Interview: Edna

1. Date: 2021-03-01
2. Time: 10 am

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| Hello, I am Zakes Hlatshwayo, a Ph.D. candidate at UP, conducting a study on emerging black farmers’ practices and state support to them, the study is conducted in three provinces. This study aims to understand emerging black farmer practices and how they are supported by the state. Thank you for your willingness to participate. I am interested to understand your farming practices and experience, as well as the support you receive. Information will be used only for academic and research purposes. You do not have to give your name if you don’t want to and can decline to answer any question. I appreciate your assistance and request you provide as much information as possible to help us understand your work.  The research study has been approved by the University of Pretoria’s Research Ethics Committee. Your privacy and confidentiality will be secured. No direct reference will be made to you, I will use a pseudonym, codes and categories to keep information about you confidential, and to protect it from unauthorized disclosure, tampering, or damage. You are not required to use your name, do not write your name on any of the documents. The data will be kept for 15 years in a password protected format and used for University of Pretoria research only.  For the purpose of this research I will use semi-structured questions, with your permission I will record the interview and take notes. The interview will not be longer than 50 minutes. Hopefully, the information will help policymakers, practitioners, officials and managers to make informed decisions on such programmes in the future. | | | |
| RQ1: What is your name? Edna  RQ2: Where do you live? Vlakfontein, I have three children. My partner is unemployed.  RQ3: What is your highest level of qualification? Below matric  RQ4: Gender: Female  RQ5: Age: 41   * Do you farm? I’m a fresh produce farm worker (horticulture). * What do you farm? Spinach, Pepper-bells, carrots, kale pumpkins, and tomatoes. * When did you start? I started in the early 2010s. * How did you start? I always worked in my family’s garden. * Why did you start? It was a family chore, which helped the family save money. | | | |
| RQ6: Where is the land located? | | Sedibeng | The farm I’m working at is located in Sedibeng Agripark, south of Joburg. I started here around 2015. I do not own the land I work for someone. |
| RQ7: How long have you been working here? | | +5year | I’m working in two hydroponic tunnels including an area outside, I work alone, and sometimes the farmer helps me, but rarely does. |
| I’m one of a number of farmworkers, who work for different farmers (She is not sure about the numbers). It is mostly women employed here on the tunnels and plots. | | | |
| RQ8: How did you get access to the land? | |  | I do not own the farm or land, I work for a farmer. I came here on the advice of friends. I’m not sure how he got the land. |
| RQ9: Do you own the land? | | No | No. I do not own the land. |
| I work for a farmer. I get paid weekly, did not disclose the amount, and the is no written contract of employment. She comes five times a week, sometimes on weekends if there is work to be done (she earns extra for that). A friend who works at Agripark referred her to the farmer. She is not registered for any of the government benefits, and she is not aware of the law that governs farmworkers or whether she is within the definition. | | | |
| RQ10: Where did you learn to farm? | |  | At home, in Limpopo, we have a backyard garden, not big, but we grow something. |
| RQ11: Have you received any training on farming? | | No. | The farmer tells me what to do, the Agripark officer also gives some advice if asked. I learn from doing and sharing with other workers. |
| There is no formal training given to farm workers, the relationship is between the farmer and extension officer. The farmer tells her how to use the fertiliser and water the plants or when to open the tunnel doors to allow for increased ventilation. | | | |
| RQ13: What are the sources of your livelihoods? | |  | My weekly salary. The children’s support grant and my mother’s pension help me. |
| RQ14: How do you support your family? | |  | In addition to the above, the farmer allows her to take some vegetables home (not deducted from her salary). |
| I could not find the farmer as an interviewee. | | | |
| RQ15: What forms of labour/equipment do you use? | Mainly manual labour, hoes, spades shovels, and other innovations, and water gallons used as sprinklers. | | |
| RQ15: What other forms of support do you get? | None. Sometimes the farmer brings more hands to help with the harvesting. | | |
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| RQ16: When did you get involved in the Agripark? | Above. | | |
| RQ17: Where did you hear about Agriparks? | A friend who work for one of the farmers introduced me to the farmer, who gave me a job. | | |
| A friend told me about the Agripark, I was looking for work to support my family. | | | |
| RQ18: What actual support have you received from Agripark? | |  | The support is given to the farmer, I’m not sure what. As a farmworker, I’m mostly told what to do. |
| RQ19: what other support and services have you received? | |  | None. |
| RQ20: What improvement has been brought? | |  | At a personal level, I think I’m developing, and I will be able to start and manage my own farm. I still have to learn where to sell. But I have made contacts with people who come to buy directly from the farm. |
| RQ21: Do you sell any of your products? | | Yes. | This is done by the farmer, I have not been to the markets. Sometimes he tells me prices were either better or worse, not sure in what ways. It does not affect my wagers. |
| RQ22: When did you start selling? | |  | The farmer sells. He sells on a cash basis, with no credit. |
| RQ23: Have you been involved in planning meetings and deciding on priorities? | |  | No. only the farmers hold meetings with officials. I don’t know what gets discussed unless I’m told what to do.  It would be best to know about the future of Agripark. I would like to apply to get a start in my own farming.  The communication is insufficient. |
| RQ24: What concerns and issues have arisen concerning the Agripark?  How are the issues resolved? | |  | There are complaints about the allocation of tunnels and plots. Initially, it was one cooperative or company to a tunnel. But now one person or cooperative owns more than one tunnel and or plot. Some plots lie fallow, with no explanation. The boreholes get broken and not repaired in time causing water problems.  There is no unity among farmers and farmworkers. These problems are unresolved. |
| RQ25: In what way can Agriparks be improved, any suggestions? | |  | Farmworker must be given their own plots, sometimes it is the well-connected individuals who get tunnels and land. Women and youth must be prioritised especially the poor and unemployed  Officials must apply the rules, those who are progressing must give space to others. People overstay, even though they are doing seemingly well. Farmers exceed the agreed incubation period.  There is a need for improved coordination between government, farmers, and farmworkers. In this way, we all learn and grow together.  More youth and women should be brought on board. |
| RQ25: Did hear about the Covid-19 pandemic and how were you impacted? How did you learn about Covid-19 | | Yes. | I heard from the news and people, the farmer also spoke to me about it. The hard lockdown forced us to stay at home, we lost produce and money. I had no income or fresh produce to cook at home.  I remained at home with my three children, partner, and mother.  On our return, it was handwork to prepare the soil to plant.  We had to buy our own masks and sanitizer. |
| Covid-19 relief fund | |  | The department has applied on our behalf, I am still waiting to hear from them. |
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| Covid-19 impacted me in many ways, before lockdown I could take fresh produce home, but during Covid, I had to buy veggies. I had to do away with chicken, which is cheaper than red meat. Initially, the children stayed at home and did not go to school, we had to feed them, it was expensive. All the money we had we had to use, we stopped contributing to the Stokvel, which is a family safety net. | | | |
| RQ25: Have you benefited from working with youth or women? | | Yes. | We talk and share information about our own farms and other business opportunities that are available here. We might start our own cooperative. |
| RQ26: Are there any other issues you would like me to look into? | |  | Look into the issue of trade unions and a basic income, we need empowerment as black female farmworkers, especially those with children. |
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Observations: Edna is very socially conscious she talks about unionization to protect farm-worker, a basic income grant, and a valid contract to protect farm workers. She wants her own space, she thinks she is ready and capable to go on her own. She is angry seeing people dismissed or treated badly by farmers, department officials, and security personnel, “I have struggled a lot” she says. As a poor black woman, who wants to farm, I cannot get to a bank and ask for a loan, there are many obstacles.

Covid-19: She holds strong views, for example, she believes government should have consulted broadly before the lockdown, especially food producers. Talking from her own experience, she argues children were let down by the temporary closure of the school feeding system. She was left with no money, she, together with other farmworkers, had to walk to work.