An Evaluation Of Factors Affecting Small, Medium, And Microenterprises For Commercial Farming: A Case For Smallholding Farmers In Wintervedlt

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Abstract

The South African agricultural landscape focuses on livestock and crop farming, which includes vegetables, fruit, nuts, and grains. The catalysts of this sector are well-developed commercial and emerging farmers/smallholder farmers. Most African countries, including South Africa, are developing, and their population is expected to grow in the future. The anticipated population growth requires the agricultural sector to adjust accordingly. The South African government not only expects the agricultural sector to boost the country's food security but also boosts job creation. Small, medium and microenterprises (SMMEs) in agriculture are also expected to play a major role in growing the national income. This study aims to evaluate factors affecting SMMEs in commercial farming in Wintervedlt. Ten farm owners and five farm workers were interviewed. The researchers used a mixed research design. The study's results revealed that the most prevalent demographics in livestock agriculture are males and people who are or are nearing retirement age. Youth is underrepresented in this sector. Access to credit, formal markets and infrastructure remains the main challenges for smallholder farmers.

Keywords: SMME, agriculture, smallholder farmer, commercial farming

1. Introduction

In South Africa, plans have been set in place for small medium and microenterprises to become drivers of the economy. It is estimated in the South African National Development Plan (2030) that SMMEs represent approximately 40% of businesses in South Africa and could potentially produce approximately 90% of jobs in the country's economy by 2030. These plans were watered down by the Head of the African National Congress's economic transformation subcommittee, Mmamoloko Kubayi, in May 2022. She reported that South Africa will not meet the goals committed to in the National Development Plan by 2030

because of low economic growth due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors prior to COVID-19 (Makinana, 2022).

This study used the qualitative cross-sectional approach to explore factors affecting SMMEs operating commercial farms in the Winterveldt area. A cross-sectional approach is undertaken at a particular period (Saunders et al., 2007). Cross-sectional studies are time bound.

South African businesses in the agricultural sector are typically categorised in terms of size and volume. The classifications used are subsistence, semicommercial (also referred to as emerging) and commercial enterprises. Agricultural SMMESs in South Africa are formed by individuals, groups, and/or government initiatives such as the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD). These initiatives were established in democratic South Africa in approximately 1994 (Ortmann & King, 2007) to create opportunities for previously disadvantaged groups to participate in the economy.

The Department of Small Businesses was established in 2014 with a mandate to promote and develop enabling policies and legislative environment for the growth and sustainability of SMMEs (Small Enterprise Development Agency, 2016). Moreover, the South African president established a task team with a directive to cut red tapes that hinders the success of SMMEs, such as the inability of the government to pay suppliers within 30 days (Magubane, 2022). The establishment of the task team demonstrates that the government acknowledges its ineptitude in assisting SMMEs to operate successfully and contribute meaningfully towards the targets set out in the NDP and GDP.

Commercial farmers should respond to social, economic, and environmental issues such as water shortages due to low rainfall, food security, high production costs, access to land and access to credit and government support, high unemployment, and inability to produce the required scales (production efficiency), etc.

Common operational constraints for SMMEs include limited knowledge of business development, access to funding/financial support, competition from existing and advanced enterprises, access to the market, limited infrastructure, climate change, access to technology, labour costs and availability and oligopoly control (Smit, 2016) and (Ndlovu & Masuku, 2021). Businesses should be accountable for implementing sustainable business models that take economic, social and environmental aspects into account (Ulvenblad et al., 2019).

The study contributes towards an increase and development of knowledge on factors affecting smallholder farmers for commercialization and increases awareness for emerging and existing farmers in Winterveldt and South Africa. It will help assess opportunities regarding industry risks and opportunities. The government needs to be intentional in its policies to help smallholder farmers improve their production efficiency (Obi & Ayodeji, 2020); government policies should also be evidence-based and should not rely on ideologies to be effective (Mathinya et al., 2022). A study on the factors affecting SMMEs, particularly

commercial farming, will assist in policy-making by identifying critical problems, possible solutions, pros and cons of the proposed solutions and associated costs.

2. Literature Review

Categories of agriculture in South Africa are subsistence farming located in the former homelands and large-scale farmers, who are mainly white (Kirsten & van Zyl 1998). These authors further elaborate on perceptions that South Africans have about small-scale farmers, being that they are backwards, nonproductive, and noncommercial.
The term 'smallholder' hides imbalances and class disparities created by the former government disparities that are still prevalent to date (Cousins, 2010). Most small-scale/smallholder farms operate in areas that were part of the former homelands and are also entangled by racial undertones, as large-scale farming is associated with white farmers. In contrast, small-scale farming is associated with black farmers (Mathinya et al., 2022). This perception may seem backwards as homelands ceased to exist in South Africa approximately in 1994. The reality is that many of the smallholder farms in former homelands struggle to transmission to commercialisation. The term small-scale farming refers to all farmers with little commercial activity, with no racial connotations (Mathinya et al., 2022).

Scale is important; however, with high-value irrigated crops such as nuts, high yields can be realised even on smallholder farms (Mathinya et al., 2022). This argument is consistent with Kirsten and van Zyl (1998), who emphasise the optimal use of the land. The call is for farmers to increase production output and efficiency, regardless of land size.
The Department of Small Business Development defines SMMEs according to the sector, number of employees, and annual turnover. A small enterprise in the agriculture sector has a total full-time equivalent of paid employees ranging from 11 to 50, with an annual turnover of $\leq$ 17 million, whereas microenterprises have a total full-time equivalent of employees ranging from 0 to 10, with an annual turnover of $\leq$ 7 million (Revised schedule 1 of the national definition of Small Enterprise in South Africa, 2019).

The White Paper on agriculture (1995) recognises the importance of smallholder farms in improving national and household food security. It recognises that while operations in small-scale farms may be relatively small compared to large scale, their importance in improving national and household food security is increasing. Matlou and Bahta (2018) define small-scale farms as owner-managed, with a small number of employees and receiving labour assistance from family members.
Following the relevant literature, this study recognises small-scale and smallholder farmers as the same, and the titles are used interchangeably. This study recognises smallholder farmers

as an enterprise operating with 0-10 employees with an annual turnover of ≤ 7 million, consistent with the definition by the Ministry of Small Business Development.
According to Khapayi and Celliers (2016), smallholder farmers need to have ownership of factors of production, such as irrigation equipment, ploughing machines, and cultivating tractors to improve their operations instead of renting out whenever needed. Leasing out machinery is an additional cost to already struggling smallholder farmers.

The government needs to be intentional in its policies to help smallholder farmers improve their production efficiency (Obi & Ayodeji, 2020); moreover, government policies should be evidence-based and should not rely on ideologies to be effective (Mathinya et al., 2022). Policymakers should consider available credible studies on smallholder farmers to develop policies for implementation that are relevant and impactful. Policymakers should also commit a greater focus on entrepreneurship training to educate smallholder farmers on operating sustainable and profitable agricultural businesses (Thindisa & Urban, 2018). Policies for each category of SMMEs need to be developed to have an agenda that is inclusive and provides equal growth opportunities (Bhorat et al., 2018). Government policies should create an enabling environment that promotes competition and infrastructure development in favour of smallholder farmers, provide incentives and facilitate access to financial support (Bose et al., 2017).

3. Research Methodology

The study uses qualititative research that follows pragmatism methods and recognises that knowledge is derived from experience; it explores diversity among participants and captures the description and narrations of participants to report on the findings (Kumar, 2019). Data collection includes focus groups, individual interviews, case studies, ethnography, grounded theory, action research, and observation (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).
The study's design was exploratory to increase academic knowledge about smallholder commercial farming for SMMEs. It focuses on the execution of the methodology (Sovacool et al., 2018). The design helps the researcher to establish answers to the research questions. Exploratory research design helps the researcher develop ideas and definitions and establish salient points, which ultimately help improve the final output of the research design (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). This means that data regarding the study area in exploratory research are somewhat limited, and the purpose of the research is to gain more insight.
The research philosophy applied was interpretivism; it allowed the researchers to gain more insight into the subject matter. This is done by considering the participants' lived-personal experiences, opinions, culture, and behaviour. Interpretivism differs from positivism, as it aims to embrace the richness of the participants' insights (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).
The targeted population for the study was SMMEs operating smallholder farms for commercialisation purposes in Winterveldt; products were either crops, livestock, or a

combination of both. Cooper and Schindler (2014) explain that a good sample should represent the entire population and be precise and free from bias. In nonprobability sampling, a sample is selected based on subjective judgement, while probability sampling is a representative sampling, and each item in the population has an equal chance of being selected (Saunders et al., 2007).

In purposive sampling, participants are selected based on experience and as theoretical categories change during the cause of the study (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The participants were selected based on referrals from one farmer to the next. The researchers were flexible and relied on developments as the study proceeded. Hence, purposive sampling was applied. A sample of ten willing farm owners who met the sampling criteria and five farm workers participated in the data collection process. In-depth face-to-face semistructured interviews were also conducted individually in a focus group.

A pilot study was conducted prior to the main study. A pilot study is where research is carried out on a small-scale prior commencement of the main to assist the researcher in improving and conceptualising the main study (Williams-Mcbean, 2019). The quality of the interview guide and the questionnaire were first tested on one farmer. The session took over two hours, although the intention was to complete within one hour. The interview guide had to be revised after the pilot study to ensure that the questionnaire and the interview guide were precise and completable within sixty minutes.

Data analysis is executed simultaneously with data collection for researchers to modify research questions and collection methods where necessary; it is at this stage that themes are recognised and salient concepts are identified (Mohajan, 2018). Thematic methods are used to identify repeated patterns in the data (Sundler et al., 2019). The data were collected, put into Excel, grouped into quotations according to the themes and analysed.

4. Results and Discussion

The themes were extracted from the responses to the interview guide and were analysed. The results are presented according to the structure of the interview guide, represented as Section A: Socioeconomic demographics of the smallholder farmers in Winterveldt and Section B: Factors affecting smallholder commercial farming enterprises in Wintervedlt.

Section A: Socioeconomic demographics of the smallholder farmers in Winterveldt

Table 1: Demographic profile of the farm owners

n	Age	f	%	Gender	f	%	Level of education	f	%	Farm size	f	%	Productive Area	f	%	Experience	f	%
10	18-35	1	10%	Male	9	90%	Matric	1	10%	< 1 h	0	0%	< 1 h	0	0%	1 to 2	1	10%
	36-45	4	40%	Female	1	10%	ND	2	20%	1-5 h	2	20%	1 h	2	20%	3 to 5	4	40%
	46-60	2	20%				Degree	2	20%	6-10 h	6	60%	1-5 h	6	60%	5 and above	5	50%
							Honours	4	40%	> 10 h	2	20%	6-10 h	2	20%			
							Masters	1	10%				> 10 h	0	0%			
							Doctorate	0	0%									

Legends: n= sample size; f= frequency; ND= national diploma; h= Hectare

Most of the owners were of the ages 36 to 45, representing 40%. The 90% of them was men and 10% women. In Sehar and Oyekale's (2022) study, 40% of the farmers were above 60 years of age and 76.7% were men. Therefore, there is a partial congruency to the findings by Sehar and Oyekale (2022).

Most of the participants in the area have an honours degree or equivalent. The results correlate with Matsane and Oyekale (2014), who reported that small-scale farmers are literate, mostly with high school-level education and relevant experience.

Farmers with land ranging between 6 and 10 hectares represent 60% of the respondents, and only two have land above 10 hectares. In the Eastern Cape, the average size of productive land is two hectares (Mdoda et al., 2022; von Loeper et al., 2016). A study conducted on smallholder farms in Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda revealed that the majority of the farms are operated on land less than a hectare (Giller et al., 2021). Farm sizes in the Winterveldt area differ from the ones reported in previous studies, as the majority are operating in slightly larger farm areas.

Although the farm areas in Winterveldt are mostly in the range of 6 and 10 hectares (total size area), the productive area/total area that is used for farming purposes is below that range. It was established that most of the smallholder farmers in this study utilise approximately 1-5 hectares for farming purposes.

According to Khapayi and Celliers (2016), the availability of sufficient land remains a challenge in South Africa, with most farmers having production land of fewer than 10 hectares. This reflects the results of the Winterveldt study, as 90% of the respondents confirmed that the farms are operated on fewer than 10 hectares of land. Although the land is available, it is not efficiently used. This finding could be attributed to insufficient funds to finance business operations.

There was a significant occurrence of farmers with more than 5 years of experience. The most common about farmers in the area is that they mostly grew up being exposed to farming, as the farms were previously operated by either parents or grandparents.
"I have 8 years of commercial farming experience doing green peppers and cucumber under protection (nets and tunnels). The 8 years' experience is informed by the fact that my parents were also farmers, they farmed for 30 years. I did not want to start small, so I started commercially". According to Matsane and Oyekale (2014), smallholder farmers have high school-level education and approximately 20 years of farming experience. Similarly, in Winterveldt, the farmers have relevant farming experience from childhood and mostly have tertiary qualifications.

The population of respondents leasing farms from their own families is 10%; 40% are owned by either parents or grandparents, and the remaining 40% are legal owners of the land they inherited. One out of the ten respondents came from outside the Winterveldt community, bought land and started their farming operations. These results support the sentiments of Khapayi and Celliers (2016), which are that smallholder farmers need to have ownership of factors of production to improve their production instead of being bound to rental agreements.
Respondents producing crops represent 60% of the population sampled, while 40% have combined livestock and crop production. The majority of the participants have their companies registered with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC).

Table 2: Demographic profile of the farm workers

n	Gender	frequency	%	Working days per week	f	%	Experience (years)	f	%
5	Male	5	100%	1-2 days	0	0%	1 to 2	0	0%
	Female	0	0	3-5 days	0	0%	3 to 5	1	20%
				5 Days and above	5	100%	5 & above	4	80%

Legends: n= sample size; f= Frequency

Eighty percent of the farm workers have over 5 years of working experience, are all male and mostly work for five days and more per week. The concerns of all the respondents here are that they are foreigners who are not legally documented; as such, they cannot be included in the government programmes available, i.e., training.

Section B: Factors affecting smallholder commercial farming Enterprises in Wintervedlt

Half of the respondents expressed that to operate efficiently, grow their facilities and employ enough labour, they need financial assistance. Their concern is that to qualify for financial support, they need to prove affordability to credit providers, which requires the submission of

financial forecasts and cash flows that they do not have. This corroborates Ndlovu and Masuku (2021), who reported that financial results for most small-scale farmers are unrecorded.

The general view of the respondents is that they have access to extension officers, although more mentorships are still needed. This finding is consistent with Matsane and Oyekale's (2014) finding, which reported that 83% of smallholder farmers had access to extension officers. According to van Schalkwyk (2022), extension officers should help smallholder farmers with information on mentorship and good management systems to help farmers and workers keep track of tasks and activities.

There is a balance between smallholder farmers who supply to the formal markets and those who supply to informal markets. The formal markets were municipal markets in Gauteng Province, i.e., Johannesburg and Tshwane markets, retail stores and auctions (applicable for livestock). The respondents supplying to municipal markets and retailers expressed that they are forced to be price takers. Prices are determined based on supply and demand, but the benefit is that the municipal markets do not restrict supply based on quantities. Only one respondent out of the ten had an off-take agreement. The respondents attributed the inability to acquire off-take agreements to not being able to produce the minimum quantities and quality required by the market. Commonly, most smallholder farmers do not have direct contracts in place, committing to the quantities, quality, frequency of deliveries, etc. (Ndlovu & Masuku, 2021).

The respondents indicated that they occasionally receive support from the government for inputs such as fertilisers, manure, chemicals to treat pesticides, etc. Although there seems to be some level of support from the government, it is not on high-impact resources such as tractors, irrigation systems, boreholes, water tanks, and working capital.

Khapayi and Celliers (2016) reported that farmers located closer to the main roads had better access to the markets, but a vast majority of the smallholder farmers are far from public roads and must navigate through badly maintained gravel to access the public/main roads. These are also sentiments shared by the respondents. They reported that roads in their community are badly maintained and become muddy during rainy seasons, making it almost impossible to access the area during that time. This is made worse by the fact that the respondents must travel between 30 KM to 125 KM to the markets and to different suppliers for sourcing farm inputs. Transport cost is considered one of the highest expenditure items for farmers in the area.

Numerous challenges were revealed by the respondents. These included climate change, theft, water scarcity, electricity-load shedding, and lack of government support for tractors.

The challenges raised by the respondents corroborate the findings in the literature review. Failure by the government to integrate emerging farmers into the agricultural economy calls for more enquiries into the challenges experienced by smallholder farmers to develop better-suited policies and strategies that will help grow emerging farmers into commercial farmers (Khapayi & Celliers, 2016).

5. Recommendations for future study

The study revealed that participation in farming activities in the area according to the age ranges is as follows; the ages between 18- and 35 years old was 10% of the sample, ; the ages range between 36- and 45 years old represented 40% of the sample, ; the ages range between 46- and 60 years old represented 20% of the sample; and above the age of 60 years old represented 30% of the sample. The Majority majority of the farmers are between the ages range of 36- and 45 years old, and above 60 years old. The results revealed little participation in the ages range of 18- to 35 years old, which is the youth category. Further study on the lack of or minimal participation by the South African youth in Agricultural agricultural projects should be investigated. Future studies could test whether farmers receiving or thatwho had received funding for major infrastructure such as boreholes, irrigation systems etc. and / or those who have been through incubation programmes are experiencing the same challenges by those who have not received funding for major infrastructure and / or incubated.

6. Limitations

This study focused on the factors affecting smallholder farmers to commercialise. It was limited to smallholder farmers in the Winterveldt area, farming for commercial purposes. Focus groups are between the researcher and a group of between 6- and 10 participants (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). An invite for the focus group was extended to eight farmers in the Winterveldt area, but only five farmers availed themselves for the session. The study could not cover a wide range of farmers, as the sample selected was ten farm owners and five workers. The sample was small and subjective, ; to produce conclusive results, the sample would have to be extended. Furthermore, the farm worker results were not corroborated with the farm owners.

7. Conclusion

There is still a greater need for government support for smallholder farmers in the area to transition to commercial operations. The number of farmers in the area operating at a commercial level is still very low. This is mainly due to farms being operated on a small scale. To increase production output, capital injection is required for the purchasing of applicable equipment, such as boreholes and water tanks. The municipality also needs to

invest in infrastructure development to ensure that business operations are not adversely affected during the rainy season.

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