Interview: Max

1. : 2021-02-25
2. Time: 9 am

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| Hello, I am Zakes Hlatshwayo, I am a Ph.D. candidate doing an academic study on: Emerging black farmers’ practices and state support to them: a study of three government Agriparks in South Africa. This study will explore the practices of emerging black farmers and their successes and challenges in three selected areas where Agriparks exist. Thank you for your willingness to participate. We are interested to understand your role and experience. 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 me 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? Max  RQ2: What is your occupation? General Manager  RQ3: In what capacity? I’m the general manager of two Gauteng Agriparks (Westonaria and Sebokeng)  RQ4: How long have you been in this position? Three years  RQ5: What is your highest qualification? Masters in Agriculture Science  RQ6: Gender: Male  RQ7: Age: 41 | | | |
| RQ8: Are you involved with Agriparks? | | Yes | I’m the manager of two Agriparks |
| RQ9: How are you involved? | |  | I’m part of the management team of the provincial department. I sit in the department meetings, I’m responsible for operations in the Agripark. I ensure that we meet the goals of economic growth and poverty reduction |
| Agriparks kickstart the Rural Economic Transformation in rural regions; promote the growth of the smallholder sector by creating new small-scale producers and new jobs in the agro-processing industry by the year 2020 (as set out in the National Growth Path). Over ten years; the idea is to bring under-utilized land (especially in Communal Areas Land and land reform farms) into full production and expand irrigated agriculture. Agricultural value chains are prioritized as important in the provision of job opportunities and improving the standard of living of farm workers. | | | |
| RQ10: How did you get involved? | |  | I applied for the job as advertised, I obtained a master’s degree in the field. |
| RQ11: What is the background of the Agriparks that requires them to support emerging black farmers? | |  | The Agriparks frameworks ensure that the vision set out by the NDP is achieved. Increase employment levels through economic growth, skills development, and innovation and build the capability of the state to play a developmental role. |
| The focus is on the empowerment of rural and township communities, especially women and the youth, through facilitating and mediating strong organizational and institutional capabilities and abilities to take full charge of their growth and development. | | | |
| RQ12: What policy changes influenced the establishment of Agriparks? | |  | A policy review provides background on the policies’ priorities and the alignment of key national development plans and ministries. The Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP), the framework for the Agriparks provides an overview of the national, provincial, and district policies that will guide the development of Agriparks to achieve its objectives and garner support from local structures. |
| RQ13: What are the present functions of Agriparks? | |  | The Agriparks provide the foundation for the development of small-scale farmers and create economic opportunities for economic growth and employment. |
| The farming project is supported by the Department of Agriculture. The Agriparks basic infrastructure such as land, tunnels and hydroponics, facilities such packaging storage, and ablution, provide extension support services such as advice, fertilizer, seedlings, water, electricity, and water. We enter into 3 years contract with farmers, renewable, to help them develop the necessary support to move into commercial farming. We provide equipment such as tractors, harvesters, and thrashers to the farmers. | | | |
| RQ14: What are the priorities of the Agriparks? | |  | The aim is to support and strengthen smallholder farmers with service centres that will provide access to extension and advisory support, training, storage and packing facilities, mechanization and markets. These are aimed at addressing economies of scale for subsistence and smallholder producers in a specific space and commodity. |
| RQ15: What are Agripark’s perceived efficiencies in fulfilling their functions? | |  | Agriparks are located in all the district municipalities, managed and owned by smallholder farmers, so can best serve local communities and facilitate coordination at a local level. Agriparks take farmer development to the local level and strengthen partnerships between the government and private sector, ensuring access to services such as land water, energy, transport, and production |
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| RQ16: What do you believe are the main success of the Agriparks? | Agriparks bring together, at a local level, various government departments and improve interaction with the private sector and communities, this is important for growth. It has created opportunities for local farmers, women, and youth, and provides basic service as indicated. It supports land reform beneficiaries to access government support and one-point, one-stop services. | | |
| RQ17: What are the challenges, if any, that you see concerning land ownership, agriculture, and poverty alleviation? | The Agriparks program aims to radically transform the South African economy to bring a million African people into productive activities within the mainstream economy. At a political level, there are constraints regarding land redistribution to stimulate economic growth and reduce unemployment and poverty. Prime agriculture land is still in a few white hands, we need to make that land available to black farmers. In the long run if well implemented it resolves the issues of widening inequality. | | |
| RQ18: What processes are put in place to deal with the challenges? | There are political challenges at the national level that need to be solved, then it is the issues of inter-departmental coordination as well as the private sector. All these issues need to be resolved by the state intervening to ensure that transformation happens. You look at issues of the national budget, there is no commitment to this, at least for now. The private sector has not come on board to support the Agriparks, it is rebutted as a small farmers initiative but is more than that. | | |
| RQ19: How are emerging black farmers identified and recruited to be part of the programs of the Agriparks? | We look at self-starters, some have backyard gardens and others have small holdings, we also target vulnerable groups like women, youth and struggle veterans who all have plots here. We place adverts on the department’s webpage and advertise on municipal buildings and local newspapers. | | |
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| RQ20: What are the main farming practices of emerging black farmers? | |  | They vary and are sometimes integrated, most are in small-scale farming because of the unavailability of land, and some farms for survival and sell their surplus. Most use their labour and own tools, bring in family members, or employ temporary workers. |
| RQ21: What legislative reform justified the emergence of the Agripark to provide support to emerging black farmers? | |  | It is about fast-tracking land reform and ensuring that the beneficiaries get state support. There is concern about inequality caused by the lack of economic development opportunities, especially in rural areas. The Agriparks program aims to support producers and help them access markets to sell their produce. |
| RQ22: Who decides on the type of support and services given to emerging black farmers? | |  | Ideally, the decisions are taken through interactive consultative processes by the local municipality, during the development of local goals and objectives. These processes include several local stakeholders, business owners, and individuals who make their inputs. The researcher also plays an important role, they guide on what is available and possible. |
| RQ23: How are decisions communicated to emerging black farmers? | |  | We hold scheduled monthly meetings where plans are discussed and decisions are made and implemented. We also talk to the teams and individuals on issues specific to them. |
| RQ24: How do emerging black farmers participate in the decision-making on priorities of Agriparks? | |  | Farmers participate in all our meetings that we have here, they are allowed to speak and make the inputs. We have situations where farmers wrote letters of complaint to the provincial administration when they were not happy, we even had protest actions. |
| RQ25: Are emerging black farmers given plans about the priorities of Agriparks? | |  | The documents and information about the Agriparks are in the public domain, everyone can access it. It is an open situation, people can ask for these documents and they will be given. |
| RQ26: Are women and youth benefitting from Agriparks? If so, how? | |  | In all of our Agriparks, the majority of beneficiaries are women and youth, we prioritize them when there are vacancies or training opportunities available. |
| RQ27: What are the challenges of the Agriparks? How are these challenges dealt with? | |  | Agriparks are designed to facilitate economic development and the creation of jobs in the context of sustainable land and rural reforms. The is political resistance to the subdivision of agriculture land, there is a problem of budgeting for it, there is interdepartmental challenges and private sector resistance. These challenges need to be faced at national level. We are doing the best we can with the resources we have. At a local level we talk to the farmers and improvise solutions. |
| RQ28: What are the successes of the Agriparks? How is success determined? | |  | Our existence is important the growth of small-scale farmers and rural development. We have given many farmers accesses to land, water, equipment, infrastructure and facilities, at no cost to them. We provide extension services to the farmers and give guidance, we provide seedlings, fertilizer and pesticides all of this important to alleviate a dire situation. A central component of the reforms initiated by the Government is the coordination of a number of government agencies, private sector and community representatives in streamlining the plan making process. We have been able to achieve this. |
| RQ29: What are your recommendations for the future of Agriparks and wider support to emerging black farmers? Are there any other issues that you suggest I should look into? | |  | It depends on the political priorities of the ruling party, since the new administration there has been a cut in the budget which ahs affected operation. I think, often emerging black farmers and their role in ending poverty and hunger is misunderstood, we need to revisit. The other thing is funding, we need funds to sustain this effort. |
| RQ30: How did you hear about Covid-19? | |  | Besides the many other sources, we had a memo from the department advising us of the outbreak. It was scary at first because there was not enough information available to all of us. |
| RQ31: How did Covid 19 affect you?  RQ32: How did you respond to government’s lockdown, did you benefit? | |  | At first there were mixed messages, I stayed at home and came back when we were allowed to return. We were provided with the necessary precautionary interventions, but most of the farmers were not convinced and decided to stay away. It is only later that they came back. |

Notes: He was adamant that the Agriparks were the right interventions, he complained of the politician not following up. He indicated that the budget for land and rural development is forever being cut, this is not good for transformation, he tells me.