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**CONTRIBUTION OF FOOD SECURITY PROJECTS ON POVERTY ALLEVIATION TO THE COMMUNITIES OF LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA.**

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### ABSTRACT

*Despite South Africa's economic growth having been accelerated considerably in the country, poverty levels have not decreased as one would have experienced. Food Security Projects initiated by the government of South Africa in order to help alleviate poverty within Limpopo Province have proved unsustainable and difficult to provide for what they were mandated to provide to the satisfaction of the government, which is to create jobs and alleviate poverty. The purpose of this study was to assess the contribution of food security projects on poverty alleviation in the communities. The study was conducted in the five districts of Limpopo Province, namely; Mopani, Vhembe, Capricorn, Sekhukhune and Waterberg. Qualitative design was used in this study. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interview guide which was administered to 50 chairpersons of the food security projects. The study also followed audit components such as economic components, political components, health and education components, environmental components and social components which were used to assess the economic and material characteristics of the communities. The results affirmed that food security projects are contributing to poverty alleviation to the beneficiaries and to a lesser extent to the community members.*

**Key words:** Food Security projects; Poverty alleviation, audit components

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In South Africa food security policy was established under the bill of rights which is enshrined in the constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Section 27, 1 (b) of the bill of rights, states that every citizen has a right to access to sufficient food and water and the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resource to achieve the realization of this right. Poverty and food insecurity are two concepts that overlap to a large extent, but not complete, extent (Bresciani & Croppenstedt, 2006) Poverty is a cause of hunger, but hunger can also be a cause of poverty. In a study conducted in Vhembe district, Mudau (2001) concludes that projects were established in order to help create employment in the neighbourhood. The government of South Africa initiated the food security projects in an effort to alleviate poverty within the rural and urban communities.

This paper is therefore based on the contributions of food security projects on poverty alleviation in Limpopo Province of South Africa. The paper evaluated the food security

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projects which are found in all the districts of Limpopo Province. Appropriate recommendations to the policy makers were made on ways of addressing poverty alleviation.

The objective of this paper was to assess the economic and material characteristics of the communities using the following audit components; economic, political, environmental, health and education and social components. The paper used the above audit components to gather information about the food security projects around Limpopo Province.

## **2. DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM**

Global economic challenges have made it increasingly difficult for governments to meet the food security challenge. Agricultural development through establishment of food security projects was seen as a panacea for reducing poverty and food insecurity by the government of South Africa, but there has been lack of monitoring by those who were tasked with making sure that food security projects function according to their mandates.

## **3. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **3.1 Study Focus and Site**

The study focused on food security projects that are located within the districts of Limpopo Province, namely; Vhembe, Mopani, Capricorn, Sekhukhune and Waterberg. The reason for initiating the establishment of food security projects by the government was to alleviate poverty by creating employment. The study used evaluative methods which are systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the economic, political, health and education, environmental and social components in the communities (Social Audit Toolkit, 2005).

The study population consisted of fifty chairpersons of food security projects and five Extension Officers at district level. These chairpersons are beneficiaries of the food security projects and are working fulltime at these food security projects. Limpopo Province covers an area of 123 910 square kilometres, representing 10.2% of the total area of the Republic of South Africa. (Statistics South Africa. GHS, 2009).

### **3.2 Sampling Procedure and Data Collection**

Stratified sampling was used to select the type of project, such as vegetable production, livestock production, broiler production, egg production and pig production in all the five districts. In this context, stratification is the process of grouping members of a population into relatively homogeneous sub-groups before sampling (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2006:61).

Purposive sampling was also used to select the fifty chairpersons to represent each sampled project and five extension officers from each district. Chairpersons of projects were purposefully selected based on the different production types (Burns & Grove, 2009:355; Polit & Beck, 2010:319).

### **3.3 Data analysis**

Qualitative data was collected using the semi-structured questionnaires in individual interviews. Open-ended questions were coded and included in a categorical data coding sheet

as Neuman (2003:146) recommends. The coded data was then analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 22). Frequency tables and charts were computed on a computer spreadsheet.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Demographic characteristic of respondents

This study was conducted in all five districts of Limpopo Province, i.e. Mopani, Vhembe, Capricorn, Waterberg and Sekhukhune. The food security projects are run by women who are in majority at 75% while 25% are male. The results of the study confirmed that 75% of members are between the ages of 46-60 years, followed by 20% of members who are in the age group of 31-45 years and lastly 5% are at age group of 61 years and above. The results of the study also confirmed that 75% of food security projects members are single. Furthermore, the results indicated that 35% of members have passed grade 1-7, 40% of members in the food security projects have passed grade 8-9, while 15% have passed grade 11-12 and 10% have no formal education.

### 4.2 Economic components

The respondents indicated that since the establishment of their food security projects they are happy that they are motivated to continue to work to date. About 75% of respondents have reported that beneficiaries get a salary at the end of the month. This was confirmed by 60% of informants who said beneficiaries are motivated to continue to work because they get a salary at the end of the month. About 20% of respondents have said that beneficiaries have hope that one day their project will grow and provide more to them. In terms of support that the food security projects are providing to beneficiaries, 60% of informants have said that beneficiaries get a share after sale of stock. This study has also revealed that the food security projects were not in a position to handle employment problems of other community members (68%; Figure 4.2.1). With regard to the economic implications of the food security projects, there are challenges that impede their functionality an support to other community members. The study indicated that 38% of respondents have said that the food security projects do experience financial constraints, this was confirmed by the informants (20%: Figure 4.2.2)

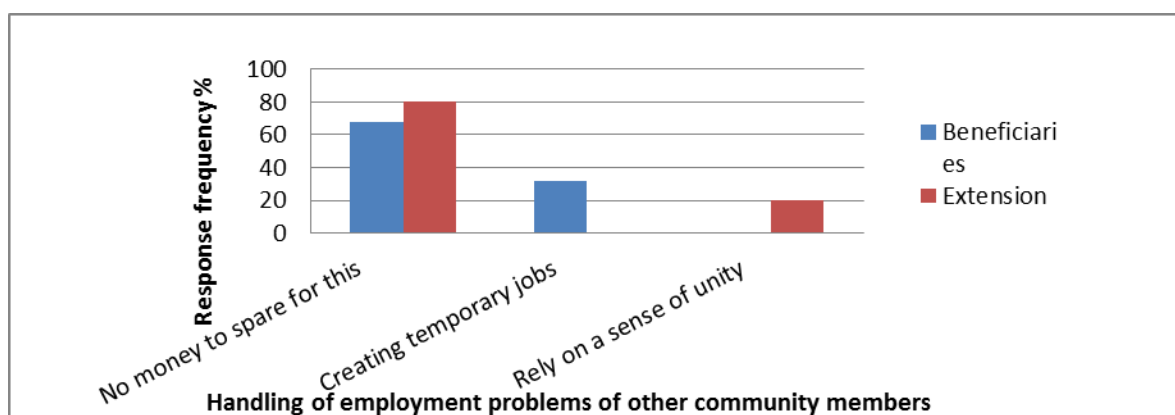
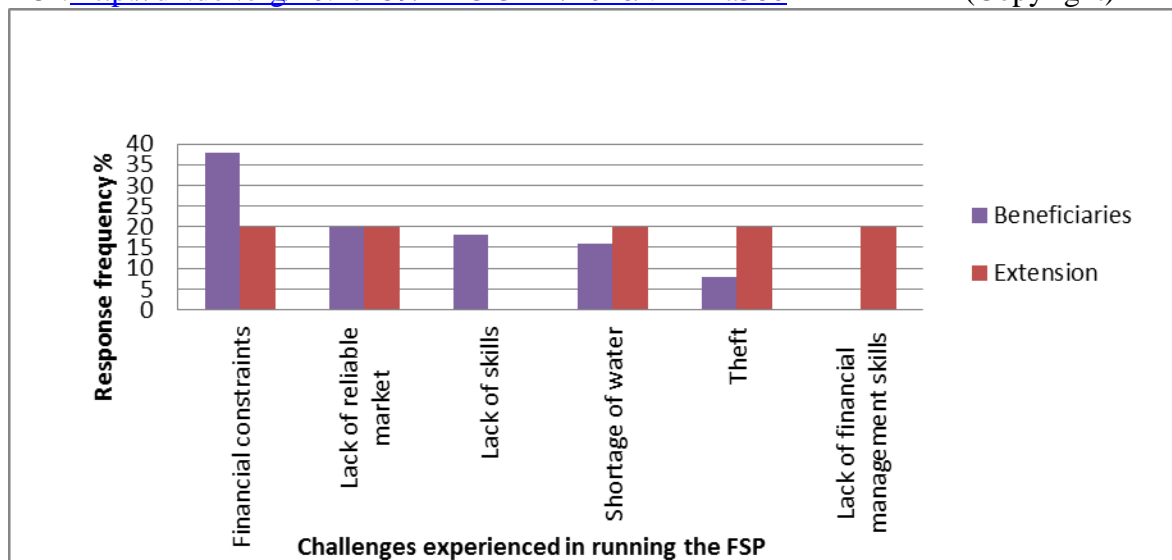


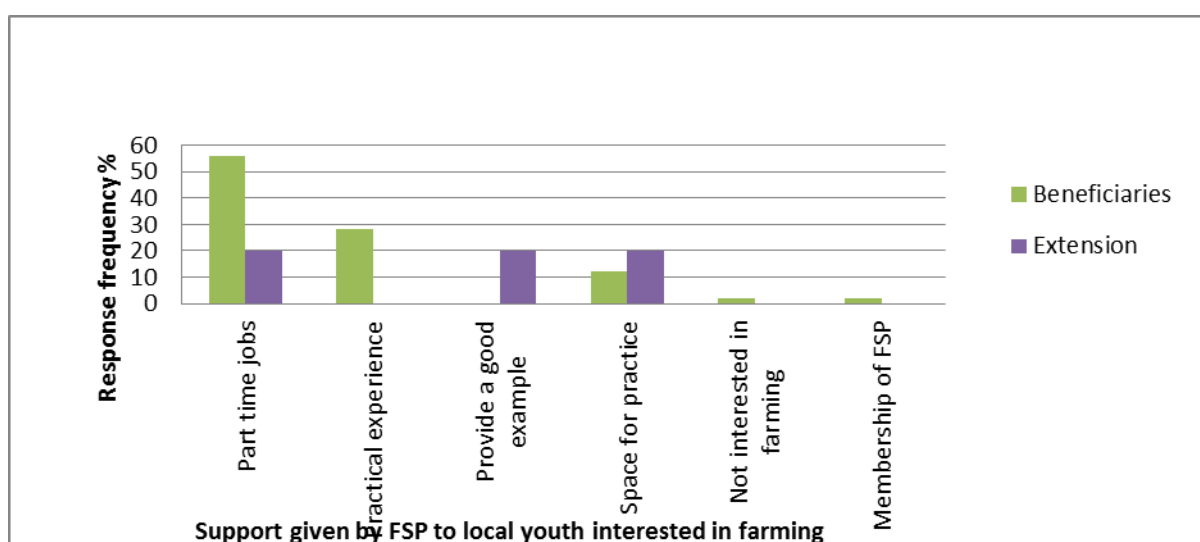
Figure 4.2.1: Handling of employment problems of other community members



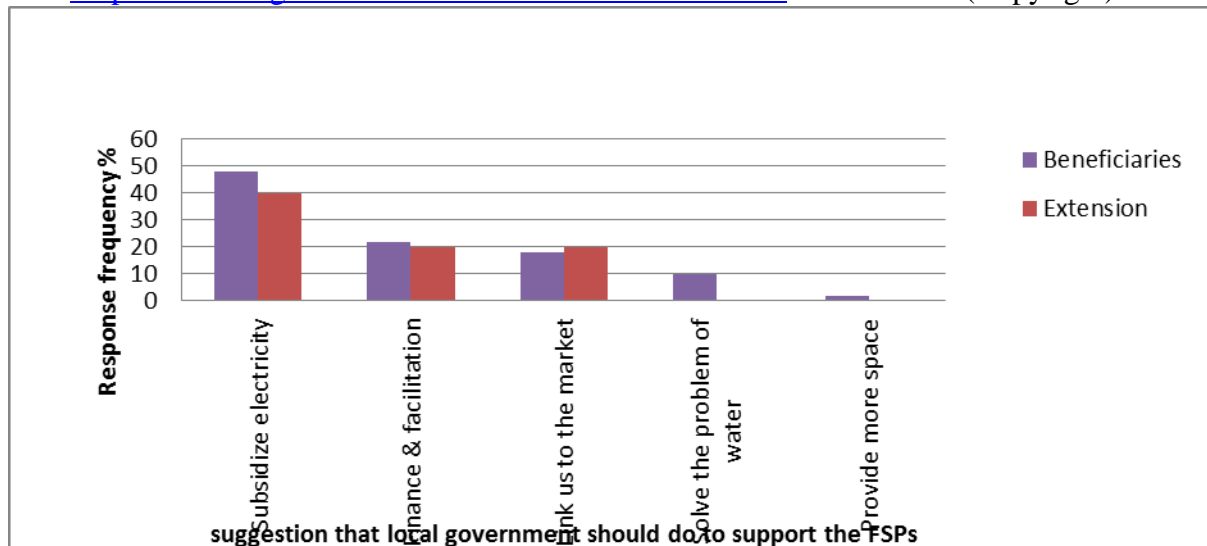
**Figure 4.2.2 Challenges experienced in running the food security projects**

### 4.3 Political components

The political components confirms the impact that projects have on the daily lives of community members, the support that the projects gives to the youth interested in farming and the support that local government should do to the projects. About 98% of respondents have said that projects provide fresh produce to the communities, while about 40% of informants have said the projects are located within short distance to the communities. The respondents have also confirmed that the projects gives support to the local youth interested in farming. (Figure 4.3.1). Furthermore the respondents have indicated that beneficiaries have confirmed that they need the local government support (Figure 4.3.1c).



**Figure 4.3.1 Support given by food security projects to local youth interested in farming.**



**Figure 4.3.2 Suggestions that local government should do to support the food security projects**

#### 4.4 Environmental components

The respondents indicated that the food security projects do not contribute to pollution of the environment because extension officers have created awareness about the danger of it in the past. About 100% of the respondents contend that beneficiaries of the food security projects do not create pollution because awareness was created to them by the local extension officers.

#### 4.5 Health and education components

The respondents indicated that although health care services are present in the communities, food security projects are also providing health care education to the members of the communities. About 58% of respondents and 100% of informants shared the same sentiments in that beneficiaries of food security projects are providing health education in the form of nutritional information.

#### 4.6 Social components

In this study the kind of support that food security projects were providing to the communities was revealed. About 60% of respondents indicated that their projects produce and sell to the local communities, however; there are challenges that they face such as high demand rate of agricultural produce.

### 5. DISCUSSIONS

The sustainability of the project depends on its capacity to generate an income for its beneficiaries, the direct access to the food which it also provides was also important to beneficiaries. In a study by Mudau & Netshandama (2012), they conclude that growing the agricultural sector is the primary channel for achieving household food security. Food security projects generated income for its members because they get salaries from the profit made after the sale of stock. Lunga (2011) postulates that food security projects have a great impact in the local communities in terms of job creation.

The economic empowerment programs such as food security projects serve as a means to help communities to financially support themselves (Love & Sayed, 2001), World Health Organization (WHO) and the Global Food crisis (2008) contends that poverty and hunger situations which people face on a daily basis are the reasons why projects were established.

The food security projects transfer resources and skills to members of the local communities (Love & Sayed, 2001). The food security projects have been in the fore front in terms of providing health care education to members of the communities, they do that despite the presence of health care services which is there in the communities. The study also highlighted some challenges that food security project members experienced during their daily operations. The projects face financial constraints, lack of reliable markets and lack of financial management skills. Brand, Du Preez and Schutte, (2007) postulates that in order to help people change their lives through improved income-generating, it may be essential to develop their money management skills.

The fact that most customers are community members has prompted project members to plough back to the communities. Youths who are studying agriculture are given the opportunity to practice farming skills at the projects for free. Spark (2007), maintains that projects provide children with a tool for survival at times of food shortages, they also familiarize children with methods of sustainable production of food that are applicable to their homestead of farms and important for household food security.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The contributions of food security projects towards poverty looks moderate, although the food security projects are creating employment for project members, they cannot handle employment problems of other communities members because their profit is low. In her study on impact of Siphilaza food security project in alleviating poverty, Lunga (2011), highlights that women run projects better than men and women can starve themselves of salary for a number of months without getting anything.

In achieving the objectives of this study, it is therefore critical for Extension Officers and other funding departments that are responsible for food security projects to develop a monitoring tool to ensure sustainability of projects. As it was mentioned during the interviews with respondents and informants, it is necessary for project beneficiaries to be trained on financial management skills as well as a broad management of food security projects. Lastly, communication skills with market agents need to be improved.

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