Interview: Thandi

1. Date: 2021-02-03
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? Thandi  RQ2: Where do you live? Mohlakeng.  RQ3: What is your highest level of qualification? Post-matric  RQ4: Gender: Female  RQ5: Age: 40 | | | |
| RQ6: Do you have another job? | | No | She worked at Standard Bank as a bulk cash counter |
| RQ7: How long have you been in this job? | | +2years |  |
| Thandi is mute and deaf, for the interview I use her sign language interpreter Senge. She started in 2016 as part of a cooperative with seven members. In a matter of a few months, it fell apart. She works under a company, Voice Out Deaf, that she registered in 2017. She won the Woman in Agriculture award Nationally in 2019, Westrand business woman of the Year, and won the ministerial award for Female Entrepreneur. | | | |
| RQ8: Where do you farm? | | Westonaria |  |
| RQ9: What do you grow? | | High-value crop | Tomatoes are the main produce, lettuce, green peppers, baby spinach, and kale. Winter, lettuce |
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| RQ10: How many hectares do you farm? | |  | Ten tunnels of 10m x 30m = 300 m2 each, so 3,000 m2 and it is not clear how much other land is on the other plots. |
| RQ11: How did you obtain this land, under what tenure? | |  | Department’s adverts and word-of-mouth advertising and applied for vacancies. |
| It is government land under the Agripark. She has no clear rights to it and does not know how long she will be able to stay there or what the plans of the Agripark are. She has no lease or other such written agreement. There have been talks that they will assist her to “commercialize” (which was clarified as basically going it alone, as she is already fully commercial, growing for sale to a range of outlets). | | | |
| RQ12: Have you always produced and sold the same things? | | Yes | In the winter or different seasons, they introduce other seasonal crops. |
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| RQ13: How did you start farming? | “Always interested in agriculture” “Working for Standard Bank, but never had a passion for the banking industry” and also wanted to help deaf people. Saw women doing farming on TV, and decided why not try. The aim was also to focus on the processing of healthy food. | | |
| RQ14: How did you learn about this opportunity? | Spoke of buying tomatoes direct from ZZ2, hiring a vehicle to collect them, and then selling them here. And can make a good profit, buying box for R40 and selling for R200. | | |
| RQ15: Where did you obtain the capital?  RQ16: What are the sources of your livelihoods?  RQ17: How do you support your family? | She used her saving and later her income from tomato sales, and now she also uses some of her earnings.  She has no other source other than this opportunity.  From this business | | |
| RQ19: How many people are employed, temporary and full-time? | She has 11 workers, all deaf as well (paid weekly, but difficult to pay all with the tomato challenge, now we employ during harvest when each will get about 50% of sales and each must have their own tunnel. | | |
| RQ20: What are your main inputs? | Seedlings, water, pesticides, fertilizers, nets, and improvised equipment. The work is labour-intensive. | | |
| RQ21: Where do you get your inputs from? Mainly from the Agripark, but the transport they have to hire themselves. She produces some of her own seeds and seedlings. She gets some of the fertilizer from Agripark for free but says it is not always the right type she needs (Agripark just gets certain generic ones). Some seeds from the Agripark, but they come late, so she buys and produces her own. Water and electricity are from the Agripark, but unreliable water supply is her biggest problem. During Covid-19 we had to go and buy from corporative, it was expensive. The spray we prefer our own, they buy a standard, and the other sprays are not working for other crops. We buy from a nursery, about 15kms away in Baron. And buy Hygrotech seeds. The person from Hygrotech also comes there and shows them a bit about how to use them, and communicate on the phone as well.  Where do you sell? The biggest market is local street traders. She sells all in the area, that is the towns, townships, and informal settlements in the area. To a shop in Westonaria, Fruit and Veg Market. Pick N Pay in Mohlakeng (township just nearby up the R28) and in Westonaria. Street vendors, “There are a lot of street vendors buying, they are the biggest market.” Second biggest fruit and veg. Community stalls, bakkie off-takers, and door-to-door sales. We use crates and boxes, there is no branding. | | | |
| RQ22: What do you supply? | |  | Tomatoes, kale, pepper bells, carrots, and lettuce. |
| * How often? | |  | Twice a week |
| * How did you get the market? | |  | She speaks to buyers and outlets about her products, buyers come here, it’s word-of-mouth advertising. |
| * Are produce collected or delivered? | |  | Some are collected, others delivered and we transport the products in our car. |
| * What quantity or value of each crop produced? * What market works best, and why? | |  | It is unstable, it depends on the yield, which is sometimes good or bad. complained about the rain-ruined tomatoes.  She is happy with her market, including retailers and they all pay on delivery. |
| * What could be done to make markets work better? | |  | She repeated a number of times that the market is not the problem, she has a market. They never sell at Joburg market. “We have plenty of customers, from the start we never sold to the Joburg market |
| * Have you sold your product elsewhere before, if so, where? | | No |  |
| RQ23: Are you part of an organization or group? They are on a committee with the other farmers on the site and joined in a joint protest over poor services and lack of Covid-19 protocols in April 2020. But she does not seem so close to the others.  Do you have any other collaboration, individual or group? She works closely with another farmer at the Agripark. They help each other, certainly, he appreciates the help he has got from her and she also talked of working closely with him.  RQ24: What concerns and issues have arisen concerning the Agripark? She says the situation with the Agripark is confusing, doesn’t know where they are going or what help they are supposed to receive. Say she was supposed to be “commercialized” last year, the budget is there, and the business plan is there, but there is no communication. “Don’t know what are we doing here, we don’t even have a signed contract… we only know we are here for learning and when you grow they should move you somewhere”. They did have various engagements with the management and department responsible for Agripark but don’t feel they got any improvements. They have decided now to focus on their work and look for other options for land outside the Agripark.  RQ25: What improvement has been brought? We still are waiting to get the promised land. This project is a perfect project in terms of infrastructure, but the management is not good.  RQ26: In what way can Agriparks be improved, any suggestions? She stresses the issue of training, emphasizing that not enough provision is made to train mute and deaf people. She highlights issues of broken equipment like the tractor and harvester which never get repaired, poor facilities, and logistics support. She blames poor organization and management at various levels of the system. | | | |
| * Has then been any changes in your farming? | |  | They had nothing when they started, not even a shovel. Now, apart from the use of the tunnels and the land, the infrastructure was here. |
| * Did you hear about Covid-19 and how did you hear about it? * How did Covid 19 affect you? * How did you respond to the government’s lockdown? * How did you hear about the government’s response and how did you benefit? | |  | Mostly from the radio, tv, and community, it was described as dangerous to society.  I stayed at home with no income and reorganize.  Some workers had problems getting to work in the first lockdown, hard to get permits, and misunderstandings with the policy on the way, this was exacerbated by them being deaf and not able to communicate with the police. But that is no longer a problem now.  They divided the workers into different groups so not all come at the same time due to Covid. “Some of them are now back to work”. All were supposed to come back on 1st March. But today they went for SASSA, grants.  She did not apply for the Covid-19 grant |
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Notes: She is ambitious, and prepared to learn and grow. Big success, we used to have a mentor from the Ekasi innovation hub, our financial mentor, and an accountant from three years back. Now he decided to buy a farm after seeing our financials. He is a first-time farmer. He has about 2hectare, we are doing well with him. We partner with him, he gave us a portion of his land where we plant our own crops. we build a tunnel. We sell everything of his. We don’t pay rent, water and electricity is his expense. He lives in Midrand. There are a few other farmers that we recently partnered with, we are preparing the farms. The second farmer, 1 hectare, tractors just started a few days ago. And in this one, we will go 50% share of profit. Expenses of electricity and water are his. Also starting with another farmer in Vaal.

She notes the importance of training for starting, especially for deaf people because it is difficult to learn if you can’t hear. She has started a system where each will be responsible for a tunnel and get a share of the income from that tunnel. She is trying to set up some kind of incentive system and link earnings to work done and production. She emphasizes the importance of women and youth being supported by the government, she highlights the high numbers of unemployment and poverty.

They had a protest action as the farmers in part due to the failure of the management of Agripark to put in place any clear Covid measures. They closed the gate, wrote to the MEC, and demanded action. This also became a protest about other service problems at the Agripark, like the unreliable water supply.