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ADVANCING LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT INITIATIVES**Njabulo Masondo ¹, Yusuf Lukman ^{2*}**^{1,2*} Faculty of Management and Public Administration Science, Walter Sisulu University, South AfricaE-mails: ¹220279225@mywsu.ac.za; ^{2*}yukman@wsu.ac.za (Corresponding author)

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Abstract. Agriculture is a vital activity that drives the local economy. This study explores agricultural support in South Africa. This research focuses on initiatives local governments take to bolster agriculture and promote economic growth, recognising that agriculture plays a crucial role in the financial foundation of rural communities. There is slow growth in the local agricultural sector in most rural settlements due to inadequate support from local authorities. Specifically, the study aims to explore and strengthen agricultural support in the Mquma local municipality area by examining existing local economic development strategy initiatives, particularly those related to agriculture, and then empowering these initiatives to fully support rural settlements. The study employed a mixed approach with stratified random sampling to collect data. The sample size was limited to 68 rural farmers in the Mquma local municipality area, specifically wards 24, 25, 26, and 27. The questionnaire responses included 77 rural farmers plus one agricultural and forestry officer in the Local Economic Development unit, making the total sample size 78 for the study. The data were analysed both statistically and qualitatively using SPSS and Atlas. Ti. The findings demonstrate that current support initiatives are practical and beneficial to rural farming, as indicated by the high level of satisfaction reported by rural farmers regarding the assistance provided by the municipality. The main issue is the lack of constant support, innovation, and adequate funding from the city for rural farmers. The study recommended a list of solutions to combat these challenges, such as increasing the number of supported farmers annually, increasing the budget for the agriculture and forestry office, standardising innovation and skillset in the agriculture and forestry office in Mquma local municipality to maximise support, maximising monitoring procedures, accountability, transparency and intergovernmental collaborations.

Keywords: local economic development; rural agriculture; rural municipalities; Eastern Cape; South Africa**Reference** to this paper should be made as follows: Masondo, N., Lukman, Y. 2026. Advancing local economic development through agricultural support initiatives. *Insights into Regional Development*, 8(1), 105-119. <http://doi.org/10.70132/p5696977889>**JEL Classifications:** O1, O13, H25**Additional disciplines:** Agriculture, Management**1. Introduction**

Rural communities depend on agriculture as their fundamental economic activity to achieve financial stability (Mbatha, 2020). The primary level of economic growth requires support to enable continuous skill and ability development in community foundations (González-Esteban & Botella-Rodríguez, 2022). Rural municipalities in South Africa face challenges in supporting farmers in meeting basic standards for their agricultural businesses. The Eastern Cape province's Mquma Municipality, within the Amathole district municipality, continues to face challenges in supporting economic development for its population. The Local Economic Development (LED) program, operating at the lower level of the South African government hierarchy, enables local governments to provide various initiatives for community economic support.

In the context of the Mnquma Municipality, special economic zones, including tourism, mining, and agriculture, are the primary focus of the municipality's jurisdiction. Specifically, this study examines the support initiatives provided by the Mnquma municipality to promote agriculture in its communities. This study examines the challenges and developments associated with promoting agricultural ventures within the communities of the Mnquma municipality.

Onyiriuba et al. (2020) argue that every state enhances its rural settlements to embark on agricultural production, as it is the primary means of production for the base of a growing economy. South Africa has been one of the countries struggling to position the agricultural sector in the proper channels for primary economic growth. In the local government spectrum, various municipalities in South Africa have been battling with a lack of support for agriculture through LED. South Africa is a developing country that still relies heavily on the primary and secondary sectors for economic growth and GDP expansion. Rural settlements should be a focus to stabilise the economy through agriculture. Davis (2022) Emphasises that rural municipalities, particularly in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga provinces, still lack an adequate support structure to promote local agricultural growth, which will stimulate their communities, rather than migrant farmers. Rural municipalities, such as the Mnquma municipality in the Eastern Cape, have a history of struggling to support local farmers. The municipality serves a population of 252,390, with significant economic activity in retail trade and various other trades. However, the communities in Butterworth have great potential in farming and other agricultural activities. Although most farmers are subsistence farmers, the land of Butterworth has been proven fertile enough for large-scale farming. Mdoda et al. (2022) state that the full agricultural potential in Butterworth has not been fully explored by either the private or public sectors. Despite its small territory, Butterworth has relatively fertile land, which produces crops such as maize, vegetables, and fruits. Livestock farming and other farming activities are predominantly operated by external companies in Butterworth, rather than local ventures or farmers occupying the farming space (Christian et al., 2020).

Statement of the Problem

There is a pool of factors that can prevent development in rural areas; however, some factors are critically dependent on the government authority of rural settlements, rather than the capacity of the dwellers or residents themselves. To extend this, many rural municipalities have been struggling to meet the needs of their limited capacities in rural settlements. A lack of skills and innovation in these rural municipalities causes these battles. Nevertheless, particularly in the Mnquma municipality, there has been a gap in local economic development strategies, specifically in supporting agriculture, as in other areas of the economic zone in Butterworth. The lack of adequate support for agriculture has been primarily caused by insufficient revenue collection from the Mnquma municipality to direct the solid budget to LED, particularly in providing sufficient funding for agricultural initiatives. However, funding is not the primary challenge since some funds are well distributed to agricultural programmes. According to the 2022/2023 Mnquma municipality annual report, the challenge this study seeks to explore is how these funds are utilised for initiatives aimed at boosting the farmers of Mnquma municipality. (Mnquma Municipality, 2023).

The research aims to examine the impact of agricultural initiatives in the Butterworth area of the Mnquma municipality.

The lack of agricultural activity in Butterworth had troubled the researchers in their efforts to understand why there is no economic movement around agriculture in rural areas near Butterworth. It is essential to motivate rural farmers to undertake their ventures, which will help boost agricultural activities in the Mnquma municipality area. This study will fill a significant gap in understanding economic turbulence in local communities, not just in Butterworth, but in all rural areas across South Africa. If adopted, it will help municipalities innovate in supporting agricultural training to boost the primary sector and redirect resources to local, deserving entrepreneurs, rather than international and continental ones.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Dode & Cletus (2019) state that several theories can be aligned with developing agriculture, especially those theories relating to the 21st century, such as Modernisation Theory, technology-related theories, such as the Technology Acceptance Model since farming has also been introduced to robotic solution such as drones used for irrigation, technological devices used for testing plant type, detection of bacteria, weeds and modifying plants for fast growth. According to García-Avilés (2020), humans are social creators driven by sharing ideas, both involuntary and voluntary. Different characteristic approaches to problem-solving can be shared and influenced across the world without explicit expressions. Traditionally, issues were addressed by different specialists with varying approaches to solving problems, sharing solutions among groups and later adopting them across nations to address similar issues. With reference to what has been explained, a traditional theory called Diffusion of Innovations Theory was created by Everett Rogers, confirming this idea of spreading knowledge and ideas across similar disciplines or focuses with similar problems to solve or developments to achieve. The theory then focuses on disseminating knowledge and innovation based on various perspectives and approaches to solve a specific problem. Traditionally the theory is best at use because traditional matters during the early years of human existence often demanded new and unique human thinking and innovation combined with knowledge to solve problems later on adopting same innovations to solve similar problems, now diffusion of innovation theory is all about the study of human innovation and how their shared, strengthened and communicated through various means of communication to solve critical issues or achieve developments.

Throughout the decades, this theory has helped the globe connect and network ideas and innovations to develop social and economic constraints by adopting different characteristics, regardless of specialisation, such as economics, politics, physics, engineering, or other disciplines. This theory has helped problem solvers to share a pool of innovation without focusing on a specific specialisation of a problem solver (Briggs, 2020). According to Zanello et al (2016), this theory can also be limited to a single specialisation, focusing on solving a problem in a specific area of practice, such as civil engineering; however, the diffusion or spreading of innovative solutions is based solely on the character or perspective of that problem solver in that field.

This study adopts this theory, given the domination in the traditional development of the rural economy and agriculture. The theory aligns best with this study because South Africa remains part of a group of developing countries characterised by significant gaps in traditional development, particularly in rural agriculture. As portrayed in this study above, agriculture is one of the essential economic activities which enables a country to thrive primarily; therefore, this theory covers this, essentially addressing how developing states can receive innovations from each other and developed states that have passed traditional stages of agricultural development with selected ways of sharing innovations and ideas.

Considering that the problem statement is focused on slow paced agriculture in rural areas in Mnquma local municipality the sharing of agricultural innovations can be gradually conducted to lower level of government with the provinces of South Africa as to study hoe other similar municipalities are dealing with the same problem in South Africa before innovation is explored in the SADAC region further in the Southern Africa, more in the continent Africa then going outside to the globe observing and studying different innovations in superpower states such as China since it dealt with traditional agricultural development during the Mio Zedong era and 1970s.

Mdoda (2022) notes a broad category or type of farmers in Butterworth. Only livestock, poultry, pig farming, forestry and crop production are found as farming practices. Other farming areas, such as fishing, horticulture, agroecology, greenhouse farming, and grain farming, are scarce. Christian (2020) explains that, generally, smallholder farmers have played a significant role in addressing food security worldwide. Studies conducted by the United Nations reveal that traditional farming has helped many developing countries alleviate poverty and reduce hunger. According to Carelsen et al (2021), internationally, smallholder farming has been recognised as

playing a crucial role in supplying the world with nutritious food and ensuring food security. The scholars maintain that not all types of smallholder farming should be placed in a competitive environment with commercial farming; however, encouraging consistent small-scale farming may help the world decrease starvation and hunger, particularly in developing countries.

Most small-scale farming is visible in developing states with less industrialisation and a more traditional economy. A significant challenge in these farming activities is profitability, as small-scale farming often lacks the necessary support to sustain profitable operations. Underdeveloped nation-states, such as Burundi and South Sudan, have critically low profitability in smallholder farming, yet many smallholders in rural areas compete for a tiny market. Let alone the local economic failure to address these realities. However, the other challenge is that there are high levels of food insecurity because farmers are not encouraged to farm for basic survival, leaving the nation with several cases of malnutrition.

Logically, a general means of survival in farming, for instance, is to plant crops and harvest for selling in the markets to get profit to survive, yet not realising that the maximised level of small-scale farming can be a double-edged sword for farming, for means of food productivity, while reserving some harvests to compete in the markets. Reliable local authority support has been lacking in several governments of underdeveloped nations due to a failure to provide necessary awareness for farming to achieve food security, while prioritising farming for the market. Shushu (2024) states that international cooperation, in promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has made noticeable differences in addressing the roles of smallholder farming in response to hunger, one of the urgent SDG goals to achieve. This has led to noticeable success in spreading the idea of farming for food security while also promoting market-oriented farming by encouraging smallholder farmers to pursue a dual purpose in their farming activities. Some countries in Africa have effectively led these ideas, such as South Africa, which has been hosting educational awareness campaigns to encourage maximum farming to promote food security.

This is not effective for full agricultural support to promote positive and sustainable impact because supporting rural farmers will be different from supporting urban or modern farmers, such as those in rural settlements, where literacy is still critically low, there is no industrial exposure, no entrepreneurship exposure, language barriers, disadvantageous networks for distance connection or using online sourcing for educational exposure. All of these factors contribute to a demand for more competent, advanced and flexible leadership for the local municipality to support rural farmers extensively. Suppose these attributes are not embedded in the agricultural sector in the LED of any rural municipality. In that case, a shortage of support will lead to an undesirable negative impact on rural farmers.

Due to climate change, the scale of farming has declined over the past few years. This has not been an issue in the Eastern Cape province, but globally, climate change has negatively impacted farming, leading to a decline in farming patterns. The Department of Agriculture and Land highlighted this challenge, noting that changing weather patterns resulting from global climate change led to droughts. This makes farming difficult, especially in rural areas, considering that water is scarce in most of the Eastern Cape. This has been a complex challenge for the relevant authorities to address. Bontsa et al. (2023) have shown that climate change is almost uncontrollable, as environmental studies have revealed that its causes are varied, including human activities such as vast industrialisation, mining, and gaseous emissions.

The Integrated Development Plan 2022/2027 (IDP) of Mquma municipality identifies agriculture as one of the primary focuses for economic development. The IDP of the municipality has strategically outlined agriculture as a key driver of rapid growth in rural development; hence, the IDP focuses on agricultural matters by addressing them through quality strategic planning to attract funds from the private sector. Sohuma (2023) explains that another factor contributing to the small selection of farmers is that most active farmers are older adults who are

focused on smallholder farming rather than farming for entrepreneurial purposes. This is because young people are reluctant to farm, yet young people possess skills and literacy, which is quite modern and might be more consultative in the municipality.

On the other hand, older farmers are reluctant to attend training programs hosted by the municipality to enhance their farming skills. This is due to constraints such as health issues, illiteracy, and a lack of energy to walk or travel long distances. The municipality had implemented initiatives such as capacity building, providing small farmers with basic farming practices, distributing farming materials and equipment, and visiting farmers with ongoing challenges (Zantsi, 2021). The underlying issue related to small farming in Butterworth is the land itself, as it has been considered unfertile for good crop growing, and it is difficult for the municipality to reserve ample fertile land for local farmers to occupy; instead, particular individuals own large tracts of fertile land. (Sigigaba, 2022). In the meantime, the farming initiatives by the Mnquma municipality are still relatively small. According to the last municipal annual report under the LED section, only 11 farmers were supported by programmes such as crop production, livestock improvement, and animal medication provision.

Christian (2020) emphasises that supporting farming with essential materials, such as weed prevention chemicals, wheelbarrows, crop management and growth chemicals, seeds, pest control, and chemicals for treating livestock affected by animal diseases, is much more reliable than awarding farmers a large amount of funds. Studies have shown that most rural farmers lack financial education due to limited exposure and a low literacy rate, which can lead to reckless financial decisions. Therefore, awarding farmers with relevant farming necessities is more cost-effective than allocating funds. Furthermore, financial education is a gradual process for Butterworth farmers, as it is an essential capacity required in the entrepreneurial sector, particularly in the agricultural sector.

As outlined above, due to modernisation, rural farmers are struggling to meet market demands, largely because of the competitiveness of machinery farming, which leaves them ineffective in driving agricultural growth. Moda (2022) quotes, that old rural farmers are affected by the modernisation of farming because illiteracy levels are critically low in most rural areas. For instance, in the Eastern Cape, the introduction of mechanised farming has been a challenge for some time because the province consists of rural farmers, who are mostly not exposed to industrial experience. Supporting bodies, such as the National Youth Development Agency, have effectively assisted the Eastern Cape province by partnering with nearby local municipalities to introduce mechanised farming through entrepreneurship programs aimed at the youth.

A small enterprise development agency had also contributed to this gap in machinery farming by delivering relevant training, education, and equipment to emerging rural farming entrepreneurs in the Eastern Cape. Rural farmers in the Mnquma municipality had benefited from these opportunities (Bese et al., 2021). The gap is still visible, considering that farming in rural areas, such as those in Butterworth, still faces challenges in adapting to industrial or mechanised farming. Specifically, the Mnquma local municipality has been battling with issuing the necessary equipment due to budget constraints, although the integrated plan of the municipality has made a plan for addressing the issue of machinery farming initiatives offered by the relevant authority

The vast relevance of local economic development (LED) in this study has led to the conceptual framework being focused solely on LED as a concept to be expanded, as it serves as a suitable tool for local and rural development in South Africa and other developing countries. Conceptualising LED is critical for this study, as South Africa has adopted LED as a system for promoting local economic growth and entrepreneurship at the grassroots level (Ababio & Meyer, 2012). LED is a strategic approach to tackle issues such as unemployment, lack of innovation, and productivity while developing abilities and skills.

According to Khumbule (2020), the adoption of this strategic approach to human development has no specific date of inception; however, European states initiated this approach to promote human development. Due to its

widespread adoption, it is unclear who the specific founder or creator of LED is. However, it has assisted many states in driving economic growth at the lowest level possible, resulting in an even spread. Juta (2023) emphasises that regardless of a state's political system, LED can be adopted by any state and work effectively if the leadership of that state is committed and determined. The LED was championed by the World Bank around 2001, influencing the system to be adopted in most states to fast-track world economic growth; this is where most countries were already aware of LED. Countries also adopt the LED differently; for instance, some countries temporarily adopt this programme, while others make it permanent to enable the achievement of controlled local growth, such as South Africa (Ababio & Meyer, 2012). According to the World Bank, the LED programme operates as a process with distinct phases.

3. Research Methodology

Toole (2020) stresses that the research approach also varies depending on the epistemology behind the study or research. Traditional knowledge contributes to research, combined with scientific knowledge, depending on the discipline in which the researcher is specialised, which is formally known as epistemology, and it directs the research approach the researcher will opt for. The existing knowledge has an impact on any study, as the gap is taken from reality and coexists with a realistic system; this is known as ontology (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Choosing a research approach becomes an increasingly philosophical task for researchers. Most social science researchers are known as interpretivists, which is derived from the paradigm. A paradigm is a philosophical tool that directs the researcher's observations toward the problem statement and the reactions from the affected population.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive capture of data. This approach was selected to gather detailed feedback from farmers in the Mquma municipality area regarding the benefits and challenges of agricultural initiatives by the municipality. Both closed and open-ended questions will be employed to collect information from farmers in Butterworth and the municipal administration responsible for Local Economic Development (LED), particularly in the agricultural sector. The researcher will employ a quantitative approach to analyse economic patterns in both small- and large-scale farming, providing a comprehensive understanding of the agricultural sector in the rural areas under the Mquma municipality.

The justifications for adopting this study are based on primary observations of the complexity of the problem in rural farming within the Mquma municipality area. The problem is complex in the sense that the challenge around the agrarian initiative support is not only based on the municipality's databases and coverage to rural agriculture, but the challenge also extends to other relevant authorities like the Department of Agriculture in the Eastern Cape and the farmers themselves, since they lack enthusiasm for farming, particularly rural farming. This motivates the researcher to adopt a mixed-methods approach, providing a more statistical, yet descriptive and broader, sense of data collection and analysis.

In a mixed-methods approach, the population size may comprise both large and small numbers within the jurisdiction, depending on the area the researcher selects and the scope of the problem. In total, Butterworth has a population of approximately 232,993; within this number, there are relatively few farmers contributing to both food security and food production and trade (Mdoda, 2022). Considering the open lands and rural areas in Butterworth, the small number of farming participants should be a concerning factor not only to the Mquma local municipality but also to the Department of Agriculture in the Eastern Cape province. According to the latest annual report of the Mquma local municipality, the majority of active farmers are smallholder farmers in rural areas under the Mquma municipality, with very few farmers farming for market sales or to supply wholesalers and retailers. This study focuses primarily on collecting data from identifiable farmers in the under Mquma local municipality.

According to 2022 census data, Butterworth has a population of 232,993, which is divided into 32 wards demarcated for the municipality; therefore, it is impossible to focus on all these citizens and produce valid information (Mnquma Municipality, 2023). Since this study focuses on agriculture particularly in the rural areas of Butterworth the population covers all the wards under Mnquma Municipality considering that these wards carry a high number of farmers active in small farming in their households and their owned farming land, for instance it is possible to find ward 01 having more than 20 farmers only and these farmers vary depending on the size of the ward but all range above 20, this information is according to the Agriculture department of the Eastern Cape based for Butterworth. Due to this, this study randomly selects 2 farmers per ward to represent the total population of farmers for the study. 2 is multiplied by the number of wards added with 2, which represents Mnquma municipality officials in the LED section, to get a total sample size $2 \times 32 + 2 = 66$.

Therefore, the researcher's assumptions may not be accurate. In terms of the number of farmers per ward, given the total number of wards, this method is not accurate and therefore not reliable in this study. A more scientific and accurate widely used formula in the mixed method approach, the sample size was therefore scientifically counted as follows:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \times P \times (1 - p)}{e^2}$$

n = sample size

z^2 = confidence level (z-score)

P = population proportion (from a population of 323,993)

e^2 = Margin error

$$n = \frac{90\%^2 \hat{C} - 0.05 \hat{C} - (1 - 0.05)}{10\%}$$

$n=68$ (Sample size)

Therefore, the above calculations confirm that the sample size for rural farmers under Mnquma Municipality for this study will be 68 farmers. This study employed the second formula to calculate the sample size, yielding a sample size of 68. A Structured survey using Google Forms was designed to gather quantitative data on key variables related to agricultural support initiatives and local economic development. The survey included closed-ended questions to measure participants' perceptions, experiences, and outcomes regarding various aspects of agricultural support programs.

Direct observations of agricultural activities, community events, and stakeholder interactions in Mnquma Municipality were conducted to supplement data gathered through surveys and interviews. Observations helped validate and contextualise findings from other data collection methods, providing a deeper understanding of the local context and dynamics.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) has been adopted for analysing quantitative data received from agricultural statistics of the Mnquma municipality area. This data is represented by bar graphs, pie charts, and a few tables to portray the statistical representation of the data. On the other hand Atlas ti software has been adopted for analysing the qualitative data received from other parts of questions covered in the survey which expected long expressions of texts as answer, due to that Xhosa was used in the survey to accommodate elderly farmers who do not understand English to clean and interpret the data to academic professional English Atlas ti was used analysing the data using thematic approach.

4. Findings

The data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively using three systems: SPSS, ATLAS, and Excel, for comprehensive statistics and simplified analysis. SPSS contains descriptive and statistical analyses, with individual variables analysed for numeric expressions such as the total percentage of females that participated in the questionnaire. SPSS also contains normative analysis, as the data were collected with demographics active in rural farming in the Mquma municipal area. SPSS covers summaries of statistical descriptive analysis between different variables to find what the data contains. SPSS also contains reports that display individual variables and numeric layouts, allowing comparisons across different variables. The use of Atlas was to validate the reliability of the data collected, as other variables were expressed as answers to questions about the capacity of the Mquma local municipality in enhancing farming in rural areas. Excel was used to create a simplified report combining all variables for this data.

The gender distribution of respondents in the study indicates a higher participation of females (44 respondents, 57.1%) compared to males (33 respondents, 42.9%), (see Table 1). This finding suggests that women play a prominent role in agricultural activities within the selected local municipality in the Eastern Cape. The strong female representation highlights the centrality of women in sustaining rural livelihoods, particularly in small-scale and subsistence farming systems, which are often closely linked to household food security and community wellbeing. This pattern reinforces existing evidence that women constitute a significant proportion of the rural agricultural workforce, despite frequently facing structural constraints such as limited access to land ownership, credit, and agricultural inputs.

From a rural development and policy perspective, the gender profile underscores the importance of designing agricultural support initiatives that are gender-responsive and inclusive. Given women's numerical dominance in the sector, targeted interventions such as skills development, access to extension services, financial support, and market linkages should be deliberately designed to address gender-specific barriers and enhance productivity and income generation. At the same time, the relatively substantial participation of men indicates opportunities for balanced, household-based agricultural development approaches. Overall, strengthening support for both women and men, while prioritising women's empowerment, can significantly contribute to advancing rural prosperity and achieving sustainable agricultural development in the municipality.

Table 1. The gender distribution of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female (Ibhinga)	44	57.1	57.1	57.1
Male (Indoda)	33	42.9	42.9	100.0
Total	77	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. The distribution of respondents by category of farming and age group

Category of Farming	16–18 (Count)	18–30 (Count)	Above 30 (Count)	Remarks
Commercial farming	2	12	5	Engagement increases with age
Cooperative farming	0	5	1	Limited participation
Industrial farming	0	4	3	Low overall involvement
Subsistence farming	0	35	7	Dominant practice among youth
Subsistence & Commercial farming	0	2	1	Mixed engagement
Total	2	58	17	

The data reveal a clear age-based pattern in the categories of farming practised within the selected local municipality. The majority of participants are aged 18–30 (58 respondents), indicating strong youth involvement in agriculture, which aligns with the study's objective of advancing rural prosperity through targeted agricultural

support initiatives (see Table 2 above). Within this age cohort, subsistence farming is the dominant practice (35 respondents), suggesting that most young people primarily engage in agriculture for household food security rather than market-oriented production. Commercial farming is present among this group (12 respondents), but it is limited, while cooperative and industrial farming remain relatively low. This distribution reflects structural barriers, such as limited access to capital, land, technology, and markets, which constrain young farmers from transitioning into higher-value, more commercialised forms of agriculture.

In contrast, participation among those aged 30 or older (17 respondents) reveals a more diversified engagement across commercial (5), industrial (3), and subsistence farming (7) sectors, indicating that experience and resource accumulation may facilitate progression along the agricultural value chain. The very low representation of the 16–18 age group (only 2 respondents, all in commercial farming) suggests minimal early entry into agriculture, potentially due to schooling commitments or limited exposure to agricultural programmes at that stage. Overall, the findings underscore the need for differentiated agricultural support initiatives that prioritise youth-focused capacity building, access to finance, and market integration to facilitate a shift from subsistence to sustainable commercial and cooperative farming. Such targeted interventions are critical for advancing rural prosperity and ensuring that agriculture becomes a viable livelihood pathway for younger populations in the Eastern Cape. Participants are presented by age group and their response to whether they have ever benefited from any agricultural initiatives hosted by the uMquma local municipality, as shown in Figure 1.

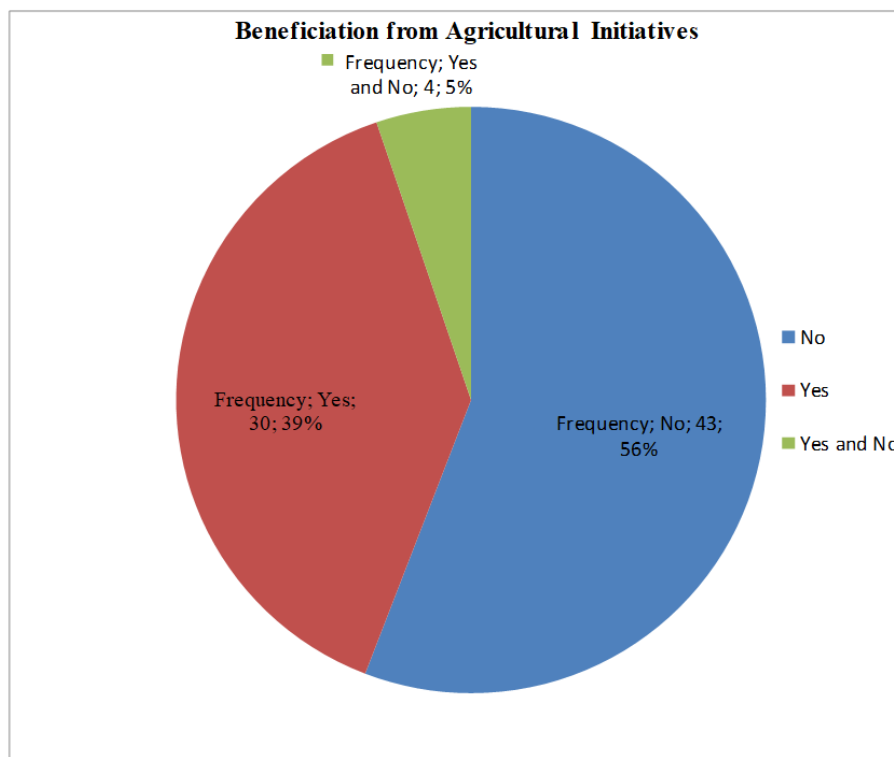


Figure 1. Benefits from any Agricultural initiatives by Age

Figure 1 illustrates participants by age group and their responses to whether they have ever benefited from any agricultural initiatives hosted by the Mnquma local municipality. The graph compares. According to Figure 1 above, the age group with the highest participation is 18 to 30, accounting for the majority of submissions that have never benefited from any agricultural initiatives, with a percentage of 41.56% (32 counts). The green bar represents this group. Within the same 18- to 30-year-old age group, the yellow bar indicates the number of

participants who responded 'yes' to benefiting from agricultural initiatives hosted by the Mmquma local municipality, with a percentage of at least 29.87% (23 counts). The lowest participation is from the youngest age group (16 to 18), with no participants unsure of whether they had benefited from agricultural initiatives hosted by the Mmquma local municipality. Although only 1% of participants submitted 'yes' to benefiting from the initiative in Mmquma, the small percentage coverage from this age group is due to young people hesitating to participate in the questionnaire. As only a very few participated, most young people are not passionate about farming, as the graph proves.

The pie chart illustrates participants' responses regarding the number of years of experience they have in farming. This pie chart reflects a high number of farmers with experience ranging from 1 to 5 years, represented by the orange colour, with a concerning number of just 1.30% of farmers with experience of over 10 years, represented by a yellow colour. This literally means that rural farming in Butterworth is not as advanced, considering. Participants' responses reflect their experiences in farming over the years (Figure 2 below).

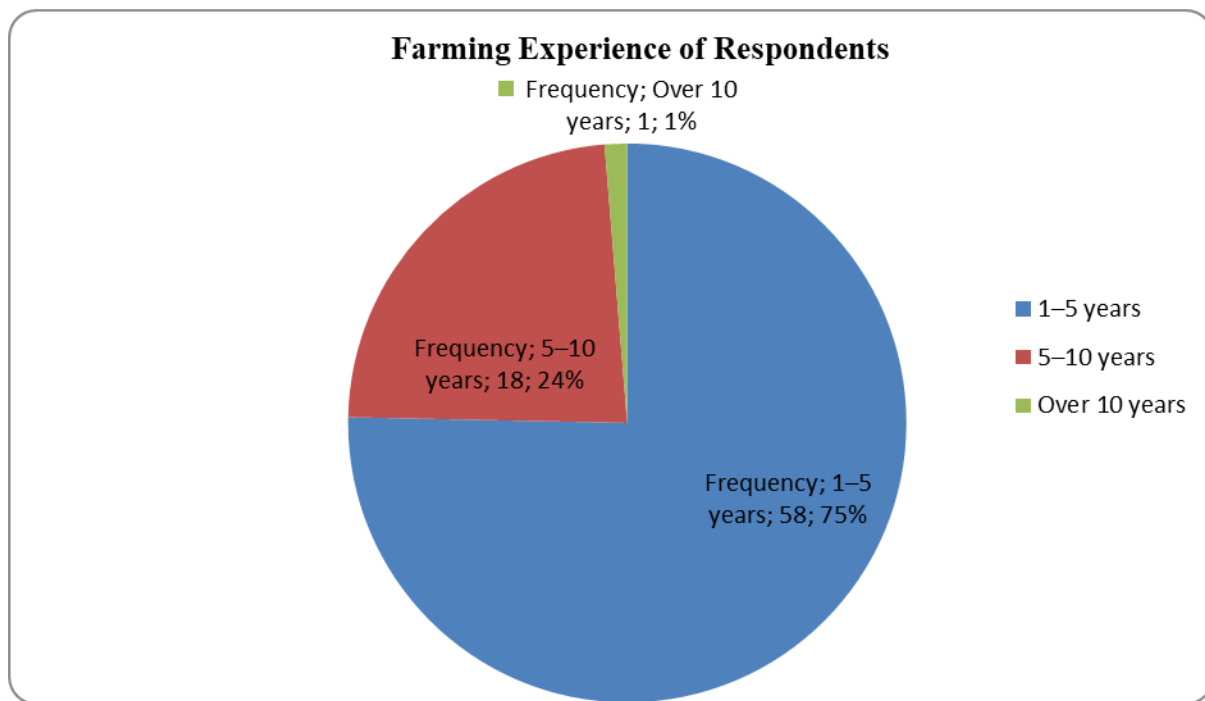


Figure 2. Experience in Farming

The pie chart illustrates participants' responses regarding the number of years of experience they have in farming. This figure reflects a high number of farmers with experience ranging from 1 to 5 years, which is represented by the orange colour. In contrast, a concerning number of just 1.30% of farmers have over 10 years of experience, represented by a yellow colour. This literally means that rural farming in Butterworth is not as advanced, considering that there are no experienced farmers in the area. Although there is a visible experience of 23, 38% of farmers with experience ranging from 5 to 10 years, represented by a purple colour, it is still concerning that small, experienced farmers exist in the Butterworth rural areas.

The level of satisfaction with agricultural support initiatives by rural farmers is presented below in Figure 3.

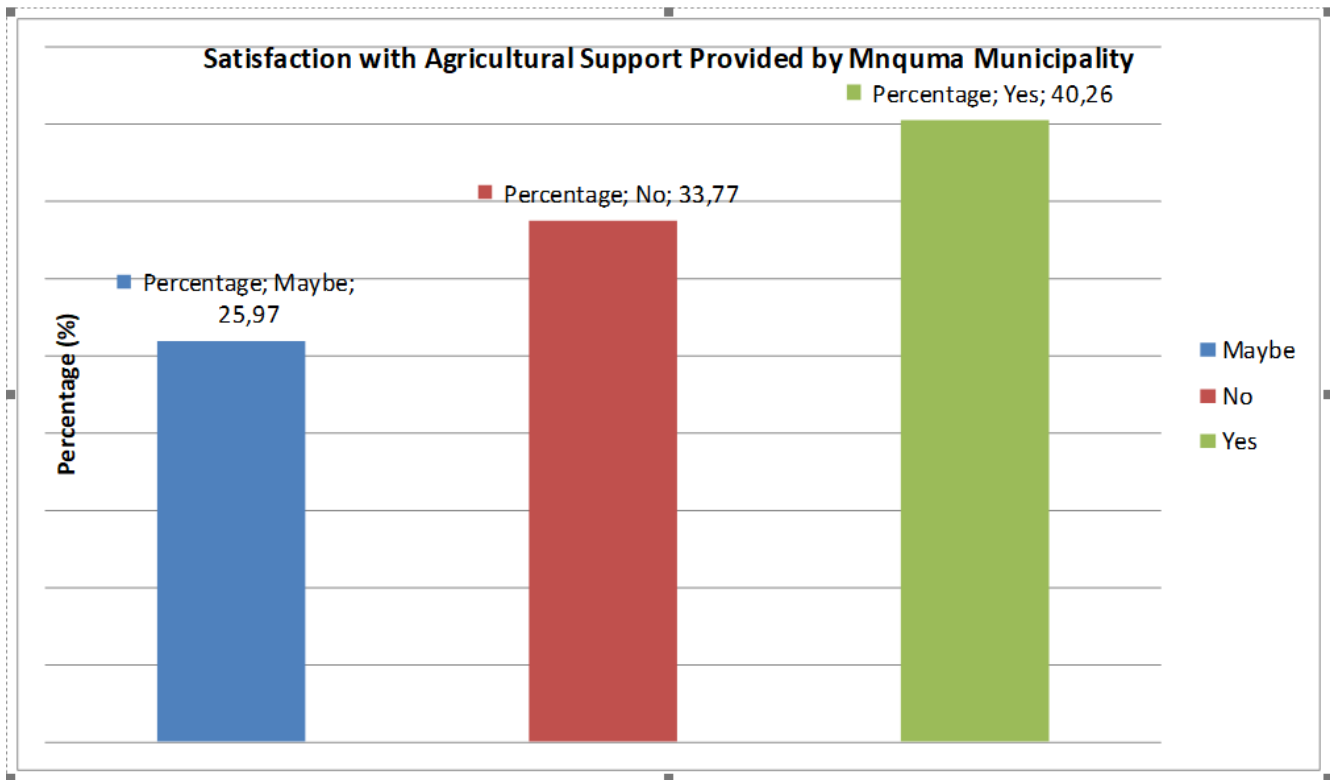


Figure 3. Satisfaction with Agricultural Support

The findings on satisfaction with agricultural support provided by Mnquma Local Municipality reveal a mixed but cautiously positive perception among respondents. A plurality of participants (40.26%) indicated that they were satisfied with the agricultural support received, suggesting that existing initiatives have had some tangible benefits for a segment of farmers in the municipality. This level of satisfaction implies that when support is accessed, it is relevant and responsive to specific farming needs, thereby contributing to improved livelihoods and enhanced local agricultural productivity. However, satisfaction is not overwhelming, indicating that positive impacts are not uniformly experienced across all beneficiaries.

At the same time, a substantial proportion of respondents expressed dissatisfaction (33.77%) or uncertainty (25.97%) regarding municipal agricultural support. The high combined percentage of respondents who are either dissatisfied or unsure points to shortcomings in the reach, consistency, or visibility of agricultural interventions. This may reflect challenges such as uneven distribution of support, limited follow-up, inadequate communication, or misalignment between programme design and farmers' actual needs. In the context of advancing rural prosperity, these findings underscore the need for the Mnquma Local Municipality to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, improve stakeholder engagement, and enhance transparency and feedback systems to build trust and increase overall satisfaction with agricultural support initiatives.

Different agricultural initiatives for rural farmers under the Mnquma Local Municipality are presented below (see Figure 4). Question: If yes, what kind of Agricultural initiatives did you benefit from?

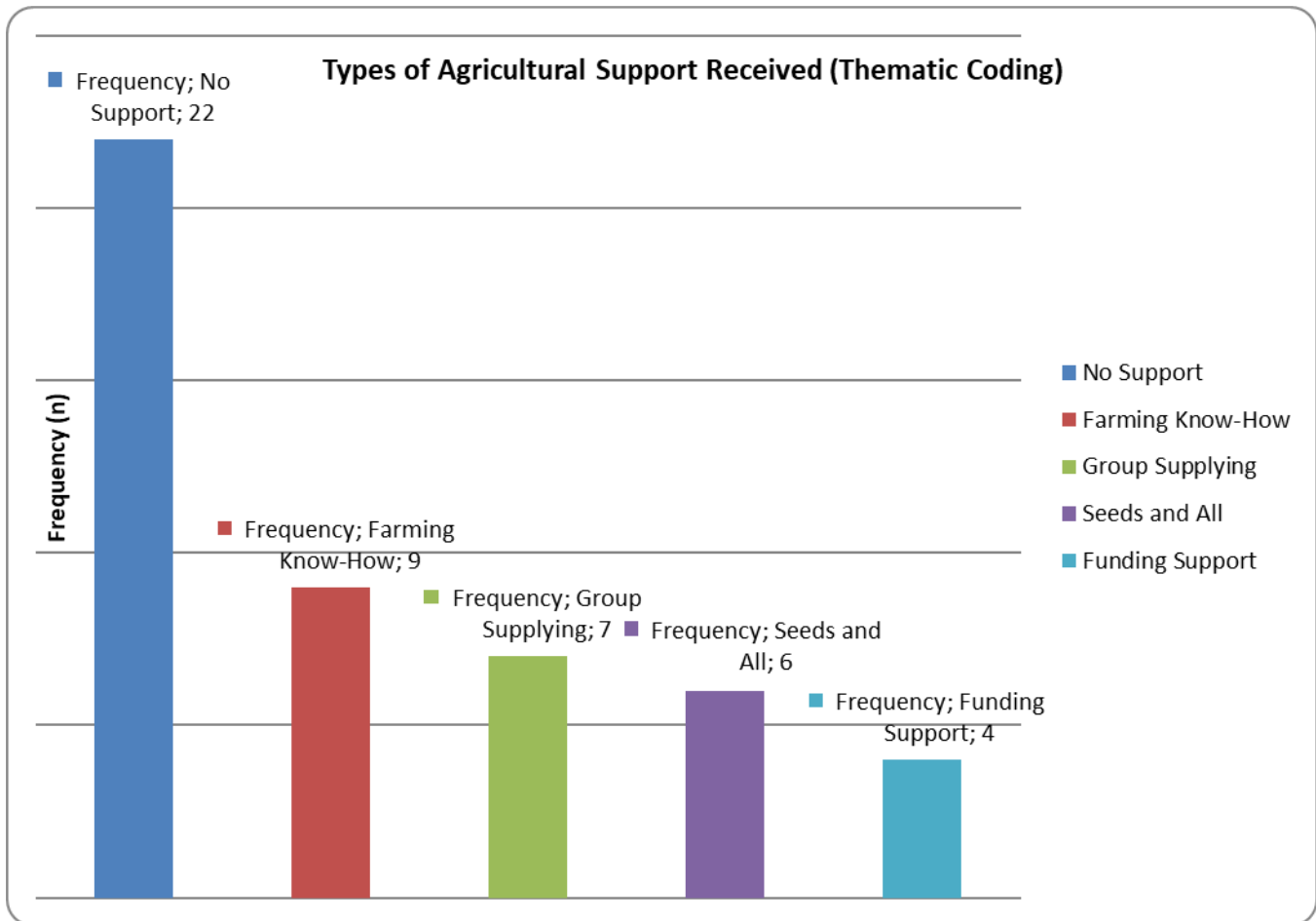


Figure 4. Categories of Agricultural Initiatives

Figure 4 is based on the follow up question made as a subtopic above, by use of thematic approach the answers of the 77 participants were coded by grouping significant accepts which are closely related to the research objective 2, which are funding support represented by green with a total of 4 responders, group supplying represented by blue with 7 responders no support represented by orange with 22 responders, seeds and all represented by purple with 6 responders, farming know how represented by red with 9 responders. In total, 48 out of 77 responders in the survey were selected and assigned to different codes based on their responses.

- Figure 4 displayed five distinct themes through coloured representations.
- No Support (Blue): 22 respondents indicated a complete lack of agricultural support.
- Farming Know-How (Red): The training of agricultural techniques and information dissemination formed the basis of support, according to 9 participants.
- Group Supplying (Green): 7 respondents described the process of agricultural resource distribution through collective group collaboration.
- Seeds and All (Purple): 6 participants stated that they received seeds and other necessary farming resources.
- Funding Support (Turquoise): 4 respondents acknowledged financial assistance to support their farming activities.

The findings on the types of agricultural initiatives experienced by respondents reveal a significant imbalance in the distribution and reach of support within Mnquma Local Municipality. The most prominent response was “no support” (22 respondents), indicating that a large proportion of farmers have not benefited from any form of municipal agricultural initiative. This result reinforces earlier findings, which show limited beneficiary reach, and suggests systemic gaps in programme coverage, targeting, or communication. Despite agriculture being positioned as a driver of rural prosperity, the dominance of non-beneficiaries highlights challenges in translating policy intentions into inclusive and tangible support for rural farmers, particularly smallholders. Among those who received support, farming know-how and training (9 respondents) emerged as the most common form of assistance, followed by group-supplying initiatives (7 respondents) and seed and input support (6 respondents), while direct funding support was the least reported (4 respondents). This pattern suggests that municipal interventions are largely skewed towards capacity-building rather than material or financial support, which may limit farmers' ability to scale production and transition towards commercial agriculture. While skills development is essential, limited access to funding and production inputs constrains the broader impact of such initiatives. In the context of advancing rural prosperity, the findings point to the need for a more balanced and integrated agricultural support framework that combines skills transfer with financial assistance, input provision, and inclusive programme outreach to ensure sustainable agricultural development in the Eastern Cape.

5. Conclusions

The study highlights the critical role of agricultural support initiatives in promoting rural prosperity within the Mnquma Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape. Findings reveal that while current programs have positively impacted rural farmers and generated high satisfaction levels, persistent challenges such as inconsistent support, limited innovation, and inadequate funding continue to constrain sustainable agricultural growth. These shortcomings undermine the potential of agriculture as a driver of local economic development and rural livelihoods.

To address these gaps, the study recommends increasing budget allocations for agricultural programs, expanding the number of farmers supported annually, and standardising skills and innovation within the municipality's agriculture and forestry office. Strengthening monitoring, accountability, and transparency, alongside fostering intergovernmental collaboration, will ensure that support initiatives are both effective and sustainable. Ultimately, empowering rural farmers through comprehensive and innovative strategies is essential for achieving long-term economic development and advancing rural prosperity.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the implementation of specific funding programs should focus on delivering financial support to farmers to purchase necessary farming materials and acquire technology. The agricultural training programs should be expanded to provide farmers with comprehensive training in modern agricultural practices and knowledge. The formation of farmer groups and cooperatives should be encouraged because these entities enable group supply mechanisms which create opportunities for resource sharing and scale advantages. The delivery of essential farming inputs, including seeds and fertilisers, should be made promptly and fairly to facilitate crop production.

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Njabulo MASONDO completed his Honours degree in Public Administration at Walter Sisulu University and is currently busy with master's degree.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3058-8261>

Yusuf LUKMAN, Dr. is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Public Management and Governance at Walter Sisulu University, South Africa. His research focuses on conflict management and project management, with emphasis on public-sector contexts.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8344-8083>

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