture were once providing them with support. However, that has since stopped and the officers were now focusing on areas where the programme was not implemented. This was a very good example of the government (Department of Agriculture) working closely with other organisations to ensure that they did not compete but complemented each other and provided support to more farmers instead of supporting the same group of farmers.

Other respondents indicated that they were receiving complementary information from input suppliers. Suppliers have information pamphlets that contained all information the farmer would need to know – from planting to applying chemicals, and harvesting. They felt that this information was very useful. One supplier went to the extent of visiting the field and assesses whether or not the farmer was buying the right chemicals and applying them correctly. This level of support was likely to positively contribute towards farmers increasing their farms' productivity.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented the key findings of the research and the interpretation of these results based on the data that was collected, themes and sub-themes that emerged from interviews, observations the researcher made, and the reviewed literature were applied to discuss the results. The key results included that:

a) The programme activities were implemented according to the programme's ToC.
b) Access to credit was described as the most valuable farmer support element in terms of its contribution towards putting more land into production. However, the value of credit has not been fully realised due to farmers experiencing production loses and lack of access to markets.

c) Training and mentorship seemed to be appreciated more by new farmers with limited farming experience and/or low levels of education. Experienced farmers were of the view that they had the knowledge required to farm successfully and, in some instances, they believed they were better informed than the extension officers.
d) The programme is not likely to achieve other intended outcomes, such as access to markets and increasing farm income. This could also prevent the programme from achieving an overall impact of creating sustainable/commercially-oriented farmers.

The next chapter concludes by discussing the main findings (including those listed above and others), programme implementation lessons, and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

After two years of implementation, the implementation evaluation of the Abalimi Phambili Programme (APP) has revealed that the project has partially achieved the theory of change, namely the provision of finance; buying of production inputs; training and mentorship (activities); farmers accessing loans; purchasing and delivering of inputs; and training and mentoring of farmers (outputs). The assessment showed that the intended outcome (farm productivity) had been realised to a certain extent. The main findings of the research showed that access to credit plays a huge role in unlocking the challenges faced by farmers in buying production inputs. Access to credit afforded farmers an opportunity to purchase inputs that they would not have been able to afford without being beneficiaries of a farmer support programme. Access to credit made it possible for farmers to put more land into production and the terms and conditions of the loans were also found to be aligned to the characteristics of the targeted project beneficiaries. The

targeted farmers were poor and could not afford to farm at a scale that made financial sense. The project offered interest-free loans which were repayable once the farmer had sold his/her produce, and farmers were not required to provide any assets as surety, thus making it easy to access credit.

However, the results also showed access to credit was only effective if the credit approval, the buying of production inputs, and the delivery of the products was done on time. Delays in loan approvals and delivery of inputs reduced the potential impact of this FSP element. Therefore, the “access to credit” farmer support element needs to be enhanced through fast-tracking the loan approval processes. Despite all the challenges noted above, farmers still considered access to credit as the most important farmer support element.

Mentorship services were ranked as the second most important farmer support element after access to credit. Farmers appreciated the field visits by the extension officers and the useful advice they provide. However, it was noted that the existing resources were overstretched, which limited the number of visits of extension officers per farmer. The service also needed to be enhanced through the training of extension officers, ensuring that they have access to new and updated sector information to provide useful and invaluable information to farmers. This would eliminate the issue of farmers not trusting the information they get from extension officers. One of the interesting and unexpected findings was that farmers paid attention to the dress code of extension officers and that they associated the dress code with the level of passion and commitment to their responsibilities. The farmers’ expectation was that extension officers should wear appropriate protective gear, such as boots, to walk freely in the fields, do a proper assessment of the crops, and advise accordingly.

Training was ranked least important and the majority of farmers recommended that this part of the ToC must be dropped completely as it was unnecessary as currently, the scope of training does not meet the requirements of the majority of farmers; the scope is very basic and only relevant to new farmers with less farming experience. Training interventions need to be kept at a minimal and enhanced to include advanced topics in agriculture.

As indicated in Chapter 3, one of the advantages of conducting an implementation evaluation is that it allows for the project to revisit the ToC, and to identify areas that need to be enhanced, or discontinued. The research results could also add value during the project design stage, should the implementing agent plan to expand the project to new sites. Based on the above assertions, the implementing agent needs to revisit and revise the provision of all three farmer support elements in order to address the challenges raised by farmers. The researcher has made the following recommendations.

5.2 Recommendations

The implementing agent needs to conduct a very comprehensive needs assessment on each of their implementation sites and on each farmer to understand the existing experiences and gaps. The project design is currently a 'one-size-fits-all', assuming that all smallholder farmers have similar financial, training and mentorship needs. The needs assessment report would indicate the number of farmers that require training and the type of training required; the same goes for mentorship services. This exercise would ensure that the project remains relevant to each and every farmer participating and this would also ensure that the project budget is aligned with the needs assessment report. Using the Jozini site and the sampled farmers as an example, one would budget less for training (providing support to those farmers who need it), or train on specific topics, such as "pricing of produce", and "how markets work", as indicated by farmers. The remainder of the budget could be allocated to the provision of credit to enable farmers to fund the costs associated with land rental and labour.

The implementing agent needs to fast-track loan approval processes and the researcher recommends that they test/pilot a model where loan applications are completed online by an administrator, based on each of the four sites, and submit the application online to the finance team at head office who will verify and approve applications that meet the criteria. Manually completed applications are currently scanned from the site to head office where they are captured. It seems that the capacity at head office is not sufficient to service all four provinces. The implementing agent could also enter into agreements with the local input suppliers so that once the application is approved, the supplier releases inputs immediately while LIMA finalises the payment process. The agreement with suppliers

could also include an arrangement where LIMA commits to buying inputs in bulk in exchange for the supplier training farmers for free on pests and disease identification and the application of chemicals. This would again free-up the budget for other items not adequately funded by the project.

LIMA also has an opportunity to add a variety of affordable insurance packages to their programme, should the unfortunate situation of natural disasters occur. In cases where LIMA is not able to provide insurance, they could also consider engaging insurance companies to come up with innovative and affordable insurance packages. Further, farmers are struggling to find tractors to do land preparations. During the planting season, tractors are in demand and farmers have to wait in long queues for the limited number of tractors in the area. The project budget could also cater for mechanisation in this regard. These tractors could be owned by the project and rented out to farmers at cheaper rates; income from the rental may be used to sustain the project.

The implementing agent needs to play an active role in negotiating land rental terms for farmers. Farmers are paying rent upfront and they are then left on their own when pipes burst or engines brake down. Land lease agreements must be formalised first to ensure that these agreements are for longer periods, for example, 5-10 years. Mjindi irrigation scheme management should also take responsibility for maintaining the infrastructure.

Lastly, the project needs to budget for capacitating internal staff and to procure protective gear that is appropriate for field staff. This would earn them dignity and respect from the farmers they are serving. The office-wear appearance seems to be a sign of lack of commitment and passion.

Based on the above assertions the project is not likely to achieve its outcomes and overall impact, namely access to markets, improve farmer incomes, create self-sufficient farmers and work opportunities, if the issues raised in this study and the recommendations put forward to rectify some of the shortcomings are not implemented.

5.3 Policy Implications

5.3.1 Funding farmer support programmes

If the South African government, its agencies, the private sector and non-governmental organisations are committed to increasing the contribution of the agriculture sector to economic growth and employment creation, they ought to do things differently. It is a huge concern that a farmer support programme, implementing in 2015, still face similar challenges to those reported in the 1980s and 1990s. Research and evaluations of previous interventions are available for funders and implementers to learn from and improve their offerings. Funded programmes should be at the level where they address challenges faced by smallholder farmers in increasing their productivity and at the same time have a strategy to ensure that farmers have access to reliable and better-paying markets. Stringent measures should be put in place to ensure that implementers of FSPs are not focusing on the easy elements of farmer support, such as training, but instead ensure that these programmes are comprehensive. Effective implementation of FSPs is greatly dependent on research and consultations between implementers and beneficiaries of programmes to better understand the specific interventions required. Therefore, it is important to fund FSPs, not only based on a business plan, but a business plan informed/supported by a detailed needs assessment.

5.3.2 Landownership

The ability of smallholder farmers to increase productivity is also dependent on the landownership issues being addressed. The slow pace of land reform programmes and/or challenges of insecure communal land tenure are impacting negatively on farmers. Policy development aimed at supporting smallholder farmers must be linked to land policy, that is, fast-track land distribution to people who are actively farming but do not own land, and facilitate the process of formalising land lease agreements.

The concept of irrigation schemes has its merits, such as providing access to more farmers instead of having large tracks of land owned by a few individuals. The government might develop a policy that states that the farmer may use the allocated plots for as long as it is productive. Supporting irrigation schemes might also reduce the burden of

providing post-settlement support in terms of budget and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of extension services e.g. installing irrigation infrastructure for a 500 ha scheme (plots of 10 ha divided across 50 farmers) will be cheaper than setting up the infrastructure for one farmer. However, the lessons from this evaluation indicate that for the irrigation schemes to work they need proper management to ensure that cases of farmers losing their produce due to a faulty engine or leaking pipes are eliminated.

5.3.3 Market access

Research suggests that smallholder farmers are struggling to meet market demands due to the quality and or quantity of their produce. In the past, the government has put more emphasis on the organisation of smallholder farmers into agricultural cooperatives so that they combine their produce, and use the same transport to deliver to the markets. However, based on this research conducted in Jozini, it seems the major problem is that farmers are competing to supply a few local markets and they also do not have the financial capacity to explore markets outside Jozini. There is an opportunity for the government, especially the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) in partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry (Dti), to dedicate a portion of their budget towards incentivising markets to procure from smallholder farmers and collecting the produce themselves. This would also require cooperation from other departments, such as Roads and Infrastructure, to prioritise infrastructure development in rural areas where there is agricultural potential. Therefore, a policy aimed at developing smallholder farmers cannot be standalone; it requires various government departments and agencies to work together.

5.3.4 Affordable credit

It is recommended that the government, its agencies and NGOs/NPOs, adopt a policy that caters for the provision of cheap credit to smallholder farmers since this is crucial in increasing farm productivity. Providing smallholder farmers with finance options that they cannot afford would defeat the purpose of developing them. The APP project provides a good case study on how to offer affordable finance with terms and conditions suitable for the targeted group.

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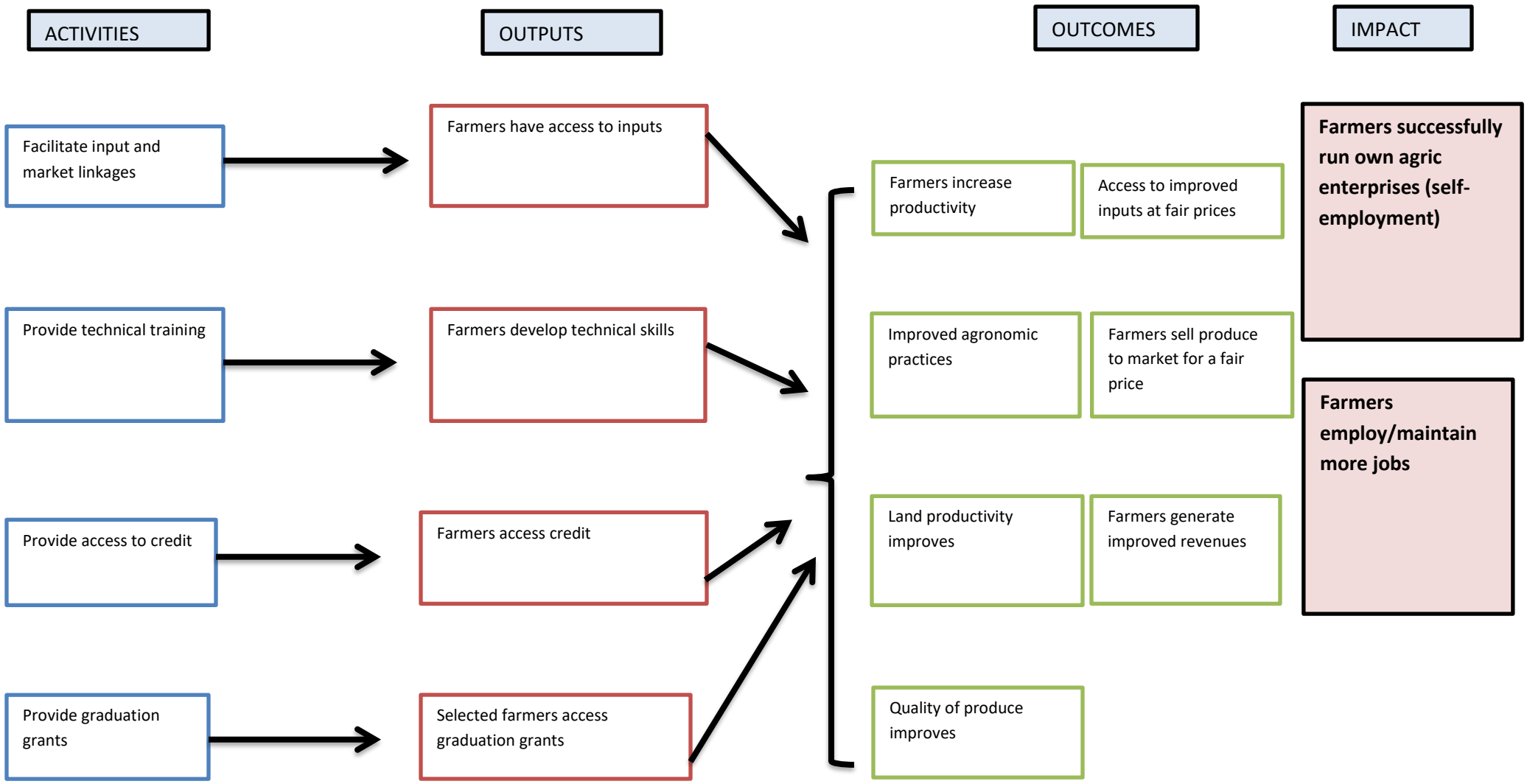
Appendix 1: The Project's Theory of Change



Appendix 2: Data collection tool – Interview Guide and Schedule

Interview Guide

I. Introduction
II. Purpose of the interview
III. Go through the consent form & obtain the respondent's signature
IV. Allow the respondent to ask any questions before the interview
V. Offer the respondent bottled water
VI. Start the interview process as per the questionnaire below
VII. Thank the respondent for participating

Interview schedule

Section A ***Probe where necessary to ensure the respondent talks to each of the FSP elements	Ask the respondent about their farming background and their experience of the Abalimi Phambili Programme (APP): - This involves their farming background, i.e. when they started farming up until they joined APP - Have a discussion about their experiences on how the programme has implemented the three farmer support elements (i.e. access to finance, mentorship, and training) - Any successes and challenge they wish to share
Section B	- Ask respondents whether or not they were receiving farmer support outside the APP. ***Ask respondents if they have additional inputs to make
Section C	- Based on what we have discussed, how would you rate the APP out of 10? Where 10 is the best and 1 the worst. - Please rate the farmer support elements (access to credit, training and mentorship) in their order of importance, from highest (1) to lowest (3).

Appendix 3: Field notes

Respondents	My impressions	Other comments
1	Experienced farmer has been farming for years, participated in different FSP initiatives including the DBSA Cotton scheme at Makhathini Flats. Very passionate about farming.	This programme is too small for him now. He is at the point where he wants to grow his operation.
2	Very open, laughs a lot, not afraid to speak her mind, she has high expectations. Not from Jozini. She is looking forward to achieving financial freedom, probably also to regain the investment lost in her first attempt at farming. She wants more from the programme, more support, more money, more of everything.	
3	Educated, well-spoken and has a lot to say, not full-time in farming	Emphasis on markets
4	Young, soft-spoken and close to his family. Has a qualification in agriculture and farming experience. His family was interested in obtaining finance, the rest they are able to take care of. Lack of access to markets is a frustrating topic for him.	Emphasis on markets
5	Young, energetic and passionate, full of praises for LIMA. This programme basically built her farming career	Many common issues raised by all 5 respondents
6	Old and wiser, had a lot to say, very thorough, keeps record of everything, great sense of humour despite his bad experience in farming	

7	New to the project, new to farming, has other livelihood sources	
8	Very shy, probably afraid because she was not been able to repay the loan, very careful about what she says	She rated the project 10/10. However, her supporting statements are contracting the score. Take note that she was not able to repay the loan…is it guilt??
9	Dedicated mother who works hard for her kids to go to school, passionate about farming. She made an important note on how they have been trained of=n financial issues but have not been applied those lessons due to lack of funds to manage.	Same as above – rated the project 10, however, she blames the project for delivering inputs late and she lost her produce
10	Part-time farmer and full –time employed his only interest is the cheap loan, man of few words. Training and mentorship not important to him. He has an agriculture qualification and has work as an extension officer	Emphasis on lack of access to markets

Appendix 4: Sample Interview Transcript

Time: 9am

Place: Farmer 1's home

Farmer 1 (F1) and Phumelele Ngcobo (PN)

PN: Please tell me about your background in farming

F1: I started farming in 1996 during the start of Mjindi irrigation scheme. We started planting peas and later moved on to cotton, for the looooongest time we planted cotton until Hullets came in and we changed from cotton to sugarcane. However, the Hullets scheme was not profitable; we incurred lots of costs planting and made very little money after harvesting.

PN: mmh

F1: Yes, we had not control over how our profits were calculated, Hullets paid for farming inputs, labour and all the associated cost and after harvest they deduct and pay you whatever is remaining as profit. Eish! We saw this as a rip off, you do the work but you have no control…Aaykhona[no].

PN: mmh

F1: I decided to drop-out of the scheme with other farmers and become an independent farmer, planting maize. At least you are in control, I planted myself, marketed my own maize, paid my own expenses, customers paid directly to me.

PN: mmh..Ok

F1: I knew if I made a profit or loss.

PN: Ok..

F1: Then Lima came into the picture. It's the first time I'm using Lima's services, I don't want to lie. I used to fend for myself but then I had financial challenges. I decided to contact Lima because they are not that kind of an organisation that require you to put money upfront or match the money they give you.

PN: mmh

F1: They say come for free, we will help you. You agree on a payment plan and you pay the money after you have sold your harvest.

PN: mmh…ok

F1: They offer interest free loans. You tell them which inputs you require e.g. manure, seeds, chemicals, etc. When they buy for you, you direct them in terms of what you need, from where and the cost, so you know exactly how much money they spent buying inputs, they are transparent. They then deliver those inputs at your home or in the field and you sign. After harvesting you go and pay at an FNB bank. I have my unique number which I use as a reference to pay.

PN: Oh..so that is how they track repayments?

F1: Yes, my unique number is J123

PN: Can you tell me more about how you have experienced the implementation of this programme and how is it different from your previous experience?

F1: The Lima programme is different; unlike other organisations where you are required to put in money upfront, with Lima you go for free…for free. You go and register, they put your on their data base, come visit your farm [farm assessment], and once your application has been approved they buy inputs for you. You tell them which inputs you want…this….this….and this, how much it will cost and they deliver to you. Then you start working. I like that they don't give you cash, they buy the inputs you've requested.

PN: Ok…

F1: *sigh*…Hhhayi ke [So]…when it comes to paying, they don't chase you. You won't see them following you around in the field asking for payment…No! You do it voluntarily because you have been assisted and you still want to benefit in future.

PN: Ok…

F1: Yes, they give you their account number, your reference number. All you have to do is to pay at FNB and keep receipts. If I go back for again for assistance they can check their records and see that I repaid the previous amount in full.

PN: So in addition to access to finance what other support are you receiving?

F1: No I don't want to lie, the only assistance I needed was finance to buy inputs. There is nothing else that I have asked from them.

PN: What about training and mentorship?

F1: I'm very good at farming, there is no crop that I cannot farm, maize, butternut, cabbage, tomatoes, cane, beans, I know how to plant.

PN: Ok…so where did you accumulate this knowledge?

F1: I use all the experience accumulated since 1996 when I started with Mjindi farming. We learnt by doing. I don't have any formal training or certificates [laughs]. I even know how to apply chemicals, when to apply manure and the correct amount to apply.

PN: Oh! Okay…

F1: For my produce to be of quality and look good, I know what to apply but I have no certificate

PN: Ok…you do this all by yourself not even through assistance from other organisations or government?

F1: Aah!! No, no. We do not receive government assistance here…they are far from us. Now we have independent companies such as Lima coming to assist us. There is no other help that I'm receiving other than from Lima without Lima we would not have received support. This irrigation scheme is very big and everyone will tell you about Lima because we don't have other organisations assisting us. Even the sugarcane schemes implemented here do not give farmers enough financial support. They receive inputs to the value of R4000 but that is not enough because it does not cover costs associated with land preparation, labour, machinery and harvesting. At the end of the day those farmers are left with nothing.

PN: mmmh!

F1: It is better to plant maize because I have control. Customers come to me to buy, I don't call them. They harvest themselves and pay me directly. This is much better than our experience farming sugarcane. Some farmers ended up harvesting and selling the cane on their own without notifying Hullets in order to keep all the money. They rented land, planted using the financial support from Hullets, come harvest time they sold all the harvest and disappeared.

PN: yoooh!

F1: Yes, Lima can tell you as well. They get robed, people join the programme, rent land from other people, obtain financial support from Lima and after harvest they disappear.

PN1: How do those people end up in the programme?

F1: Aaah! You know Lima would find people in the field and those people approach Lima and introduce themselves and say…Hi sister [the facilitator], I am Phumelele and I would like to be assisted by Lima and then Lima would tell them to come and apply and bring your ID. They register them and load them onto their database. Only to find that they wanted support for four months so that they can make money and pay off their debts

elsewhere. AAh! That is a big a problem and Lima would need to tighten up the loose screws.

PN1: Is there anything that can be done to prevent that?

F1: Yes, they must go verify plot numbers with Mjindi scheme, Mjindi will confirm that indeed the plot belongs to you and they will also have information of where you stay [address], whether or not you are originally from Jozini.

PN: mmh!

F1: That is how schemes such as Mjindi collapsed, people were not repaying. There is a company that came after Mjindi and their support was of a larger scale, they bought tractors for farmers. Farmers would make money and not repay. The company ended up opening cases against farmers. There was a sheriff doing the rounds and repossessing people's vehicles and tractors. If you have a tractor you really make money. That is the kind of support that I really need. I don't need car but a tractor. Unfortunately, Lima's support is very limited. They cannot assist me with a tractor.

PN: Have you tried looking for assistance somewhere else?

F1: Aaah! I tried with Absa and I was unsuccessful.

PN: ooh! I am sorry about that

F1: Hah! It's okay. I don't want to lie shame…Lima has assisted us even though their support is limited. They pick you up! There were farmers here who were not able to plant because of lack of finance.

PN: I understand that they also conduct field visits (mentorship). What has been you experience?

F1: The conduct visits at the beginning when you are still applying, to see where you farm. During the planting they are hardly there. That is why people would harvest and get away without repaying the loan.

PN: mmh..mmmh!

F1: Lima should have their own tacking schedule. They must know that if I plant now in December, then I will be harvesting in the next four months and therefore, they must visit frequently. They don't do that and that is going to be their downfall. It is wrong that they support people who are not land owners. However, in the case where someone is renting at list they must know the land owner and verify that he/she is leasing land to that particular individual and for how long is the lease period.

PN: mmh! That is a good suggestion.

F1: Another is that their training is slacking [poor]. Like I said, I don't have formal training but I have knowledge.

PN: Can you elaborate on that?

F1: There is a big difference between how you plant winter and summer maize crop. Planting these crops requires different techniques and the spraying programme is not the same. You won't get that information from Lima.

PN: mmh!

F1: The Lima advisor recently came to me asking if I had the chemical (steward) for cabbages, she wanted to help another farmer. But I was very confused because she already had ampligo (another chemical). If you have ampligo you don't need anything else because it is a very effective insecticide…you see she doesn't have knowledge?

PN: mmmh!

F1: She is looking for a pistol while carrying an AK47 [we both laugh]

PN: Thank you so much [F1] is there anything that you would like to add?

F1: Let me tell you what is the issue here, land owners failed to farm and opted to lease out the land. They are leasing to anyone who wants to farm, including people who are not from Jozini – which poses a challenge for Lima. Lima's challenge is that they trust people and give support to people who are not from Jozini, who are only renting land for that specific season, they benefit from inputs, harvest, sell, and take the money and leave.

PN: Any ideas how this might be addressed?

F1: Lima must go beyond verifying a paper that someone has a right to use land, they must insist on proof of residence and even ask other farmer is they know these people. That might help.

PN: okay, I see. So, are you receiving farmers support from other organisations beside Lima?

F1: Aah!! No, no. We do not receive government assistance here until independent companies such as Lima came to assist us. There is no other help that I'm receiving other than Lima.

PN: If you were to rate your overall experience of the project since you joined to date, what score would you give out of 10 where 1 is poor and 10 is excellent?

F1: Lima's support is limited, too small especially when you want to grow as a farmer. The issue here is that we don't have enough tractors to do land preparations. We need a programme that would help us buy tractors. But I understand that this is bigger than Lima. They give me what they have but I want more. They are doing what they can. I will give them 5/10.

PN: Thank you so much for your time F1, I appreciate it.

shaking hands and had small talk on how he really wants to buy a tractor and make money by doing land preparation for other farmers

Appendix 5: Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE
RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Name of researcher:

Phumelele Nondumiso Ngcobo
Student Number: NGCPHU011

Title of research project:

IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION OF THE SMALLHOLDER FARMER SUPPORT PROGRAMME AND ITS IMPACT ON FARM PRODUCTIVITY: A CASE OF "ABALIMI PHAMBILI PROJECT", JOZINI, KWAZULU-NATAL

Dear APP Farmer,

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Phumelele Ngcobo, from the **University of Cape Town** as part of the Master of Philosophy in Development Policy and Practice. The results obtained from this research will contribute to my final thesis. You were selected as a Key Informant in this study because of your involvement in the Abalimi Phambili Project (APP) implemented by Lima Rural Development Foundation (Lima). The interview is expected to take no longer than 2hours.

Purpose of the study
The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of the farmer support programme implemented by Lima in Jozini, KwaZulu-Natal through conducting in-depth interviews with recipients of the support provided by Lima.

The study seeks to evaluate the impact that the following farmer support elements have had on farm productivity i.e. farm yield:

1. Training;
2. Access to credit;
3. Access to inputs; and
4. Mentorship

Potential benefits to subjects and/or to society

The study will give farmers (the intended project beneficiaries) an opportunity to share their experience of the project, whether the project has assisted them improve production or not, the elements of the farmer support they believe are more important, etc. The outcome of the study may be used by the implementing agent to improve certain aspects of the project and to gain a better understanding of what works and does not work for farmers. The research may inform how farmer support programmes may be better structured to ensure farmers receive the support they need and which elements of the programme may be attributed to increased productivity and are, therefore, worth funding.

Payment for participation

You will not receive payment for your participation in the study.

Risk of participation

There is no risk as participants are guaranteed confidentiality, unless they prefer identity to be disclosed.

Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using codes to identify participants. Individual identifiers such as names of participants, their addresses and ID numbers will not be disclosed.

The information will be shared with my supervisor, Prof. Rajen Govender and Co-supervisor, Ms Matodzi Amisi for purposes of supervision and other relevant scholars such as External examiners, for examining the completed study.

Thank you for your participation

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

By answering the questions put to me:

- I agree to participate in this research project.
- I have read this consent form and the information it contains and had the opportunity to ask questions about them.
- I agree that the interview be recorded
- I agree to my responses being used for education and research on condition my privacy is respected, subject to the following: - (tick as appropriate)

	Yes	No
My name may be used in the published research		
My personal details (e.g. age, occupation, position) may be included in the published research		
My responses can only be used in a way that I cannot be personally identifiable		

- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this project.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from this project at any stage.
- I understand that this research might be published in a research journal or book. In the case of dissertation research, the document will be made available to readers in a university library in printed form, and possibly in electronic form as well.

Name of Participant : _____

Signature of Participant : _____

Date : _____

The researcher must supply you with an Information sheet which provides his / her contact details, outlines the nature of the research and how the information will be used and explains what your participation in the research involves (e.g. how long it will take, participants' roles and rights (including the right to skip questions or withdraw without penalty at any time), any anticipated risks/benefits which may arise as a result of participating, any costs or payment involved (even if none, these should be stated)				
Has this been provided?	Yes		No	
Have your received verbal confirmation/explanations where needed?	Yes		No	

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ _____[He/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in IsiZulu and no translator was required.

_____

Signature of Investigator Date