

Enhancing Rural Livelihoods and Empowering Youth Through Agripreneurship: An Analysis of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme in QwaQwa, Free State, South Africa

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Abstract – Agricultural production has long been a cornerstone of livelihoods in rural areas, providing essential resources and economic stability to communities worldwide. In recent years, there has been growing interest in the role of agriculture as a sustainable livelihood strategy for youth in these regions, especially in Africa, where the youth make up most of the population. This paper explores the impact of agricultural projects under the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) on improving the livelihoods of rural communities and empowering youth in Qwaqwa (Phuthaditjhaba), Free State. It investigates the programme's impact on youth skills development, access to resources, and entrepreneurial opportunities, as well as identifying opportunities and challenges youth face within the context of the CRDP. This paper followed a case study design with a qualitative approach to describe, compare, evaluate, and identify patterns or cause-and-effect relationships between the various variables. Findings indicate that most CRDP-trained youths use their skills for household purposes, and some become job creators. However, there is also evidence that the trainees need additional support to increase production and market participation. The paper recommends that youth in rural and peri-urban areas require further interventions from governmental and non-governmental agencies to support strategies for increased production and job creation, which will, in turn, improve their livelihoods to meet the SDGs.

Keywords – Agricultural production, Livelihoods, Rural Youth, Agricultural Programmes

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1 Introduction

The agricultural sector plays a crucial role in the economic development of many countries. Agricultural production contributes immensely to the world's economy. The agricultural sector further presents a potential avenue for addressing economic issues, particularly in rural areas. According to Hollander

et al. (2024), livelihoods are different portfolios of activities and income sources contributing to family well-being. Agricultural practices lead to significant outcomes such as generating income to sustain lives, contributing to a country's income, providing raw materials, serving as a resource for foreign exchange, and offering employment opportunities (Yadav & Rao, 2024; Von Maltitz & Bahta, 2024). The involvement of the youth in agriculture is seen as an opportunity to increase employment, improve the quality of life in rural areas, and boost the overall national economy (Widiyanti et al., 2020).

Training the youth in agricultural skills is crucial, as they are not only the nation's future but also have the potential to develop livelihood opportunities from the sector (Geza et al., 2021). Youth participation in the agricultural sector ensures continuity and the use of new technological innovations. Their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in agricultural production must be considered, along with identifying potential agricultural value chains and recommending ways to strengthen rural agriculture projects.

According to Stats SA (2024), while South Africa is food secure at the national level, there is food insecurity at the household level. The inclusion of the youth in transforming the agricultural sector has been inadequate. Ninson and Brobbey (2023) suggest that few youths participate in agriculture, making them less active in agricultural production activities. South Africa's demographic profile necessitates focusing on youth inclusion in agriculture to ensure continuity and knowledge about food production. Despite numerous efforts to include youth, their representation in the sector remains poor. The current food situation in many communities could be attributed to the lack of youth involvement in agricultural production, especially in vulnerable communities.

Further efforts to include youth participation in agriculture in South Africa were through the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP). The programme is a strategic government initiative to improve people's lives in rural areas. The CRDP falls under the government's Medium-Term Strategic Framework and emphasises proactive community participation in planning to enhance the standard of living and welfare of rural communities. The programme aims to further uplift rural communities by focusing on agricultural development, land reform, infrastructure improvement, and capacity building. By optimising the use and management of natural resources to produce thriving, equitable, and sustainable rural communities, it seeks to be an effective answer to poverty and food insecurity. According to Chipfupa and Tagwi (2021), progress has been limited despite efforts to revitalise agriculture through youth programmes. Therefore, this study aims to understand how the CRDP has contributed to creating opportunities for the youth in the agricultural sector and whether it has led to improved livelihoods and sustainable rural development, as well as generating actionable recommendations for enhancing youth participation and outcomes in agripreneurship programmes and initiatives by analysing the programme's successes and challenges.

2 Literature review

The review of the literature is based on youth livelihoods in a rural setting, how agriculture is perceived as a productive activity with the potential for providing income for a living in an area where both land and labour are available far from the cities and urban areas in South Africa (Chipfupa & Tagwi, 2021). In addition, the literature further shows how agriculture is practised in different areas and how the youth can use agricultural production to sustain their lives. In other areas, imported produce still contributes to the local agricultural sector, such as grain and vegetables produced in Europe and

exported to Africa (Adeabah & Asongu, 2024). This illustrates that its contribution is still significant even if the product takes a long time to access.

Evidence shows that the youth constitute 56% of the active population in the agricultural sector (Henning et al., 2024). Their participation in the sector may contribute to their income and strengthen food security, livelihoods and job creation, resulting in economic development in their communities. According to the National Treasury (2023), in South Africa, at least 12% of the country has arable rain-fed land for crop production, and 69% of the land surface constitutes grazing and livestock farming, and this includes rural areas managed by community leaders, the clan, and the households. Emery (2008) and Dladla & Webster (2024) state that white males and middle-aged blacks still dominate the sector and urgently need to involve youth participation on a grander scale. Debates on agricultural production in rural areas, the youth's perceptions and experiences in the agricultural sector, and how they frame their livelihoods in the rural areas and learn by participating in agricultural practices to gain experience are essential.

Njeru (2022) and Van der Merwe (2024) have noted that although youth can contribute to the future economy, their limited involvement in agricultural activities poses a risk to livelihoods, food production and food security, ultimately threatening economic growth and employment creation. Therefore, a gap in the literature is to determine the state of agricultural production in rural areas, rural youth livelihoods, their perceptions regarding agriculture, agricultural value chains, and enabling factors for youth to participate in the sector. In addition, this is corroborated by Njeru (2022), who states that more knowledge is required to understand why youth remain unemployed despite governments creating developmental programmes. Although Adegbola & Mavrotas (2020) reported on some crucial factors enhancing youth employment opportunities in the rural economies in Benin, there remains a gap in South Africa on why youth do not perceive agriculture as a job-creating sector, particularly in rural-bound setups like Qwaqwa (Phuthaditjhaba) in the Free State.

Most youths in rural areas work on the land as part of the culture. They grow up working on land as part of their family responsibilities. This gives them knowledge of various agricultural practices. However, as they mature, they discontinue agricultural production (Metelerkamp et al., 2019). The study highlights the importance of youth participation in the agricultural sector in creating sustainable livelihood pathways. The government involves communities in various programmes to empower and encourage them to participate in the agricultural sector. Through the CRDP, the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) programme trained 100 youths from Phuthaditjhaba in vegetable production to empower them with gardening skills they can rely on for their livelihoods and train other community members.

The South African youth, defined as individuals aged 15 to 34, comprised about a third of the country's population, which was 62 million in 2024 (Mothapo, 2024). Although they are more energetic, innovative and adventurous than their elders, they do not participate in agricultural production activities - even those trained (Geza et al., 2021; Madende et al., 2023). The current study examined how CRDP-trained youth used the knowledge obtained to sustain their lives and document their limitations. The study helps other communities intending to implement development programmes to understand possible challenges they may encounter. In addition, the department also obtains insights into what is required by the community when agricultural projects of this nature are implemented. The literature review further shows how agriculture is practised in different areas and how the youth can use agricultural production to sustain their lives. Over and above, the study's

outcomes contributed to the academic body of knowledge on the perceptions of communities on agricultural programmes and suggested implementation practices.

The youth constitute a more significant portion of the labour population (45.5%) (Stats SA, 2024). Agricultural production could be more sustainable if more youth participated, as there would be a higher production rate, more investors in the area, and a more significant portion of the population would be employed. However, the youth mainly access their primary needs like water, good health care, and infrastructure in rural areas (Giuliani et al., 2017).

Most youths in rural areas learn to cultivate the land as part of the culture; therefore, they grow up with some knowledge of agricultural practices. These are the skills which they can use as their livelihood. Therefore, these skills are regarded as assets to their communities. They can contribute to developing their local economies if they remain in their villages. The youth are a resource and make up a large percentage of the population, namely 42-49% (Mothapo, 2024; Stats SA, 2024). However, although they are stronger than their elders, they do not have the resources to continue with agricultural production.

Agriculture as a sector is labour-intensive, and even if technology is used to produce, it cannot be applied in all production systems because of the knowledge needed to operate the machines or the cost to source these implements. Hence, Metelerkamp et al. (2019) argue that the youth have no interest in agriculture. Instead, they consider it an activity suited for elders or wealthy minorities. If the youth are to be convinced that their future lies in agriculture, previous ways of agricultural production would have to be changed and viewed as a business (Magagula & Tsvakirai, 2019). Some governments and NGOs assist youth by financially empowering them with skills in agricultural production (Kabuli et al., 2024) to encourage them to remain in the agricultural sector.

The study investigated some of the challenges in the agricultural sector brought about by different factors. It has been highlighted that the farming community mainly consists of older people who still believe in the old farming methods, which leads to less transformation in the sector. Most financial institutions are reluctant to finance agricultural projects due to the risks involved, such as land ownership. This includes youths who farm on their parents' land or lease their own (Metelerkamp et al., 2019). This further suggests that a part of the infrastructure is not functioning efficiently due to its ageing condition. Further, locally produced food products compete with imported and cheaper products due to global marketing policies.

According to Dowd-Urbe et al. (2013), smallholder farmers do not have much information and skills in technology and, therefore, take longer to develop into commercial farmers. In addition, the support they receive is also uncoordinated. The perceptions regarding the agricultural sector – that it is hard labour and that the profits are delayed due to agricultural production cycles – also do not appeal to the younger generation due to the nature of agricultural work. Most government policies do not prioritise agriculture as a sector, and funding is usually less than other sectors in government planning.

3 Methods and data

3.1 Theoretical framework

For this study, the authors used a positive youth development framework. This theory investigated the factors that are part of the youth's developmental needs, such as seeing the good in youth and encouraging participation in developmental programmes within their communities. The authors used the lens of Lerner (2003), whose theory emphasises the balanced development of the youth and aligning their mental traits. In addition, Bonell et al. (2015) view them as a resource involved in positive activities, not attracted by negative attributes like the use and abuse of destructive substances. A psychologically balanced person can be engaged meaningfully; as such, the youth are most found to be robust and innovative with a balanced psychological being, assisting them in dealing with challenges. Therefore, it is vital to channel the youth's energy positively and to be responsible human beings who can accept institutional support from their elders, peers, and community leaders. To ensure that power relations were controlled in the study, bricolage was used to ascertain power between the researchers, community leaders and the youth (Teele & Nkoana, 2024). In this study, bricoleurs contextualised the approaches using the metaphor to articulate their meaning and inferences for the youth and the community leaders. Researchers (authors) were viewed as bricoleurs in attempting to do so. In contrast, the youth and community leaders viewed themselves as co-advisors, guided by bricolage principles, as Teele and Nkoana (2024) recommended.

3.2 Study area

The study was conducted in the Free State, Phuthaditjhaba, in the Nama-hadi area, as illustrated in Figure 1. Namahadi is located in the Eastern part of the Free State Province, at 28.5635, 2833, and is one of the ten 'home-lands'. Phuthaditjhaba is slowly becoming a metropolitan area; however, the demand for land is still high due to the increasing population, climate change and land use. This Drakensberg Mountain landscape consists primarily of bare ground, which decreases most agricultural activities and tourism. Phuthaditjhaba has a population of 62,808, 19% of which is in the CBD and 81% in the villages, with an area totalling 20,600 ha.

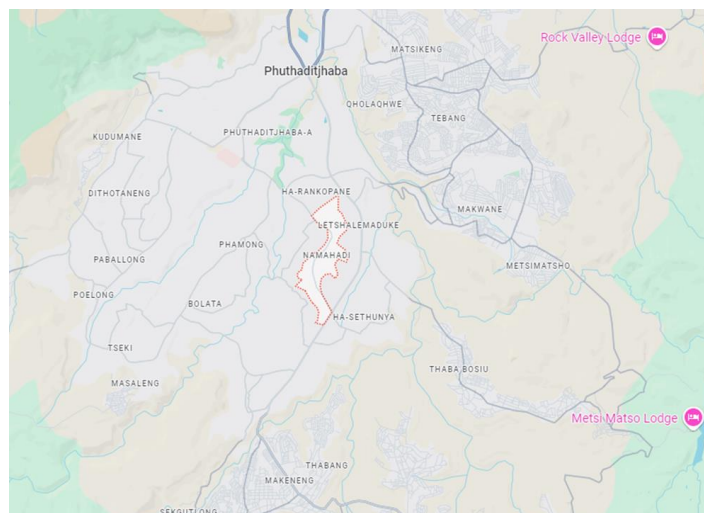


Figure 1: Map location of Namahadi, in Phuthaditjhaba (Qwa-Qwa), Free State (Google Maps, 2024)

3.3 Research design, sampling and data collection

This paper followed a case study design with a qualitative approach to describe, compare, evaluate, and identify patterns or cause-and-effect relationships between the various variables (Hwang, 2024). The case study approach was necessary because the challenges of the youth in the agricultural sector were less explored, and those trained in the CRDP programme provided feedback about their perceptions and experiences in agriculture. The process was done by collecting information from participants through open-ended questions while focusing on obtaining the required information to understand the reasons and opinions of the participants, as described by Weller et al. (2018).

The target population was the youth in the Namahadi location, Phuthaditjhaba, as illustrated in Figure 1. The researchers obtained a list of youth trained by the DRDLR and the Agricultural Research Council (ARC). Therefore, a purposive sampling procedure was followed to select the respondents, as described by Palinkas et al. (2015), to increase the depth of comprehension. A total of 25 participants were interviewed, and the details are illustrated briefly in Table 1. The inclusion criteria for the study were youth with the following circumstances:

- i) those who participated in the programme and,
- ii) those who completed the programme.

Table 1: Methodological Processes

Data collection (Instrument)	Participants (Group)	Participants (Individual)	Total number
Key informants' interviews	Three persons	Three	Three
Focus group	Three groups	8+8+9	25

Furthermore, the primary data were collected through qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews between 2020 and 2021 in Phuthaditjhaba, Free State (Table 1). Interviews were conducted with key informants, including some participants involved in the programme, community leaders, and facilitators of the CRDP. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were also applied, as illustrated in Table 1, to explore their perspectives on income generation activities, collaboration as teams, and the significance of agriculture as a livelihood source.

Secondary data was sourced from scientific literature using a desktop review focused on issues related to the CRDP and global youth participation in agriculture. The authors obtained twenty-five years of research material, constituting research articles, reviews, book chapters, theses, short research communications, and short industrial communications. All material reviewed was analysed and discussed based on the primary objective, with the conclusion leading to the recommendation that future studies should lay a foundation for sustainable agripreneurship strategies for the youth in the Namahadi location, Phuthaditjhaba, South Africa. In addition, other unpublished sources were used, i.e., existing reports and government publications. This data complemented the primary data and provided a broader understanding of the programme's objectives and outcomes. The secondary data also offered a comparative analysis with the primary findings from the field.

3.4 Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out after the conclusion of data collection using thematic content analysis (Terry et al., 2020). Data from interviews was transcribed, and the recorded information was stored in a document from which themes were generated after interviews. Using the Critical Discourse

Analyses (CDA), the written and recorded information, as well as information obtained from engagements during the interviews, were analysed to understand the participants' perceptions, attitudes, and understanding of how agricultural production can contribute to their lives as young people, and how it can assist them in establishing their livelihoods (Khetsha & Makhoahle, 2023). During analysis, emerging patterns were grouped into themes according to the information collected. Still using CDA, the developed themes were further analysed to interpret the recorded data discourse. Verbal information was also presented to provide details and strengthen the participants' perceptions (Bailey, 2008).

4 Results

4.1 Key informants

Youth involvement and programme participation

This study observed high levels of youth engagement in the programme. A substantial proportion of respondents ($\pm 70\%$) reported active participation in community gardening programmes introduced by the CRDP (Figure 2A). In addition, the results showed that while male and female youth were involved in the programme, at least 40% of participants were females, highlighting the programme's role in gender empowerment (Figure 2B). Through participants' engagement, it was observed that the critical motivators for participation included acquiring practical skills, contributing to food security, and social interaction.

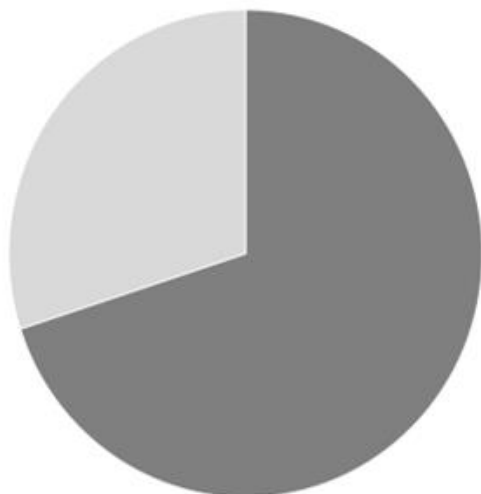
Knowledge and skills acquisition

With bricolage as part of the framework, participants openly asserted that they had seen an improvement in their agricultural knowledge, and this was reflected in their acquired knowledge of vegetable production techniques, including seed selection, planting, pest management, and harvesting (Teele & Nkoana, 2024). Furthermore, a noteworthy yet proportionate number of respondents ($\pm 55\%$) successfully established home gardens or small-scale commercial ventures using the knowledge they had gained. They further expressed interest in starting their businesses, demonstrating the program's ability to develop entrepreneurial skills (Figure 2C).

Impact on livelihoods and food security

A relatively small percentage of the participants (less than 40%) indicated that due to the programme, they experienced an increase in their household income from vegetable sales, contributing marginally to their household livelihoods (*data not shown*). These participants also highlighted that the vegetable gardens significantly ensured household food availability and nutrition. The observation showed that this led to increased consumption of fresh vegetables, which improved their health.

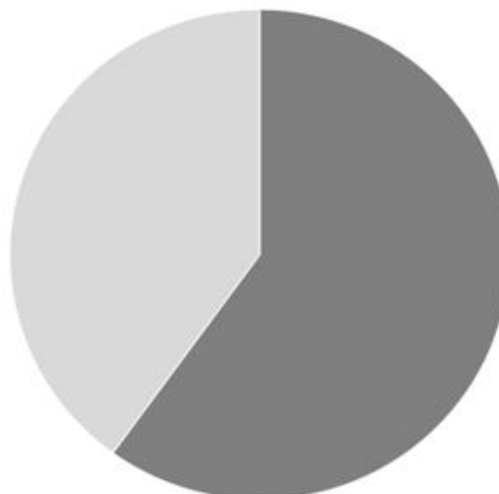
Youth participation in Community Gardening Programme



■ Active in community gardening programmes ■ Inactive in community gardening programmes

A

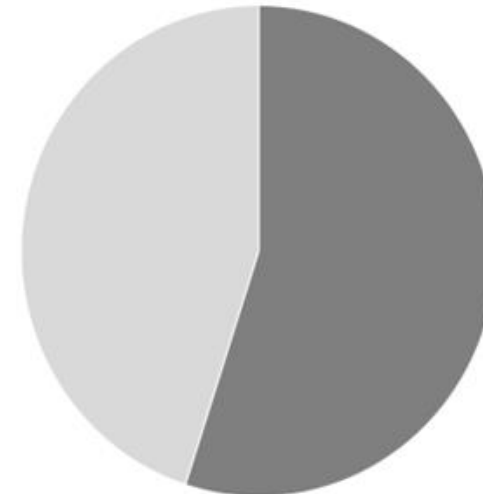
Gender: Youth participation in Community Gardening Programme



■ Male ■ Female

B

Knowledge and skills acquisition



■ Successful application of agri-business knowledge ■ No interest in agri-business

C

Figure 2: (A) Active participation in community gardening programmes (CRDP); (B) the gender declaration on the CRDP programme's role in gender empowerment; and (C) the application of acquired agri-business knowledge

4.2 Focus group discussions

Income generation and livelihoods

The participants responded to the form of income generation they were involved in. An open discussion revealed diverse income streams, with small-scale businesses in agriculture, tuck shops, spaza shops (typical in South Africa), wage labour, social grants, community-based savings clubs, and stokvels, respectively, as vital income-generating activities. Interestingly, youth respondents highlighted their interest in engaging more in agriculture and having it as a primary or secondary source of income; however, there were constraints such as limited access to land, capital, and access to the market.

Community engagement

The community was engaged in their participation in the community engagement, and they responded positively, showing that the CRDP programme partially empowered the youth in the area, Phuthaditjhaba. On this note, many participants expressed that they were not as actively involved in community-based initiatives and shared many reasons; as such, first, their desire to work in a field other than the study area, secondly, their unwillingness to work in the agricultural sector, or religious restrictions that prevent them from engaging in some specific animal production, such as the piggery production (*Sus domesticus* Erxleben.).

Aspirations and potential for agricultural growth

Most participants expressed interest in pursuing agriculture as a career or business, subsequently showing an interest in agri-preneurship. Participants further highlighted the need for training on agri-business management, agricultural technology, and agri-marketing topics. In addition, their deliberations showed great willingness to be further empowered with agricultural skills.

5 Discussion

5.1 Key informants

Youth involvement and programme participation

As elaborated in the youth involvement and programme participation, Trivelli and Morel (2020) state that increased involvement of rural youth in developmental programmes leads to their inclusion in community development and social opportunities. They further noted that participation by the youth increases interventions to improve their livelihoods and developmental opportunities. Boye et al. (2024) provided evidence to support the findings of this study, stating that youth involvement in agriculture has benefits. Firstly, they possess the necessary energy and capability to engage in all agricultural operations; secondly, they can acquire and utilise new ideas, innovations, or technologies; and thirdly, they can serve as a source of new ideas and innovations.

Alas, a keen interest among the youth in agricultural activities in Africa has yet to be realised, and various lessons-learned processes have been implemented. The challenge of attracting the youth to agriculture and its value extensions remains a concern (Addo, 2018). Many of the previous scholarly works have indicated that there are not many active young players in the agricultural field because this activity is viewed to entail a low degree of responsibility, has a lower social rank and is more monotonous. Thus, most people

seek employment in town. It is therefore necessary to minimise the impact of climate change, which adversely affects agricultural productivity and threatens food security, to make agribusiness appealing to the youth and ensure its continuity in the future (Cenacchi et al., 2020).

Rural Development requires adequate investment and supporting family farming as it demonstrates its sustainable result and fullest potential to satisfy the population's dietary needs, mainly referring to farming in Africa, which is the heart of rural employment. However, water availability has decreased significantly, increasing droughts all over Africa. Farming and related activity are threatened by climate change, emphasising heavy rain or exclusion, which extends drought periods over seasons. Crops will undoubtedly be impacted by pests and diseases, leading to water shortages and, thus, food shortages (Cenacchi et al., 2020). The economic dependence on agriculture exacerbates the situation, the slow pace of structural transformation, and the fast-expanding youth population in sub-Saharan Africa.

Knowledge and skills acquisition

Teele and Nkoane (2024) stated that patterns, body language, cognitive processing level, and power interactions were also used to derive this information about CDA. In support of these observations and feedback, Madende et al. (2023) also reported that oriented youth groups may function as role models for other youth by demonstrating the potentiality of agri-based enterprises and imparting training to others. The goal of empowering the younger generation in terms of their livelihood, income, and socioeconomic status and attracting the youth to take up agriculture as a primary source of income is achieved through the development of skills in rural youth, which helps them regain their confidence and pursue farming as a profession. In addition, there are additional employment opportunities in secondary agriculture and service-related activities in rural areas.

According to recent studies, giving the youth access to technology might boost their interest in and output from the agricultural industry (Jolex & Tufa, 2022). Technology has made it much harder for young people to get information about market prices, weather forecasts, and recommended farming practices (Allen & Heinrigs, 2016). According to Jolex and Tufa (2022), information and communication technology in agricultural operations significantly increased production and profitability for youthful agribusiness operators. Because of this, technology use may help emerging agri-entrepreneurs in the agriculture industry by promoting interactions and information exchange among prospective company owners. More significantly, promotion and marketing through online channels can improve the youth's economic prospects.

Impact on livelihoods and food security

Romero et al.'s study (2024) supported this study's findings, showing that although output excess is typically used as additional income, 70% of the families in this research region raise cattle and grow food mainly for their consumption. The supply of seeds and agricultural tools, backyard producers, and customer-consumers are all recognised as participants in four short-cycle supply chains with weak intermediation engaged in this production. These supply systems supply Fresh food to local economies' food networks. In addition, Jansma et al. (2024) supported this study's results and reported a notable shift in farming philosophy. They noted that even urban farming by the youth is becoming fashionable and has tremendous access to formal markets.

Most research has focused on how crucial education is in creating favourable attitudes and igniting young people's interest in agriculture. According to Mdege et al. (2022), adopting agricultural education has raised youth participation in agribusiness in several nations. The authors noted that educated

rural adolescents had a noteworthy attitude toward agribusiness and agriculture (Mdege et al., 2022). Nevertheless, according to one study (Yeboah et al., 2020), people with higher education levels have a worse opinion of agriculture. According to Haggblade et al. (2015), agricultural schools may thus prioritise hands-on training in order to provide students with the skills they need to succeed in the field.

5.2 Focus group discussions

Income generation and livelihoods

Findings from the focus group discussion aligned with the feedback from the key informant interviews. Yadav and Rao (2024) and Von Maltitz and Bahta (2024) reported similar challenges, where institutional agricultural credit for small and marginal farmers remains challenging across various social groups. Tjabadi (2023) further elaborated on the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that have significantly contributed to employment creation, economic expansion, and poverty reduction. Nevertheless, South Africa has a high failure rate and a poor development rate for new small enterprises, like those who are growers in agriculture. It is thought that the primary contributing element, especially for SMEs owned by black people, is access to financing. In the Free State, the agro-processing industry in South Africa has been recognised as a sector with significant potential to generate employment and stimulate growth due to its close connection to primary agriculture (Maritz et al., 2023). Despite the challenges as elaborated, the skills acquired in the CRDP were highly appreciated by the participants, as some further corroborated:

“I studied agriculture and want to apply the skills I gained to earn a living, but access to land here is a major challenge; the backyard I am using is not enough and does not give us enough produce.”

“I have a small vegetable garden where I plant vegetables for my family. I am also rearing pigs, which I sell when they are mature to supplement my income. I am using the skills I got from CRDP.”

“We do not have other skills to sustain our lives; food production is the only way to generate income. We would, therefore, appreciate the support from the municipality and other willing bodies.”

“I am employed in town and only work in the garden at home because I arrive late; I use the agricultural skills but not fully, like I was taught.”

Buyisile and Tsvakirai (2020) claimed that triumph in agribusiness makes young people appreciate agriculture as a viable business opportunity. However, the other group, who never fastened any positive attributes of profitability to the sector, are less likely to envision it as a pursuit as a career option (Kodom et al., 2022). Youths who have social support systems, such as friends and relatives involved in agri-business, are more inclined to venture into agriculture in the form of agribusiness. Similarly, enhanced involvement in any training intervention is thought to inspire youth to engage in the agribusiness business. This intervention will equip them to improve their productivity. Nevertheless, their enthusiasm is always dampened by a lack of resources like finances and land to start agribusiness (Tadesse, 2014; Yeboah et al., 2020).

Community engagement

According to Jenkins and Henley (2014), communities need to include the youth in their villages' development programmes by allowing them to participate in community meetings and decision-making, guiding them and making

their ideas known. Among other respondents, an interesting assertion was from a female youth respondent, who stated in this regard:

“I grow vegetables for local marketing, mainly green leafy vegetables. When they are ripe, I start selling to the neighbours; I also take some to the shopping centre and sell to the communities.”

Von Maltitz and Bahta (2024) corroborated this by reporting that most women empowerment indices incorporate formal education despite the disadvantages associated with support for youth and women's empowerment in agriculture. According to Liang and Zhang (2023), contract farming increased crop production yields, significantly improving young farmers' profits. This study's results showed that skill development programs significantly influence agricultural output, which raises revenue. In addition, Indwar (2024) reported that India's rural development programmes significantly improve the standard of life for rural residents, especially when a programme similar to CRDP is used. Improving knowledge of agri-business financing and production systems, gaining governmental recognition, and integrating traditional wisdom with modern research might help to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture. Therefore, enhancing production systems, agri-business finance understanding, political acknowledgement, and fusing traditional knowledge with contemporary research might support women's empowerment in agriculture and gender equality (Von Maltitz & Bahta, 2024). This will assist households in achieving food security and nutrition to accomplish SDGs 2 and 5, which aim to end hunger and poverty, advance gender equality, and empower all women by 2030 (Von Maltitz & Bahta, 2024).

Aspirations and potential for agricultural growth

Mujčinović et al. (2024) reported that youth interest in agriculture is generally high. The author based the young farmers' trajectories on better support in contemporary rural areas, where three interconnected concepts attract young farmers to agri-business: sustainability, resilience, and multi-functionality. From the author's point of view, such concepts are inseparable and indispensable. However, Mujčinović et al. (2024) also highlighted similar challenges as Yadav and Rao (2024) and Von Maltitz and Bahta (2024), with an emphasis on the increasing pressures of climate change, soil erosion, and biodiversity loss. In another study reported by Boye et al. (2024), many obstacles have been recognised as enduring hindrances to the active participation of youth in agriculture. These barriers include knowledge, abilities, property, funding, market accessibility, and establishments. Meanwhile, little research thoroughly examines how interventions affect young people's participation in agribusiness. Two respondents reiterated:

“If the government buildings, which are not being used, could be given to us, we would use them to process our produce for marketing and market our produce locally and in other areas.”

“All the retail shops trading in Qwa-Qwa import their stock; the youth could have their produce processed, frozen, dried, blended and be marketed even within the neighbouring towns.”

Community leaders: Youth participation in community programmes and decision-making

South Africa, particularly in the villages, is expected to have traditional community leaders who work directly with elected government leaders, associating indigenous knowledge with contemporary approaches (Von Maltitz & Bahta, 2024; Manthwa & Ntsoane, 2024). In this study, all community leaders reported that while youth are involved in various agri-programmes, their

participation in decision-making is often limited. This aligns with the comments from the youth participants, who noted that they had community decision-making limitations. In addition, the leaders expressed a desire to see more youth taking leadership roles in community development and further pledged to support youth-led agricultural enterprises. Boateng et al. (2024) reported similar findings as those espoused by the community leaders, which were successful. According to the survey, traditional leaders have given underprivileged schools resources and instructional materials. They have built educational buildings, developed gender equity in schools, established scholarship programs for deserving yet gifted students, and fostered a positive learning atmosphere.

In addition, Grace et al. (2024) further elaborated that the ReSPECT approach could be used as a theoretical framework to assist the youth in decision-making. The author indicated that the ReSPECT approach is unique compared to other approaches because it follows the service change process from the conceptualisation of youth-led ideas through development, partnership, implementation, and evaluation; it facilitates engagement with marginalised youth with diverse service experiences whose voices are often absent from participatory projects. It also gives equal attention to young people's sustained engagement and scaffolding in developing ideas and the capacity building of service providers addressing organisational culture and constraints.

6 Conclusion

The study has shown that young people in rural areas must actively engage in the agricultural sector to generate income and become qualified emerging agripreneurs. However, further studies are still yet to be explored on this topic, particularly on developing the framework guiding emerging farmers for supportive private and governmental institutions for emerging young farmers from rural areas with a similar context as Phuthaditjhaba in South Africa. This study only focused on some of the critical factors to focus upon in enhancing rural livelihoods and empowering youth through agripreneurship using the CRDP; yet, the study methods and the data excluded the detailed deliberations on the population demographics, current political sphere and challenges in the study area, the other existing programmes in place.

This study partially concluded that the positive youth development framework meaningfully addressed the factors that form part of the youth's developmental needs, such as seeing the good in youth and encouraging participation in developmental programmes within their communities, as well as channelling the youth's energy positively and responsibly in engaging with their elders, peers, and community leaders. This could be attributed to the youth making a living through agrarian participation, yet requiring them to show greater interest in the field, accept assistance from the existing private and governmental institutions, and take the initiative to ask for more. In addition, further studies, as explored by Teele and Nkoane (2024), have demonstrated that the use of various training following the bricolage and the participatory action research yielded improved participation in similar communities; however, future studies should clearly emphasise the improvement of the research tool to apply CRDP better. Nonetheless, as elaborated on the limitation of the study, future studies should delve deeper into these factors identified to enhance rural livelihoods, empower youth through agripreneurship, and develop a new framework(s) similar to CRDP.

7 References

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