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DESIGN EVALUATION ON LINKING SOCIAL PROTECTION BENEFICIARIES TO SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

FINAL REPORT

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DESIGN EVALUATION ON LINKING SOCIAL PROTECTION BENEFICIARIES TO SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

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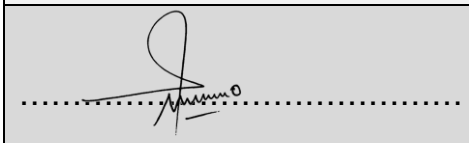
PREPARED FOR THE CONSULTANTS BY:	**RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL BY:**
 **Brian Chivumo** Project Manager	…… **Tamary Maluleke** Project Manager
CLIENT: SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD UNIT - **DSD**	
SUPPORTED FOR APPROVAL:	**APPROVED:**
…… **Emma Tabane** Project Lead	…… **Hope Vivian** Director**:** Sustainable Livelihood

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS 4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 8
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 9
RECOMMENDATIONS 13

1. INTRODUCTION **17**

1.1 CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND TO THE INTERVENTION 17
1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE EVALUATION 18
1.3 PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION 18
1.4 TARGET AUDIENCE AND EXPECTED USE OF THE REPORT 18

2. METHODOLOGY **19**

2.1 EVALUATION DESIGN AND RATIONALE 19
2.2 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK 20
2.3 EVALUATION CRITERIA 20
2.4 SCOPE OF WORK 24
2.5 EVALUATION METHODS 24
2.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE EVALUATION 26

3. PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION **27**

3.1 DSD SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMMES 27
3.2 THEORY OF CHANGE 27
3.3 IMPORTANCE OF A THEORY OF CHANGE 27
3.4 OVERVIEW OF THE THEORY OF CHANGE AND LOGICAL FRAMEWORK 28
3.5 PROBLEM STATEMENT 28
3.6 TARGET POPULATION 29
3.7 INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS 29
3.8 KEY INDICATORS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES 29

4. LITERATURE REVIEW AND BENCHMARKING **32**

4.1 INTRODUCTION 32
4.2 DEFINING SOCIAL PROTECTION 32
4.3 THE FIVE FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION 32
4.4 EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL PROTECTION POST-1994 33
4.5 SOCIAL PROTECTION AS A RIGHT 33
4.6 SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF SOCIAL PROTECTION 34
4.7 DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WELFARE 34
4.8 THE FRAMEWORK TO LINK SOCIAL PROTECTION BENEFICIARIES TO SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES 34
4.9 INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKS AND BEST PRACTICES ANALYSIS 35
4.10 NATIONAL POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK 37
4.11 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS 38
4.12 CONCLUSION 40

5. KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS **40**

5.1 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS 41
5.1.1 BENEFICIARY DEMOGRAPHICS 41
5.1.2 KEY INFORMANT DEMOGRAPHICS 43
5.1.4 RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS 45

5.2 EVALUATION FINDINGS BY OECD CRITERIA AND KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS 46
5.2.1 RELEVANCE 46
5.2.2 COHERENCE 53
5.2.3 EFFECTIVENESS 57
5.2.4 EFFICIENCY 95
5.2.5 SUSTAINABILITY 100
5.2.6 LESSONS LEARNT 103

6. DISCUSSIONS 108

6.1 REFLECTIONS ON STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE DESIGN 108
6.2 COMPARISON WITH BENCHMARKS AND LITERATURE 108
6.3 DESIGN RESPONSIVENESS TO LOCAL NEEDS AND LABOUR MARKET DYNAMICS 108
6.4 ADEQUACY OF THE THEORY OF CHANGE AND ITS ASSUMPTIONS 108
6.5 INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY TO DELIVER THE PROGRAMME EFFECTIVELY 109
6.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION, M&E, AND POLICY ALIGNMENT 109

7. CONCLUSIONS 109

7.1 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS 109
7.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMME EFFECTIVENESS, SCALABILITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY 110
7.3 READINESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION 110

8. POLICY IMPLICATION SUMMARY 110

9. RECOMMENDATIONS 111

9.1 IMPROVEMENTS TO PROGRAM DESIGN AND LOGICAL FRAMEWORK 112
9.2 ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS 112
9.3 STRENGTHENING TARGETING, DELIVERY MECHANISMS, AND M&E 113
9.4 POLICY AND OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS 114
9.5 ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A CLOUD-BASED M&E SYSTEM 114
9.6 ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GRADUATION MODEL 115

REFERENCES 116

ANNEXURES 118

ANNEXURE A: RESULTS VALIDATION WORKSHOP PRESENTATION SLIDES 118

ANNEXURE B: FINAL SHORT REPORT 118

ANNEXURE C: KEY INFORMANT QUESTIONNAIRE 118

ANNEXURE D: BENEFICIARY QUESTIONNAIRE 118

ANNEXURE E: DATASETS 118

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1:Theory of Change Schematic Diagram 31
Figure 2: Beneficiary Demographics Summary (n=79) 42
Figure 3: Key Informant Demographics (n=133) 43
Figure 4:Provincial Distribution of Key Informants (n=133) 45
Figure 5: Beneficiary Perspectives 48
Figure 6: Clarity of Target Group Definition 50
Figure 7: Policy and Legislative Alignment 53
Figure 8: Programme planning effectiveness 57
Figure 9: Intervention Success Likelihood Assessment 61
Figure 10: Intervention Success Likelihood Assessment 66
Figure 11: Systemic Change Potential 70
Figure 12: Management Arrangement Assessment 74
Figure 13: Human Resource Assessment 79
Figure 14: Program design Alterations 85
Figure 15: Program design Outcomes 90
Figure 16: Provincial Funding Adequacy Assessment 95
Figure 17: Value for Money Assessment 98
Figure 18: Sustainability Assessment by Province 100

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Practical aspects of application of the OECD Evaluation Criteria 20
Table 2: Key Informant Perspectives 46
Table 3: Key Demographic Factors for Targeting 51
Table 4: Provincial Variations in Planning and Implementation 59
Table 5: Provincial Variations in Human Resource Capacity 81
Table 6: Provincial Variations in Program Adaptation 87
Table 7: Correlation between Program Adaptation and Outcomes 91
Table 8: Effectiveness Outcomes by Province 91

ACRONYMS

The following table provides a list of abbreviations and acronyms used in the Design Evaluation Report for Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities.

Abbreviation	Meaning
ACM	Africa Chartered Managers
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CGAP	Consultative Group to Assist the Poor
COIDA	Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act
COGTA	Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DC	Development Committee
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DPME	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
DPWI	Department of Public Works and Infrastructure
DSD	Department of Social Development
EPWP	Expanded Public Works Programme
ESC	Economic and Social Council
FS	Free State (province)
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILO	International Labour Organization
KII	Key Informant Interview
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal (province)
LEAP	Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty
LP	Limpopo Province
MP	Mpumalanga Province
NC	Northern Cape
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
NW	North West Province
NYDA	National Youth Development Agency
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme (Ethiopia)
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SLF	Sustainable Livelihoods Framework
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WC	Western Cape (province)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Activities	Actions taken or work performed through which inputs are mobilized to produce outputs
Coherence	Coherence refers to the compatibility of an intervention with other interventions within a country, sector, or institution. It involves two aspects: internal coherence and external coherence. Internal coherence examines the synergies and links between the intervention and other initiatives by the same institution or government, ensuring alignment with international norms and standards. External coherence assesses the intervention's alignment with efforts by different actors in the same context, focusing on complementarity, harmonization, coordination, and avoiding duplication while adding value.
Relevance	The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries, global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.
Effectiveness	Effectiveness refers to the extent to which the ten strategic objectives of the Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities Programme have been achieved and Programme results (outputs or outcomes) have been achieved or the extent to which progress toward outputs or outcomes has been achieved. Effectiveness also considers the influence of the implementation process on project outcomes. Even though project outcomes may be as expected initially, problems during the implementation process may mean that outcomes were unavailable to beneficiaries until later than intended or that their full potential was not realized. The implementation process may also have positive or negative effects that should be considered in relation to effectiveness.
Efficiency	Efficiency is the measure of how the Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities Programme's resources (e.g., staff time, technical, financial) are economically managed and converted to results. It measures how well the project used resources to achieve the outcome. This variable ascertains and assesses the extent to which a project has achieved its objectives within the context of the resources provided. It is measured in economic terms because it examines whether the project was an efficient use of resources for the organization.
Evaluation	Evaluation is the comparison of actual project impacts against the agreed strategic plans. It can be formative (taking place during the life of a project or organization, with the intention of improving the strategy or way of functioning of the project or organization) or summative (drawing lessons from a completed project or an organization after a certain period regarding performance against the mandate).
Impact	The positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended, or unintended. This involves the main impacts and effects resulting from the activity on the local social, economic, environmental, and other development indicators (OECD-DAC).
Indicator	It's a performance measure that describes the level of performance achieved in relation to a strategy, objective, or activity. Indicators at the strategy level are called impact indicators. Indicators at the objective level are called outcome indicators, and indicators at the activity level are called output indicators.
Input	Financial, human, material, and information resources are used to produce

	outputs through activities and accomplish outcomes.
Intermediate Outcome	A change that is expected to logically occur once one or more immediate outcomes have been achieved. In terms of time frame and level, these are medium-term outcomes, which are usually achieved by the end of a project/Programme and are usually at the change of behaviour/practice level among beneficiaries.
Key Informant	Individuals who were interviewed or provided information to the reviewers/consultants
Mandate	An official command or authorization to act in particular ways or carry out specific activities, for example, as contained in founding statutes or laws or directly by a constituency.
Monitoring	Monitoring is the systematic collection and analysis of information as a project progresses. It is aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of a project or organization. Monitoring is usually based on targets set and activities planned during the planning phases of work. It helps to keep the work on track and can let management know when things are going wrong. If done properly, it is an invaluable tool for good management and provides a useful base for evaluation.
Objective	Outlines the strategic intent of a Programme or project. In the Results-based Based Management (RBM) approach, objectives are statements that concretely and specifically describe a result to be achieved. They serve as a basis for clarifying intentions, planning, guiding activity toward a desired result, and assessing achievement.
Output	Direct products or services stem from the activities of an organization, policy, Programme, or initiative.
Results	A describable or measurable change in state that is derived from a cause-and-effect relationship. Results are the same as the Outcomes and further qualified as immediate, intermediate, or ultimate.
Strategic Plan	A broadly defined plan aimed at creating a desired future.
Sustainability	At an institutional level, sustainability concerns measuring whether the organization has systems and resources in place to continue after support rendered has been withdrawn. It also concerns the extent to which projects can continue after Institutional funding assistance has ended. Assessing sustainability involves evaluating the extent to which relevant social, economic, political, institutional, and other conditions for sustainability are present.
Ultimate Outcome	The highest-level change that can be attributed to an organization, policy, Programme, or initiative in a causal manner is the consequence of one or more intermediate outcomes. The outcome usually represents the raison d'être of an organization, policy, Programme, or initiative and takes the form of a sustainable change of state among beneficiaries
Social Protection	Social Protection refers to Programmes like social grants, food and nutrition Programmes, health care, quality education, and skills development. It is concerned with preventing, managing, and overcoming situations that adversely affect people's well-being.

Sustainable Livelihoods	A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from the stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future. Focus is more on strengths, self-reliance, resilience and capacities rather than weaknesses.
Social Assistance	A social grant including social relief of distress paid to vulnerable individuals and households who are unable to support themselves.
Gross Domestic Product	This is one of the main indicators used to measure the performance of the country's economy.
Community Nutrition and Development Centres	These centres are initiatives by the Department of Social Development that provide nutritious meals to individuals and households experiencing hunger and poverty.
Integrated Food and Nutrition Security Task Team	This is a task team responsible for coordinating efforts to address food and nutrition security challenges within the country. It brings together various stakeholders to develop and implement strategies aimed at ensuring that all South Africans have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. The Integrated Food and Nutrition Security Task Team (IFNSTT) plays a crucial role in aligning national policies and Programmes to combat hunger and malnutrition effectively, thereby contributing to the nation's overall social development goals.
Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Programme	This is an intergovernmental initiative that provides agricultural assistance, such as seedlings, equipment, and fertilizers, to households facing food insecurity, enabling them to produce their food.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION CONDUCTED BY AFRICA CHARTERED MANAGERS (2024-2025)

This report has been independently prepared by Africa Chartered Managers (ACM) on behalf of the Department of Social Development (DSD). The study was overseen by an evaluation steering committee team established specifically for it, which was comprised of officials from within the DSD.

The ESC oversaw the study and commented on and approved the other main preceding deliverables before the submission of this Final Report.

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LEAD EVALUATOR	Sitembiso Gamakhulu
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ACM TEAM MEMBERS	EVALUATION STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS
Brian Chivumo (Project Manager, ToC & Field Mission Facilitator) Sitembiso Gamakhulu (Lead Evaluator) Dr Abigail Ornellas (Community Development Expert) Khathutshelo Muvhango (QA Manager & Co-Facilitator) Shelton Chirima – Quantitative Data Analyst Ms Nxalati Maluleke – Qualitative Data Analyst	Ms Desiree Jason (M&E) Ms Tamary Maluleke Ms Dibolelo Ababio (M&E) Ms Hope Vivian (Sustainable Livelihood) Ms Emma Tabane (Development Planning) Ms Modjadji Letsoalo (Community Mobilisation) Mr Klaas Baloyi (Children and Family Benefits) Ms Lindiwe Madlala (NPO) Mr Mpho Putu (Household Food and Nutrition Security)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This final evaluation report presents a comprehensive analysis of the design and implementation of the programme linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities across South Africa's nine provinces. Findings are derived from two primary data sources: key informant interviews with officials and implementers from the Department of Social Development (DSD), and surveys conducted with programme beneficiaries. The evaluation applies the OECD-DAC criteria relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability to assess the programme's design and its capacity to deliver on intended objectives. The evaluation also captures lessons learned during implementation. A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was employed to provide a nuanced understanding of how the programme is experienced by both implementers and beneficiaries.

The Programme

The DSD has a longstanding commitment to delivering social protection services and forging partnerships aimed at empowering vulnerable individuals and communities to achieve self-reliance. This programme supports the Department's focus on economic transformation and job creation by linking social protection recipients to sustainable livelihood pathways. Historically, the social protection system has been critiqued for offering limited responses that focus mainly on income support without tackling systemic barriers to economic inclusion.

The programme seeks to enhance the income, capabilities, and assets of the poor by contributing towards breaking the cycle of poverty and building self-sufficient individuals through skills development, enterprise support, and market integration. Implemented initiatives include community nutrition and development centres, small enterprise projects, agricultural interventions, skills training, and cooperative development.

The Evaluation

In February 2024, the DSD commissioned Africa Chartered Managers to evaluate the programme's design. The objective was to generate evidence to guide structural refinements and ensure that practical and scalable solutions are in place to connect social protection recipients to livelihood opportunities. This evaluation marks a pivotal point in improving programme outcomes and establishing long-term impact.

The evaluation employed a cross-sectional, theory-based design anchored in a mixed-methods approach. Data collection spanned all nine provinces, focusing on local-level interpretations and adaptations of the programme. A Theory of Change was reconstructed during the evaluation previously absent to articulate the programme's logic model and pathways to intended results. Triangulation of multiple data sources enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings.

KEY FINDINGS BASED ON OECD-DAC EVALUATION CRITERIA

Relevance

There is a broad consensus among stakeholders that the programme is relevant to DSD's mandate for poverty alleviation. Among 133 key informants, 46% rated the programme as very relevant, while 29% considered it moderately relevant. The programme is perceived as an effective mechanism that would further augment social grants' impact on poverty alleviation by enabling sustainable income-generation.

From the beneficiaries' perspective, 54% reported that the programme had a positive impact on their lives. Nearly half (48%) acquired skills that improved their employability, and 42% gained knowledge about government processes and services. Food security improvements were especially noted in the Northern Cape, aligning with departmental priorities.

However, concerns were raised around target group clarity. Although 41% of respondents indicated that the target group was well defined, only 8% of beneficiaries were aged 18–24 despite high youth unemployment, and another 8% were persons with disabilities, despite being identified as a priority by 42% of stakeholders. The gender distribution 72% female, 28% male also revealed potential exclusion or systemic access barriers for men.

The programme's objectives are consistent with DSD's strategic focus on economic inclusion. While the identification criteria (age, gender, disability, geography) were generally appropriate, the inconsistency in local adaptation of targeting undermined overall effectiveness. Moreover, field data suggested that many beneficiaries lacked an integrated understanding of how programme components were intended to support their economic transition, pointing to a need for improved orientation and capacity building during enrolment.

Coherence

Conceptually, the programme aligns well with national and sectoral strategies such as the National Development Plan (cited by 55% of key informants), the Food Security Strategy (33%), and the Social Protection Framework (34%). A majority (76%) of stakeholders perceived at least moderate policy alignment.

However, a significant policy-implementation gap was observed. While national policy coherence exists, translation into effective operational models was uneven across provinces. The Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng performed better in aligning policy with practice, whereas provinces such as Northwest and Mpumalanga exhibited weaker alignment.

Beneficiaries lacked explicit awareness of formal policies but could intuitively relate the programme's objectives to broader development goals, particularly in relation to poverty alleviation and youth empowerment.

Despite moderate institutional coherence with national priorities, integration with parallel government initiatives such as EPWP, SASSA services, and SETA programmes was limited. Stakeholder accounts highlighted fragmentation and duplication. Weak interdepartmental coordination siloed planning, and a lack of operational synergy limited programme effectiveness. Additionally, alignment with international best practices, such as the BRAC Graduation Model,

remains aspirational, with South Africa yet to embed time-bound sequencing and mentoring components.

Effectiveness

Only 24% of key informants considered the programme to be well planned, with 42% rating it as moderately planned and 26% as poorly planned. Key planning deficiencies included a lack of detailed implementation plans, insufficient contextualisation at the provincial level, and poor documentation.

Implementation success was strongly linked to quality planning. Provinces like Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape, which had stronger planning and coordination systems, reported high levels of beneficiary satisfaction and implementation success. Conversely, provinces such as Northwest and Mpumalanga showed lower planning quality, which reflected in limited impact.

The reconstructed Theory of Change, while conceptually robust, remains under-utilised as a strategic tool. Programme effectiveness is further constrained by ambiguities in provincial roles and the shortage of skilled personnel. Implementation has often been reactive, rather than informed by long-term strategic planning.

While intermediate outcomes such as food security and self-reported income improvements were noted especially among cooperatives and youth enterprises, only 27% of beneficiaries reported increased income. This suggests that while the programme builds individual capacity, it does not yet effectively address structural barriers to economic equity.

Efficiency

A severe funding shortfall was reported across all provinces. Interior provinces such as the Northern Cape (95% reporting inadequate funding), Free State (93%), and Northwest (90%) were the most affected. Even relatively well-resourced provinces like Gauteng (70%) and Western Cape (68%) flagged major funding constraints.

These funding limitations have curtailed the programme's scale and quality. Services have suffered as beneficiary numbers increased without proportional resource allocation. Nonetheless, some provinces demonstrated resourcefulness in maintaining value through partnerships, adaptive delivery models, and community engagement. Notably, the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng showed efficient resource use under constrained conditions.

The programme lacks a unified monitoring system to track inputs and outcomes, and cost-effectiveness analysis is absent. Ad-hoc budgeting and weak procurement planning further undermine financial efficiency. Where partnerships with NGOs and private actors were formed, additional resources were leveraged particularly in skills training and market access.

Sustainability

The programme's long-term sustainability prospects are uneven. While 59% of informants were optimistic about sustainability, 28% held a moderate view, and 13% doubted the programme's longevity. Western Cape (73%), Gauteng (71%), and KwaZulu-Natal (70%) showed the highest confidence, while the Free State and Northwest fell below 50%.

Factors supporting sustainability include political support, market linkages, skills development, community ownership, stakeholder collaboration, and adequate funding. Institutional frameworks vary widely, with Gauteng and the Western Cape scoring higher, while Northwest and Free State showed weaker capacity.

Beneficiaries were more optimistic than officials, with 78% expressing confidence in long-term impact and 68% believing in the utility of acquired skills. Community ownership was evident, with 58% of beneficiaries reporting a strong sense of responsibility toward the programme.

Nonetheless, most programme elements lack defined exit strategies or continuity plans, making long-term sustainability uncertain. Integration with financial inclusion mechanisms remains limited, and weak municipal buy-in undermines local anchoring.

Lessons learnt

The evaluation highlights several best practices from international models such as the BRAC Graduation Model (Bangladesh), Chile Solidario, and Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme. These models share common features: phased intervention design, mentorship, case management, financial inclusion, and inter-sectoral coordination.

Locally, South Africa's Working for Water and Working for Wetlands programmes offer lessons in combining public employment with training and ecological restoration. From these models, critical success factors include bundled service delivery, tailored graduation pathways, institutional coherence, community ownership, and effective monitoring systems.

Recommendations arising from these insights include adopting a phased graduation model, embedding mentorship, localising delivery through municipalities, leveraging digital tracking systems, aligning livelihoods with local economic sectors, and exploring blended financing.

Conclusion

The programme presents a visionary approach to linking social protection with sustainable livelihoods and holds strategic value for inclusive development. However, design and implementation challenges ranging from funding constraints and weak coordination to the absence of exit strategies limit its potential for systemic impact.

Addressing provincial disparities, strengthening institutional frameworks, refining targeting methods, and investing in robust monitoring systems are vital. Drawing on proven models such as BRAC and leveraging existing public works experiences can help DSD build a more resilient, scalable, and impactful programme.

If recalibrated with strong inter-sectoral collaboration, improved funding mechanisms, and context-responsive strategies, this programme could become a national model for lifting vulnerable populations out of poverty and into sustainable economic participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents structured recommendations based on the design evaluation of the program linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities. Each recommendation includes its policy implication, specific recommendation, responsible institution(s), and a suggested timeline for implementation.

Improvements to Program Design and Logical Framework

Policy Implication	Recommendation	Responsible Institution	Timeline
The current design lacks contextual flexibility and clear exit pathways	Revise the logical framework to include well-defined intermediate outcomes, province-specific outputs, and a structured beneficiary graduation model	DSD National, with Provincial DSD units and technical experts	6–12 months
The Theory of Change does not fully account for structural barriers	Update the Theory of Change to include assumptions about market access, social norms, and systemic inequalities (e.g., gender, disability, rural isolation)	DSD National Planning Directorate	3–6 months
Provincial planning inconsistencies undermine programme coherence	Develop standardised provincial implementation templates that allow contextual adaptation while ensuring alignment with national goals	DSD National in collaboration with the Planning and Monitoring Unit	6–9 months

Enhancing Institutional Arrangements and Partnerships

Policy Implication	Recommendation	Responsible Institution	Timeline
Weak institutional capacity undermines programme delivery	Strengthen staffing through targeted recruitment and capacity building in livelihoods development, M&E, and enterprise development	DSD HR and Provincial Departments with support from National Treasury	6–18 months
Stakeholder fragmentation reduces implementation effectiveness	Establish interdepartmental coordination forums at provincial level (e.g., DSD, SEDA, DTIC, COGTA, and NGOs) with defined roles and shared objectives	DSD Provincial Directors, Premiers' Offices	3–6 months
Limited private sector engagement reduces market access	Formalise partnerships with business chambers, cooperatives, and buyers to link beneficiaries to markets	DSD Economic Inclusion Directorate and Department of Small Business Development	6–12 months

Strengthening Targeting, Delivery Mechanisms, and M&E

Policy Implication	Recommendation	Responsible Institution	Timeline
Vague targeting results in inclusion/exclusion errors	Develop a national beneficiary profiling and vulnerability assessment toolkit to standardise selection	DSD Social Policy and Information Units	6 months
Inconsistent quality of delivery across provinces	Establish a national training and certification framework for programme implementers (incl. mentorship models)	DSD Academy, SETAs, and Provincial Training Centres	9–12 months

Policy and Operational Considerations

Policy Implication	Recommendation	Responsible Institution	Timeline
The programme is not embedded in a long-term funding strategy	Advocate for multi-year funding allocations within the MTEF for livelihoods programming	DSD National Finance Unit and National Treasury	Budget cycle (0–12 months)
Youth, women, and people with disabilities remain underserved	Mainstream inclusive design by developing dedicated implementation models for youth, women-headed households, and persons with disabilities	DSD Gender, Youth & Disability Units with DBE, NYDA, and NGOs	6–12 months
National oversight lacks a framework for performance accountability	Create a national performance and accountability framework for provinces, tied to incentive mechanisms and peer review	DSD DG's Office with DPME and Premiers' Forums	9–15 months

Adoption and Implementation of a Cloud-Based M&E System

Policy Implication	Recommendation	Responsible Institution	Timeline
Lack of implementation monitoring, fragmented and paper-based M&E systems hinder real-time tracking, adaptive learning, and national visibility of programme outcomes	Introduce and implement a digital M&E platform (cloud-based M&E system) that allows real-time data collection, dashboard visualisation, beneficiary tracking, and feedback integration across all provinces	DSD M&E Directorate in collaboration with SITA, DPME, and a technical cloud-service provider	Design and procurement: 0–6 months; Pilot rollout (3 provinces): 6–12 months; Full national scale-up: 12–24 months

Adoption and Implementation of the Graduation Model

Policy Implication	Recommendation	Responsible Institution	Timeline
The current design of the Sustainable Livelihood Programme is fragmented and largely rooted in unsustainable, grant-based welfare approaches. This model falls short of aligning with integrated, livelihood-oriented frameworks that emphasize economic inclusion, long-term sustainability, and resilience for vulnerable populations.	It is recommended that the Department of Social Development (DSD) formally adopt the Graduation Model as the foundational approach for the Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities Programme building on the lessons from the GBL Pilot Programme	DSD M&E and Sustainable Livelihood Directorates in collaboration with SASSA, DPME.	Design and implementation: 6–36 months; Pilot rollout: (Build on the GBL Pilot Programme in the 3 provinces): 6–24 months; Full national scale-up: 12–36 months

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND TO THE INTERVENTION

The Department of Social Development (DSD) derives its core mandate from the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa: Section 27 (1) (c) of the Constitution provides for the right of access to appropriate social assistance to those unable to support themselves and their dependants. The department has a broad mandate to develop and implement policies, Programmes, and services aimed at improving the well-being and social development of the country's citizens, with a particular focus on vulnerable and marginalized populations. Its primary objectives include poverty alleviation, social assistance, and the promotion of social cohesion and community development. The national DSD has the responsibility for overseeing the overall design and management of the Sustainable Livelihood Programmes (SLP), which includes standardizing the approach, setting guidelines for its implementation, and monitoring its progress and impact. The provincial DSDs, on the other hand, are responsible for executing the Programme at the local level, ensuring its proper implementation, and reporting on its outcomes.

The DSD further implements a range of Policies and Programmes to address South Africa's social challenges. These include managing social grants such as the Old Age Grant, Child Support Grant, Disability Grant, and Foster Care Grant, as well as running youth employment initiatives to combat unemployment through training and job opportunities. The department also supports community development projects to uplift disadvantaged areas and provides victim support services for individuals affected by crime and gender-based violence. Additionally, it oversees and regulates early childhood development centres to promote the well-being of young children. To achieve these goals, the department collaborates with other government entities to tackle the country’s complex social issues effectively.

In response to this, the Chief Directorate: Poverty Alleviation, Sustainable Livelihoods, Food, and Nutrition Security developed a framework titled “Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities.” This framework aims to enhance the income, assets, and capabilities of vulnerable populations, promoting the achievement of sustainable livelihoods.

Following the adoption of the framework on “Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihoods Opportunities by the DSD Chief Directorate; Poverty Alleviation, Sustainable Livelihoods Food and Nutrition Security, DSD in collaboration with Africa Chartered Managers (ACM) commissioned a design evaluation to collect empirical evidence to ensure that Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities Programme is well designed and robust with workable solutions.

Following the development of a survey design and data collection protocol by Africa Chartered Managers approved by the DSD, ACM conducted the field study to collect primary data and evaluate the design of this initiative. The evaluation aims to gather evidence to ensure the Programme is well-structured and offers practical solutions for linking social protection beneficiaries to sustainable livelihood opportunities on the Programme’s achievements during the specified period.

The study collected data from several key sources. Initially, the target group included national and provincial government officials from the Department of Social Development (DSD), as well as partners, stakeholders, and beneficiaries. These groups were consulted through provincial workshops and self-administered e-questionnaires to evaluate the connection between social protection beneficiaries and sustainable livelihood opportunities. The next group targeted for data collection was the national officials managing the Community Development and SLP Programmes

within the DSD. Their insights into the Programme's design and implementation were gathered through e-questionnaires.

Collaboration between the Department of Social Development (DSD) and Africa Chartered Managers was established for a participatory evaluation and field data collection project. The project commenced on August 15th, 2024, and concluded the first and second phases of the planned data collection period on March 28th, 2025. The report covers nine (9) provinces: KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape, Gauteng, Free State, Mpumalanga, and Northwest.

The DSD national technical team played an oversight role in supervising the data collection process to ensure its accuracy and quality. ACM was responsible for leading the development of the Theory of Change and carrying out field-level data collection. Following the submission of the draft evaluation report, the Evaluation Steering Committee reviewed the document and provided feedback, which ACM has incorporated into the final report. Additionally, on 18–19 June 2025, ACM facilitated a results validation workshop, convened by DSD at the Anew Hotel in Benoni, where stakeholders provided further input. These contributions have also been integrated into the final evaluation report.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE EVALUATION

The Department of Social Development (DSD) has long provided social protection related services and building partnerships that empower vulnerable individuals and communities to achieve self-reliance and actively participate in their development. This focus aligns with their recognition of the need for economic transformation and job creation, particularly by connecting social protection beneficiaries with sustainable livelihood opportunities. However, the current social protection system has faced criticism for its limited approach, focusing mainly on improving living conditions and income levels without addressing broader, more sustainable solutions.

A pilot implemented in Dutyini Village, Eastern Cape (2005–2006), explored the idea of linking social grants to livelihoods and cooperatives as a strategy for promoting self-reliance. The study emphasized the importance of integrating social grant recipients into larger development programs to strengthen their livelihood strategies. While social grants have effectively reduced poverty and unemployment, they are not a long-term solution. Sustainable livelihoods, which can withstand economic shocks while maintaining assets and capabilities, require proactive and strategic interventions.

In February 2024, the DSD engaged Africa Chartered Managers to evaluate the design of the initiative. The goal of this evaluation is to gather evidence to ensure the program is well-structured and provides effective, practical solutions to connect social protection beneficiaries with sustainable livelihood opportunities. This evaluation is a crucial step in refining the initiative and ensuring its long-term success and impact.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of the study is to collect empirical evidence to ensure that Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities Programme is well-designed and robust with workable solutions

1.4 TARGET AUDIENCE AND EXPECTED USE OF THE REPORT

The evaluation was conducted to determine the extent to which the Department of Social Development's programme, Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood

Opportunities, was effectively planned and implemented to improve outcomes for vulnerable populations and foster inclusive socio-economic development. The findings are intended to inform a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, programme managers, civil society actors, researchers, and international development partners. These audiences play critical roles in shaping, executing, or supporting social protection and livelihood initiatives across South Africa. The evaluation outcomes aim to support evidence-informed decision-making for government officials involved in policy design and programme oversight, while also assisting NGOs and community organizations in service delivery and advocacy efforts. Academic and research institutions will benefit from the evaluation's insights into poverty reduction and welfare strategies. Furthermore, the findings will support development partners in aligning funding and technical support. Ultimately, the evaluation products offer practical recommendations to improve programme effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 EVALUATION DESIGN AND RATIONALE

The evaluation applied a cross-sectional, theory-based design guided by a mixed-methods approach that integrated both qualitative and quantitative techniques. This design enabled a comprehensive assessment of the Department of Social Development's Programme for Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities, particularly its design integrity and early implementation. Data was collected across all nine provinces of South Africa using a descriptive study design that allowed the research team to observe and document the Programme as it unfolded within varied provincial contexts. This approach was grounded in the need to understand how the Programme was interpreted and operationalised at the local level.

Given the absence of a pre-existing Theory of Change (ToC) for the intervention, the evaluation began with a retrospective ToC reconstruction. This foundational step aimed to clarify the causal pathways that underpin the Programme's intended goals as outlined in the DSD's Framework. It also enabled the alignment of evaluation instruments particularly survey questions with the logic of the ToC, thereby enhancing the relevance and accuracy of evidence gathered.

"The mixed-methods design allowed for breadth and depth in addressing the evaluation questions. The evaluator adopted a utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) approach as part of the methodology mix to execute the assignment by involving key stakeholders at every level of the evaluation to ensure utilisation of the results". The Key Informant Interview (KII) tool was predominantly qualitative, featuring open-ended questions linked to the core evaluation themes. Thematic analysis was used to extract key insights from qualitative responses, while quantitative data, processed using SPSS version 27, was analysed to produce frequency tables and visual representations across dimensions such as relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and lessons learned. These results were disaggregated by province and demographic characteristics, including gender and disability, to expose inequalities and localised trends.

Triangulation of data sources including KIIs, focus group discussions, case studies, perception surveys, and secondary datasets like the General Household Survey, GCRO Quality of Life Survey, and South Africa Demographic and Health Survey strengthened the reliability and validity of findings. NVivo software was used to manage and analyse qualitative data, facilitating structured content analysis and categorisation of dominant and emerging themes. Field notes and audio recordings were also referenced to validate insights and account for contextual nuances.

Overall, this methodological framework ensured both analytical rigour and contextual sensitivity. It captured not only the statistical trends across the provinces but also the lived experiences, perceptions, and operational realities of stakeholders and beneficiaries. This holistic approach provided a nuanced understanding of programme performance and laid a strong foundation for informing improvements to design, implementation, and monitoring practices.

2.2 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The Programme Evaluation Matrix, developed by the ACM Evaluation Team and endorsed by the project steering committee during the inception phase, served as a foundational tool in guiding the design evaluation of the initiative linking social protection beneficiaries to sustainable livelihoods. Created following the finalisation of the Programme's Theory of Change, the matrix was a central component of the Inception Package and played a key role in structuring the evaluation's scope, focus, and methodology.

This matrix organized evaluation questions, indicators, data sources, and methods, ensuring consistency across data collection, analysis, and reporting. It provided a structured link between evaluation criteria derived from the DSD Terms of Reference and the tools used during fieldwork in various provinces. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative data within a mixed-methods framework, the matrix facilitated triangulation, quality assurance, and evidence coherence.

It enabled the evaluation team to systematically assess programme design, implementation, and impact, aligning evaluation questions with appropriate analytical methods. The matrix will continue to guide the finalization of the Design Evaluation Report, ensuring alignment between planned data strategies and the conclusions and recommendations presented.

2.3 EVALUATION CRITERIA

Below is a table with key evaluation questions posed by the DSD to guide the study. The ACM evaluation team thoughtfully applied the OECD evaluation criteria for each criterion throughout this evaluation accordingly.

Table 1: Practical aspects of application of the OECD Evaluation Criteria

CRITERIA	KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS	APPLYING EVALUATION CRITERIA THOUGHTFULLY
Relevance	Is linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to sustainable livelihood Opportunities approach relevant in contributing to the DSD mandate (priorities and policies)? a) Is the target group identified and how can they be better defined (gender, disability, age, and race)? Is the basis clearly defined?	***Understanding relevance: Elements for analysis*** The definition of relevance encompasses four main dimensions: responding to needs, policies, and priorities; being sensitive and responsive to context; quality of design; and responsiveness over time (OECD). Assessing relevance involves examining differences and trade-offs between various priorities or needs and analysing changes in the context to evaluate the extent to which the intervention can remain relevant or has been adapted. By applying this framework, the evaluator analysed data on this criterion using a color-coded

		dashboard system and frequency tables to capture both Key informant's and Beneficiaries perspective to describe the intervention approach and its relevance in contributing to the DSD mandate, including priorities and policies. We also used pie charts to illustrate the findings.
Coherence	To what extent is Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities aligned to policies and legislation?	Understanding coherence involves analysing the extent to which other interventions, particularly policies, support or undermine the intervention and vice versa. This includes both internal and external coherence. Internal coherence assesses the synergies and interlinkages between the intervention and other interventions carried out by the same institution or government, as well as the consistency of the intervention with relevant international norms and standards. Based on this framework, the evaluator analysed data on this criterion using a color-coded dashboard system and frequency tables to capture both Key informant's and Beneficiaries perspective to describe the intervention approach and its to describe the extent to which the intervention aligns with policies and legislation, including the use of pie charts.
Effectiveness	To what extent is the Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities being planned? a) Based on the Theory of Change, logframe and implementation arrangements, does it look like the intervention is likely to work and achieve the intended objectives? b) Is the logic of the intervention design robust, likely to work, and likely to contribute to transformative equity? c) Is the intervention likely to result in lasting changes in systems affecting equity (for beneficiaries)? d) Are there appropriate management/institutional	***Understanding effectiveness: Elements for analysis*** Analysis of effectiveness entails considering the relative significance of objectives or results. Effectiveness serves as an aggregate measure of the extent to which an intervention has achieved or is expected to achieve relevant and sustainable impacts efficiently and coherently (OECD). The primary focus of assessing effectiveness lies in determining whether an intervention has accomplished its intended results at various levels of the results chain. Based on the described framework, the evaluator analysed data and illustrated the findings on this criterion using a color-coded dashboard system and frequency tables to capture both Key informant's and Beneficiaries perspective to describe the intervention approach and its to depict the extent to which the intervention has been

	arrangements to implement intervention? e) Is the human resource required to implement the intervention clear, realistic, and available? f) Were alterations made to the Programme design in terms of collaboration during the implementation phase based on the reality on the ground? g) What were the outcomes of these choices for effective and efficient Programme implementation?	planned, including the use of pie charts and other statistical infographics.
Efficiency	Is there sufficient funding to achieve the objectives?)	***Understanding efficiency: Elements for analysis*** Efficiency pertains to how effectively resources are utilized. Economically, it involves converting inputs (such as funds, expertise, natural resources, time, etc.) into outputs, outcomes, and impacts in the most cost-effective manner compared to feasible alternatives in the context. Timely delivery refers to completing tasks within the intended timeframe or adjusting the timeframe reasonably to accommodate the evolving context. Assessing operational efficiency involves evaluating how well the intervention was managed (OECD). This criterion provides an opportunity to evaluate whether an intervention's resources are justified by its results, which holds significant practical and political importance. Evaluating efficiency encompasses examining economic efficiency, operational efficiency, and timeliness. Based on the described framework, the evaluator presented the findings on this criterion using a color-coded dashboard system and pie charts and other statistical infographics to describe the level of funding for the intervention necessary to achieve the objectives.
Sustainability	To what extent will the linking of Social Protection Beneficiaries to sustainable livelihood Opportunities be sustainable? Are there viable alternatives to implement the	***Understanding sustainability: Elements for analysis*** The evaluation of sustainability entails examining the financial, economic, social, environmental, and institutional capacities

	Programme for different groups in various locations?	of the systems needed to sustain net benefits over time. It involves analysing resilience, risks, and potential trade-offs, including assessing the actual flow of net benefits or estimating the likelihood of net benefits continuing over the medium and long term. Understanding sustainability involves comprehending the components of the enabling environment, the continuation of positive effects, and risks and trade-offs. Based on the described framework, the evaluator analysed data and report findings on this criterion using a color-coded dashboard system and frequency tables to capture both Key informant's and Beneficiaries perspective to describe the intervention approach and its to describe the extent to which the intervention will be sustainable. Additionally, the evaluator presented the evaluation findings using statistical infographics to illustrate whether there were viable alternatives to implement the Programme for different groups in various locations as per the DSD mandate and priorities.
Lessons learnt	What evidence from South Africa and other countries on solutions that are working? Are there lessons that can be learned from these interventions in South Africa and other countries to develop workable solutions?	***Understanding lessons learned: Elements for analysis*** Lessons learned in a design evaluation can manifest as insights into what should or should not be done, as well as the outcomes of different processes. Throughout the evaluation process, lessons emerge as evaluators reflect on their experiences. The rigor and significance of a lesson learned can be assessed based on the number and quality of supporting sources, as well as the triangulation of those sources. In this criterion, the evaluators harvested lessons emanating from the grassroots to ensure that lessons learned are well-founded, relevant, and actionable. This enhanced the overall effectiveness of the evaluation process and facilitated meaningful proposed initiatives and strategies for improvements in future interventions.

2.4 SCOPE OF WORK

As outlined in the Terms of Reference, the scope of the Design Evaluation for Linking Social Grants Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities encompassed a comprehensive and multi-dimensional assessment of the programme's design and early implementation across all nine provinces of South Africa. This nationwide coverage ensured that the evaluation captured diverse contextual experiences and implementation variations across the country.

The evaluation included an extensive document review, which involved analysing relevant policies, legislative frameworks, monitoring and evaluation reports, financial statements, toolkits, norms, standards, and community development guidelines. Additionally, it involved reviewing performance data drawn from Annual Performance Plans to assess progress over a two-year period.

Primary data collection was conducted through surveys with beneficiaries, key informant interviews with programme managers and stakeholders, and focus group discussions where feasible. The evaluation also critically examined the programme's Theory of Change and Logical Framework to determine whether the design was conceptually sound and likely to yield intended outcomes. A workshop was conducted to refine or develop an updated Theory of Change and Impact Map.

Further components of the evaluation included roundtable discussions with stakeholders from academia, civil society, and government to share findings and promote cross-sectoral engagement. A needs analysis was also undertaken to understand the socio-economic realities, aspirations, and constraints of programme participants. In addition, sector mapping was carried out to identify viable opportunities and partnerships that could strengthen the link between social protection and sustainable livelihoods.

Collectively, these activities formed the foundation of a robust evaluation process designed to inform strategic improvements and optimise the Programme's design and effectiveness.

2.5 EVALUATION METHODS

2.5.1 Document Review

The evaluation included a thorough document review to assess the Programme for Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities. This involved analysing policies, legislation, monitoring and evaluation reports, Annual Performance Plans, financial records, and community development tools such as the Community Development Policy and Practitioner's Toolkit. In addition, the evaluation team conducted a national and international desktop literature review on strategies for supporting social protection beneficiaries and linking them to sustainable livelihoods. The review informed the evaluation framework by identifying sectoral linkages, assessing programme alignment, and shaping the analysis of the evaluation questions.

2.5.2 Literature Review

The Department of Social Development's (DSD) Social Protection Support to Beneficiaries Programme operates within a robust legislative and policy framework that provides structured guidance on how social protection support should be conceptualised and delivered. Central to this framework are directives related to social grants, broader social protection policies, and the National Evaluation Policy Framework, all of which have directly influenced the formulation of the Programme's Theory of Change.

To support the development of a well-contextualised problem statement and evaluation framework, the evaluation team committed to conducting a comprehensive and context-specific literature

review. This review included both local and international perspectives on social protection, with a particular focus on interventions linking social assistance to sustainable livelihood opportunities. In addition to academic and policy literature, the review incorporated program design documents, statistical datasets, routine monitoring records, and previous evaluations to enrich the understanding of contextual dynamics and operational realities surrounding the Programme.

The literature review aimed to clarify the logic and feasibility of the Programme's implementation plan, assessing whether its schedule, resources, and activities were realistically aligned with the intended outputs and outcomes. As part of this process, a project library of key documents was compiled, and findings were synthesised into a detailed literature review report to inform the broader evaluation study. The review also included a targeted analysis of the Programme's Theory of Change to unpack the underlying assumptions and assess its alignment with national social protection goals. This provided valuable insight into how the Programme is designed to produce desired results and contributed to a deeper understanding of its potential for sustainable impact.

2.5.3 Primary Data Collection

Primary data for the evaluation was collected from stakeholders involved in implementing and overseeing the Department of Social Development's (DSD) Sustainable Livelihood Programmes, aligned with Social Protection Support to Beneficiaries. A multi-stage sampling design was employed, identifying implementing partners as primary units and beneficiaries as secondary units. A diverse range of data collection methods was used to capture a comprehensive picture of the Programme's design, implementation, and impact.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires with DSD Programme Managers from all provinces, officials from the DSD Head Office, and key stakeholders such as SASSA and NGOs/NPOs. These interviews provided detailed insights into the design and operationalisation of the Programme. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were organised in workshop formats in each province, allowing beneficiaries and local stakeholders to share open-ended feedback on the Programme's effectiveness and areas for improvement. Complementary case studies were developed from direct beneficiary experiences to demonstrate the real-life impact of the interventions.

Perception surveys were embedded in data collection instruments to assess how the Programme is viewed by its target population. The data was gathered during nine provincial workshops held between 15 August 2024 and 10th April 2025, beginning in Northwest and ending in the Western Cape. Tools such as Google Forms, structured interviews, and participatory discussions were used, yielding rich qualitative and quantitative data. This enabled the evaluation team to assess the Programme's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability from both national and provincial perspectives.

Field observations were conducted during each provincial engagement to verify programme implementation, supported by photographic evidence and beneficiary outputs. Perception surveys were embedded in the tools to capture the views of the targeted population regarding the Programme's relevance, outcomes, and impact. Together, these methods ensured a comprehensive understanding of the Programme's effectiveness across varied implementation contexts.

2.5.4 Sampling approach

The sampling approach adopted for the evaluation was designed to capture a diverse and representative range of stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the Programme's implementation and oversight. The study population included social protection beneficiaries

participating in sustainable livelihood initiatives, programme managers and officials at national, provincial, and municipal levels, policy makers, community leaders, and sector experts in poverty alleviation and socio-economic development.

To ensure depth and relevance in the data collected, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted, targeting at least ten key informants per province with relevant knowledge and experience in the Programme. Selection was coordinated in advance with the Evaluation Steering Committee to ensure the process aligned with the study objectives and ensured geographic and institutional diversity.

Primary data was collected from nine provinces, specifically from the sites of Mankweng (Limpopo), Mt Ayliff (Eastern Cape), Potchefstroom (Northwest), Emalahleni (Mpumalanga), Bloemfontein (Free State), Johannesburg (Gauteng), Kimberley (Northern Cape), Wynberg's Cape South Metro (Western Cape) and Newcastle (KwaZulu-Natal). The study employed a multi-stage sampling design that identified implementing partners as primary units and beneficiaries as secondary units.

2.5.5 Ethical considerations

In line with the DPME standards on ethical evaluation, the evaluation process undertaken by Africa Chartered Managers (ACM) was grounded in integrity, transparency, and professional responsibility. The evaluation adhered to ethical principles that safeguard the rights, dignity, and privacy of all participants. Respect for cultural, social, and individual diversity across gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and language was integrated throughout the design and implementation phases of the study.

ACM ensured that all participants provided informed consent, having been fully briefed on the purpose, process, risks, and potential benefits of the evaluation. Confidentiality and anonymity were offered to promote honest engagement, and data collected was handled in strict compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA). The rights of individuals and institutions to share information confidentially were respected, and professional integrity was maintained at all times. Triangulation methods were applied to ensure accuracy, verify findings, and uphold analytical rigor.

In both Limpopo and Western Cape provinces, where formal ethical clearance is a prerequisite, ACM obtained the necessary approvals prior to any fieldwork. By committing to these ethical standards, ACM upheld the credibility, impartiality, and trustworthiness of the evaluation process and its outcomes.

2.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE EVALUATION

2.6.1 General Limitations

The evaluation did not encounter barriers in data collection across the provinces. Provincial workshops were generally well attended and included relevant stakeholders such as DSD Sustainable Livelihood Programme (SLP) managers and beneficiaries. These sessions yielded rich contributions, allowing participants to share their knowledge and lived experiences regarding the design and functioning of the programme. The participatory approach helped reveal how the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) and Asset-Based Community Development Model are perceived to influence intended outcomes. However, a notable general limitation was the inconsistency in the quality and depth of inputs from different provinces. This affected the uniformity of data interpretation, especially in terms of how programme components were understood and implemented.

2.6.2 Data Related Limitations

The most significant data-related limitation was recorded in KwaZulu-Natal, where some aspects of programme design data were insufficiently captured due to the lower quality of input from workshop participants. This created information gaps on key programme elements in that province. To mitigate this limitation, the evaluation team conducted supplementary document reviews and used secondary data sources to close these gaps and strengthen the overall analysis. Despite this, the absence of comprehensive tracking systems in some provinces also limited the ability to fully monitor programme implementation and outcomes, especially regarding participant graduation pathways and demographic targeting accuracy.

3. PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

3.1 DSD SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMMES

The Department of Social Development (DSD) has long been at the forefront of advancing social protection related services and inclusive development in South Africa. Central to this mandate is the Sustainable Livelihoods Programme (SLP), which seeks to reduce poverty, promote economic self-reliance, and build the resilience of vulnerable individuals and communities. The SLP adopts an asset-based and community-driven development approach, evolving from earlier models of social grant support toward integrated, sustainable interventions that connect beneficiaries to livelihood opportunities.

The DSD implements a wide range of SLP initiatives, including Youth Development Program, Women Development Program, support for Non-Profit Organisations (NPO)s covering Community Nutrition Distribution Centres, Food Banks or Distribution Centres, Community Nutrition and Development Centres (CNDCs). These interventions are underpinned by a framework that transitions social protection beneficiaries from being unable to take care of themselves to productive engagement that would make them to be self-sufficient. Despite its strong policy grounding, the programme faces variations in implementation quality across provinces due to disparities in infrastructure, resource availability, and institutional capacity.

The evaluation confirms that, while the SLP aligns with national poverty reduction goals, it requires a more cohesive design, strengthened monitoring systems and a structured graduation strategy to ensure sustainable outcomes and enhanced socio-economic inclusion for the poor and vulnerable.

3.2 THEORY OF CHANGE

The TOC serves as a strategic roadmap, fostering consensus among stakeholders by clarifying what is to be achieved, by whom, within what time-frame, and with what resources. It also underpins the development of the implementation framework and provides a critical reference point for ongoing monitoring and evaluation (Connell & Kubisch, 1998).

3.3 IMPORTANCE OF A THEORY OF CHANGE

The TOC serves as a strategic roadmap, fostering consensus among stakeholders by clarifying what is to be achieved, by whom, within what timeframe, and with what resources. It also underpins the development of the implementation framework and provides a critical reference point for ongoing monitoring and evaluation (Connell & Kubisch, 1998).

3.4 OVERVIEW OF THE THEORY OF CHANGE AND LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

According to the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME, 2014), a Theory of Change (TOC) provides a clear explanation of how a programme's activities and outputs are expected to lead to its intended outcomes and long-term impacts. It also outlines the necessary inputs, such as staffing, institutional arrangements, operational mechanisms, and financial resources that must be in place for these results to be achieved.

Informed by the findings from the policy analysis and international benchmarking exercise, a Master Theory of Change was developed to guide the implementation of the Programme for Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities in South Africa. This TOC offers a strategic roadmap that maps the causal pathways from programme inputs and activities through to sustainable economic outcomes for beneficiaries. It reflects the Programme's alignment with national development priorities and articulates the assumptions underpinning each stage of intervention. Figure 1 visually represents this Master TOC, serving as both a conceptual framework and practical planning tool for programme design, implementation, and evaluation.

3.5 PROBLEM STATEMENT

3.5.1 The Ideal Scenario

In a democratic South Africa that has, for over twenty-six years, implemented various poverty alleviation initiatives, social protection remains at the centre of its developmental agenda. Ideally, the existence of an institutionalised social security system complemented by functional structures should ensure that beneficiaries are not only cushioned against vulnerability but are also connected to broader economic opportunities. These opportunities should ideally empower individuals to live lives of dignity, participate meaningfully in the economy, and transition toward self-reliance through sustainable livelihoods.

3.5.2 The Reality

Despite substantial progress, South Africa's social protection system has not been adequately designed to link beneficiaries to broader economic pathways. It has largely operated as a mechanism to buffer immediate poverty, with limited impact on fostering long-term economic independence. Root causes underlying this reality include persistent unemployment, low levels of education and skills among the poor, inadequate access to markets and financial services, skills mismatch with labour demands due to misalignment with the education provided against labour demands and weak interdepartmental coordination. The country continues to grapple with entrenched structural inequality, gender disparities, and spatial poverty, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, the absence of a coherent Theory of Change historically weakened alignment between inputs and long-term outcomes.

South Africa's unemployment rate, recorded at 34.9% in 2021, disproportionately affects youth and women. A significant portion of the population lives below the food poverty line, and over 60% of rural households depend on social grants as their main income source. The system's design does not yet adequately address the systemic barriers that prevent social grant recipients from participating in productive economic activities. The burden of disease, particularly HIV, and increasing adolescent pregnancies have also amplified the need for social support, often without concurrent strategies to transition affected populations into self-sustaining livelihoods.

3.5.3 The Consequences for South Africa

Without addressing these root causes, a large segment of able-bodied individuals including caregivers, youth, and persons with disabilities remain trapped in poverty cycles. The labour market has not responded effectively to economic growth, and macroeconomic policies have not translated into inclusive job creation. Consequently, the growing fiscal pressure on the social protection system raises sustainability concerns.

3.5.4 The Solution

To reverse this trend, the government must reconceptualise social protection as not merely a safety net but a springboard into economic participation. This calls for the implementation of integrated interventions that build human capabilities, create sustainable employment, foster entrepreneurship, and provide targeted linkages to productive sectors. Revisions to the current framework must include skills development, asset accumulation, financial inclusion, and collaborative governance mechanisms. By addressing the underlying structural causes and shifting focus from consumption to empowerment, South Africa can realise a system of social protection that affirms the right to dignity and facilitates meaningful socio-economic transformation

3.6 TARGET POPULATION

The target population for the Programme on Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities includes vulnerable individuals currently reliant on state support. This includes women, youth, people with disabilities, recipients of CRD and Child Support Grants (CSG) and unemployed individuals who are recipients of social grants or are part of households receiving state social protection. The evaluation confirmed that provinces prioritised these groups due to their susceptibility to poverty, exclusion from labour markets, and limited access to productive assets and services. Criteria such as geographic disadvantage, age, gender, and disability status were employed across provinces to target participation, with an emphasis on individuals capable of transitioning into economic activities if appropriate support mechanisms are introduced.

3.7 INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

The Department of Social Development (DSD) serves as the lead institution for the Programme. It is responsible for policy formulation, coordination, and oversight. At the provincial level, DSD structures manage the implementation, often in collaboration with municipalities, community development workers, and sector departments such as Agriculture, Education, Business and Trade. Implementing partners include civil society organisation (non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and, Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs)), the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, among others. These stakeholders contribute through service delivery, skills training, funding support, and infrastructure provision. However, the evaluation revealed institutional misalignment, coordination gaps, and resource inadequacies that weaken the operationalisation of this framework across provinces

3.8 KEY INDICATORS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The Programme’s expected outcomes are structured around improved socio-economic inclusion, reduced poverty- through strengthened household resilience. Key intermediate outcomes include increased participation in income-generating activities, improved household assets, enhanced access to vocational skills training, and greater economic self-reliance. Final outcomes target the

graduation of beneficiaries from social protection into sustainable livelihoods. Indicators used to measure success include:

- Number of beneficiaries transitioned to employment or enterprise development
- Access to skills training and completion rates
- Establishment and functioning of cooperatives and SMMEs
- Household food security improvements
- Beneficiary satisfaction and perceived empowerment
- Level of institutional support and partnership effectiveness
- Reduced Levels of Poverty, Inequality, Vulnerabilities, & Social Ills
- Resilience to Shocks
- Sustainable
- Livelihoods
- Functional, Efficient, and Integrated Sector
- Reduced Financial Burden on National Fiscus
- Strengthened Social Protection System
- Community Resilience
- Social Transformation

The evaluation notes that while the overarching Theory of Change is sound and reflects these desired outcomes, current monitoring systems lack specific, measurable indicators and consistent application across provinces, undermining the Programme's ability to track progress effectively.

The schematic diagram in **Figure 1** below is a visual representation of the Master **TOC** reconstructed for the program to Link Social Protection beneficiaries to sustainable livelihood Opportunities, serving as both a conceptual framework and practical planning tool for programme design, implementation, and evaluation.

Theory of Change Schematic Diagram – Programme of Linking Social Protection Beneficiary to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities

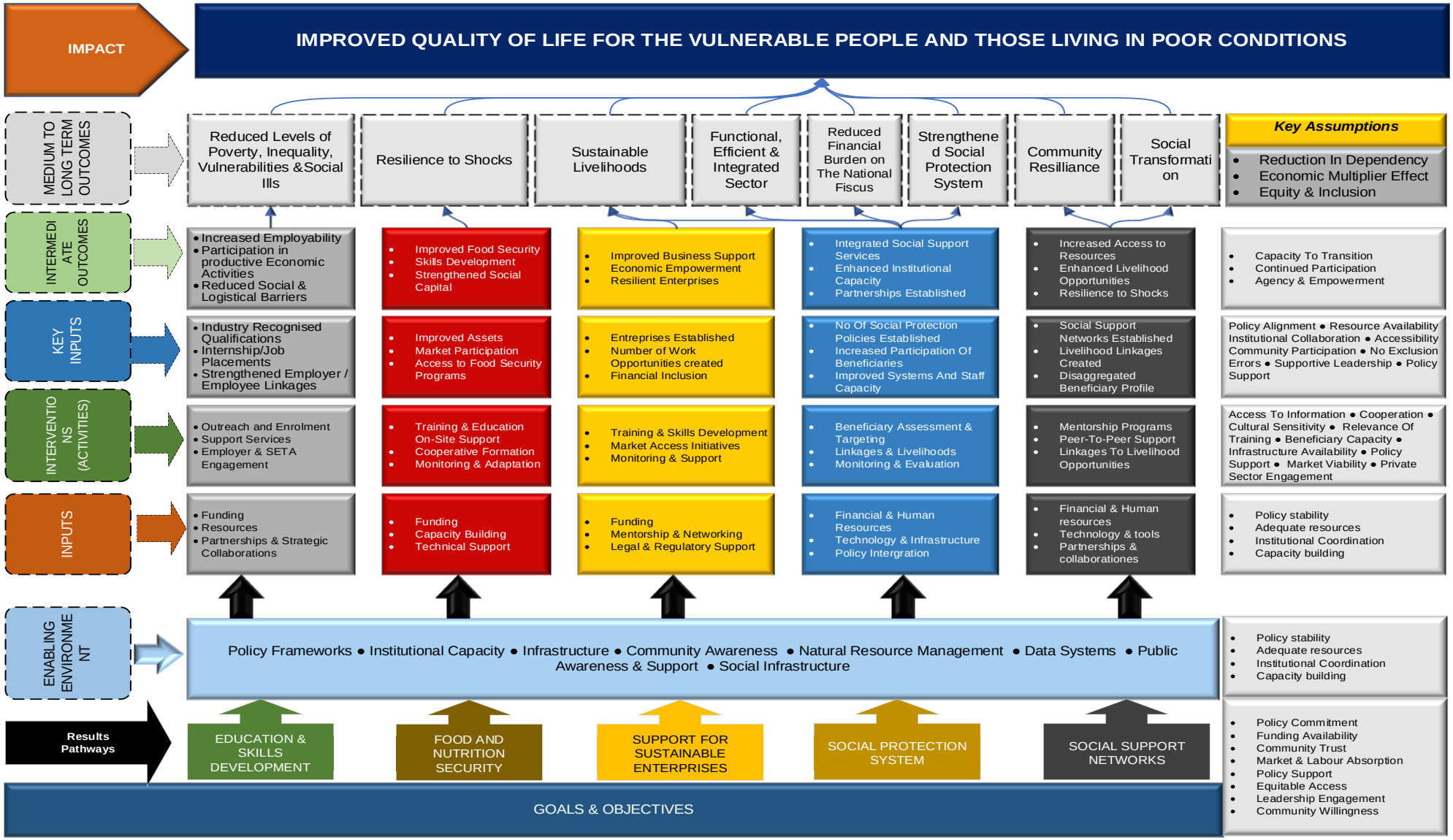


Figure 1:Theory of Change Schematic Diagram

4. LITERATURE REVIEW AND BENCHMARKING

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Social protection has become a cornerstone of inclusive development, particularly in countries grappling with high levels of poverty and inequality. In South Africa, the integration of social protection with sustainable livelihood strategies is a critical pathway toward reducing intergenerational cycle of poverty and fostering economic inclusion. Social protection plays a dual role, providing immediate relief and enabling long-term development by equipping beneficiaries with the tools and opportunities to transition from social assistance to work. This linkage aligns with the broader development vision outlined in South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP), which seeks to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012).

4.2 DEFINING SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection refers to a combination of public and private interventions aimed at providing income or consumption transfers to the poor, protecting the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhancing the social status and rights of the marginalised (Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2008). According to the NDP, social protection in South Africa is broadly conceptualised and includes statutory social assistance, social insurance, active labour market interventions, and community-driven support mechanisms. It is framed around a social "floor" which ensures that no one falls below a basic standard of living (National Planning Commission, 2012).

4.3 THE FIVE FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

The National Development Plan (NDP) outlines a comprehensive and integrated framework for social protection that is particularly suited to the South African context. Central to this framework are five interrelated and mutually reinforcing functions: protective, preventive, promotive, transformative, and developmental/generative. These functions go beyond the traditional notion of social protection as merely a welfare mechanism, redefining it as a strategic tool for social and economic transformation (National Planning Commission, 2012).

The **protective function** of social protection encompasses interventions designed to safeguard individuals and households from extreme deprivation and to save lives during times of crisis. These include immediate relief measures such as social grants and SRD critical during natural disasters, economic collapses, or personal emergencies such as illness or job loss. In South Africa, grants such as the Child Support Grant and the Older Persons Grant exemplify this function by providing income security to the most vulnerable populations who might otherwise fall below the poverty line (National Planning Commission, 2012).

The **preventive function** focuses on reducing individuals' and households' exposure to risks and preventing their descent into poverty. This involves mechanisms such as contributory social insurance schemes, health insurance, unemployment insurance, and savings schemes. By enabling people to hedge against future shocks, such as crop failure, job loss, or major illnesses, preventive measures play a stabilising role in the economy and individual livelihoods. In South Africa, the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (COIDA) are examples of preventive instruments that protect against income loss and livelihood disruption (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004).

The **promotive function** of social protection is geared towards enhancing individual and community capabilities to participate meaningfully in the economy and society. Promotive measures often include active labour market policies, vocational training, skills development, and access to productive assets such as land or finance. The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in South Africa illustrates this function as complementary provisioning by creating temporary employment while also building infrastructure and community services. Promotive interventions are central to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty, as they empower beneficiaries to transition from passive recipients of aid to active economic participants (Patel, 2015).

The **transformative function** addresses the structural and systemic roots of poverty and inequality. It involves policy changes, legal reforms, and redistributive measures aimed at promoting equity, social justice, and the realisation of human rights. Transformative social protection challenges existing power dynamics and seeks to eliminate discriminatory practices that marginalise certain groups, such as women, children, or people with disabilities. For example, constitutional guarantees of the right to social security in South Africa, as well as programmes that prioritise historically disadvantaged communities embody the transformative potential of social protection (Republic of South Africa, 1996; National Planning Commission, 2012).

Finally, the **developmental and generative function** of social protection involves actions that stimulate local economic development and increase the productive potential and consumption capacity of poor communities. These measures contribute to aggregate demand, support micro-enterprise growth, and foster local economies. In South Africa, community-based initiatives such as the Community Works Programme not only provide income but also support asset accumulation, improve service delivery, and foster social cohesion. The developmental function therefore aligns social protection with broader economic development goals, ensuring that poverty reduction efforts are sustainable in the long term (National Planning Commission, 2012).

Together, these five functions form a multidimensional framework that integrates relief, prevention, empowerment, equity, and development. The NDP thus positions social protection not merely as a safety net but as a catalyst for sustainable livelihoods, human development, and inclusive growth.

4.4 EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL PROTECTION POST-1994

South Africa's social protection system has undergone significant transformation since 1994. The post-apartheid state inherited a racially fragmented welfare regime marked by gross inequities in service delivery. The democratic government responded by constructing a unified system based on human development, economic inclusion, and social stability (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). The revised system now includes cash grants, access to basic services, labour activation schemes, and statutory insurance mechanisms. Key programmes include the Child Support Grant, the Old Age Pension, and the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) (National Planning Commission, 2012). Despite progress, challenges such as inefficiencies, fragmentation, and exclusion errors persist.

4.5 SOCIAL PROTECTION AS A RIGHT

The South African Constitution (Section 27) explicitly recognises the right to social security, including social assistance when individuals are unable to support themselves or their dependants (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The state is obliged to take reasonable legislative and other measures to progressively realise this right. The NDP reinforces this human rights approach by promoting a "social floor" that guarantees essential transfers and services to ensure a minimum standard of living (National Planning Commission, 2012). Vulnerable groups such as the elderly,

people with disabilities, and children are particularly prioritised for protection. The rights-based approach of the South African Social Security aligns very well with international statues. For example, The United Nations' Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that;

"Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality". On the other hand, Article 9 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also refers to the "right of everyone to social security, including social insurance".

4.6 SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

The scope of social protection in South Africa is expansive, encompassing a range of objectives from poverty alleviation and social equity to economic participation and human capability development. The NDP identifies the dual imperative of providing immediate safety nets while enabling beneficiaries to transition toward sustainable livelihoods through employment and entrepreneurship (National Planning Commission, 2012). Social protection is not a substitute for employment but a complementary mechanism that enhances labour productivity and builds resilience against socioeconomic shocks (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). It requires coordinated efforts between the state, individuals, and social partners including NGOs, communities, and the private sector.

4.7 DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WELFARE

The developmental approach to social welfare, formalised in the 1997 White Paper on Social Welfare, aims to empower individuals, families, and communities through integrated service delivery (Patel, 2015). The NDP supports this model by advocating for a people-centred system that builds community capabilities and thus reduce poverty shocks. It calls for professional social services, including social workers, child and youth care workers, and community development workers to respond to increasing social needs. However, constraints such as limited funding, fragmented services, and skill shortages hinder full implementation (National Planning Commission, 2012). A strengthened developmental welfare system is therefore central to ensuring that social protection leads to real and lasting improvements in livelihood opportunities.

4.8 THE FRAMEWORK TO LINK SOCIAL PROTECTION BENEFICIARIES TO SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

The South African government's approach to social protection has evolved in response to the persistent challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. A central component of this strategy is the integration of social protection with sustainable livelihoods. The Department of Social Development (DSD) has developed a comprehensive framework that seeks to transition beneficiaries from passive recipients of social assistance to active participants in economic and community development. This shift is reflective of broader global trends in social policy that seek to align social protection with developmental objectives (Department of Social Development, 2022).

The framework is grounded in the need to respond to an increasing number of individuals reliant on social grants, a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although grants such as the Child Support Grant and the COVID-19 Relief Grant provided crucial relief, they are not financially

sustainable over the long term. As such, the framework seeks to further contribute to the reduction of poverty shocks by linking beneficiaries to opportunities for skills development, income generation, and economic participation (Department of Social Development, 2022).

At the heart of the framework is the concept of developmental social protection, which goes beyond traditional safety nets to include promotive and transformative interventions. It recognizes that the root causes of poverty, such as limited access to education, employment, and assets require an integrated response. This approach echoes the principles articulated in the National Development Plan (NDP), which emphasises building capabilities and promoting active citizenry to achieve the Vision 2030 goals (National Planning Commission, 2012).

The strategic model proposed in the framework consists of three core components: empowering and strengthening the assets and capabilities of individuals, generating skills and employment opportunities, and building structured gateways to self-reliance. These elements draw from the sustainable livelihoods approach, which highlights five key forms of capital, namely human, physical, social, financial, and natural as essential to building resilience and promoting upward mobility (Carney, 1998). For example, enhancing human capital through targeted education and vocational training helps to align beneficiaries' skills with the demands of the labour market.

Moreover, the framework introduces a structured project cycle, beginning with the identification and profiling of viable projects, followed by proposal development, funding approval, and systematic monitoring and evaluation. This is designed to ensure that interventions are demand-driven, context-specific, and aligned with local economic development strategies (Department of Social Development, 2022).

Importantly, the framework underscores the significance of institutional arrangements and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Successful implementation depends on coordinated action among government departments, civil society, private sector actors, and communities themselves. Political buy-in, strong leadership, and adequate resourcing are identified as critical enablers. The role of Community Development Practitioners (CDPs) is also highlighted, particularly in maintaining close engagement with beneficiaries and ensuring timely updates of household profiles (DSD, 2022).

From a policy perspective, the framework seeks to operationalise South Africa's developmental welfare mandate by shifting the focus from consumption to production and investment. The right to dignity, enshrined in Section 10 of the Constitution, is at the core of this paradigm shift. Providing social protection must therefore also mean equipping people with the means to lead productive and independent lives (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

In conclusion, the framework reflects an important departure from residual welfare models by prioritising long-term, integrated, and asset-based approaches to poverty alleviation. It positions social protection as a catalyst for transformation, rather than merely a mechanism for temporary relief. If fully implemented, it has the potential to bridge the gap between social support and sustainable economic inclusion.

4.9 INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKS AND BEST PRACTICES ANALYSIS

4.9.1 Integration of Social Protection and Livelihoods

Across the globe, there has been a notable shift in social protection policies from purely safety-net-based systems toward integrated approaches that combine income support with opportunities for economic empowerment. This integration aims to address both the symptoms and root causes of

poverty. In Latin America, conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes such as Brazil's Bolsa Família and Mexico's Prospera have combined income support with education, health, and nutritional interventions, gradually including pathways to livelihoods through skill development and community-based projects (Barrientos & Hulme, 2009). These integrated models promote not only short-term relief but also long-term self-sufficiency.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, countries like Ethiopia and Rwanda have adopted integrated social protection strategies through public works and community development models. Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) links transfers to participation in community asset-building initiatives, while also offering livelihood support services such as credit access and skills training (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). These examples underscore the importance of a coherent policy framework that bridges welfare and economic inclusion.

4.9.2 Exit Strategies from Welfare to Sustainable Livelihoods

A critical feature of successful social protection systems is the existence of well-designed exit strategies. These facilitate the transition of beneficiaries from being unable to support themselves to being self-sustainable. One of the most widely cited international models in this area is the **BRAC Graduation Model** from Bangladesh. The model integrates a sequenced set of interventions over 24 to 36 months, including asset transfers (usually livestock), consumption stipends, skills training, access to savings, and intensive coaching (Hashemi & Montesquiou, 2011). Rigorous impact evaluations have shown that the BRAC model significantly improves consumption, asset ownership, and food security even after programme completion (Banerjee et al., 2015).

Inspired by BRAC's success, this model has been adapted in various countries such as Ethiopia, Pakistan, and Peru under the auspices of the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) and the Ford Foundation. In Ethiopia, the RESET Plus programme adapted the graduation model by tailoring support based on regional livelihoods and embedding it within the national PSNP. These models offer scalable pathways for transitioning from welfare to work and highlight the value of context-sensitive graduation designs.

4.9.3 Case Study Selection

When considering international best practices relevant to South Africa, three case studies are particularly instructive: Brazil's Bolsa Família, Bangladesh's BRAC Graduation Model, and Ethiopia's PSNP. These were selected due to their long-term implementation, robust evaluation mechanisms, and adaptability across contexts. They also illustrate different pathways to integrate social protection with livelihood support, ranging from conditional cash transfers and asset-based interventions to public works and skills development programmes. Each has been studied extensively for their impact on poverty reduction and economic resilience (Slater & McCord, 2009).

4.9.4 Comparative Analysis

Comparative analyses of these models reveal several shared characteristics. First, successful programmes adopt a multi-dimensional approach that addresses both income poverty and capability deprivation. Second, effective targeting and sustained mentoring are crucial for lasting impact. Third, programmes that link beneficiaries to markets, skills training, and institutional support have shown the most promising long-term outcomes. However, contextual differences also matter. For instance, BRAC's success in rural Bangladesh was partly due to strong community networks and low labour market entry barriers, which may differ in South Africa's urbanised, high-unemployment context (Sabates-Wheeler & Devereux, 2013).

Notably, while Brazil's model is state-led and focuses on human capital development through education and health, BRAC's approach is NGO-led with an emphasis on asset transfer and enterprise development. Ethiopia's PSNP, on the other hand, combines state leadership with donor support to provide a hybrid of public employment and household-level support. South Africa can thus draw lessons from each, particularly regarding the institutional arrangements and integrated service delivery.

4.9.5 The Role of DSD, DPWI, SETA- led Skills Training and Asset transfers

The DSD is uniquely positioned to champion an integrated livelihoods programme, leveraging its expansive reach and mandate for poverty alleviation. However, successful implementation will depend on robust interdepartmental coordination, particularly with the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI), which manages large-scale public employment programmes like the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). The DPWI can offer practical work placements and support infrastructure for livelihoods projects (DSD, 2022).

Furthermore, skills development is a cornerstone of the transition from social protection to economic participation. Programmes must be aligned with labour market needs and include vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and digital literacy initiatives. This requires collaboration with institutions such as the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

Lastly, asset transfers, particularly productive assets such as livestock, equipment, or inputs for small-scale agriculture or micro-enterprises, are critical in building beneficiaries' economic base. These should be complemented by financial literacy, market access, and mentorship to ensure sustainability. As demonstrated in the BRAC and RESET models, combining asset transfers with coaching and institutional support significantly increases the likelihood of graduation from poverty.

4.10 NATIONAL POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

4.10.1 South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) mandate

SASSA, established in 2005 under the Social Assistance Act (No. 13 of 2004), is the primary institution responsible for the administration and disbursement of social grants in South Africa. Its mandate is to ensure the provision of comprehensive social security services to eligible beneficiaries in a manner that is efficient, effective, and free of corruption. As a critical implementing arm of the Department of Social Development, SASSA plays a foundational role in the social protection system, particularly in safeguarding income for vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, and persons with disabilities. In the context of linking beneficiaries to sustainable livelihoods, SASSA's data systems, community outreach mechanisms, and ongoing monitoring functions provide strategic entry points for identifying, profiling, and targeting capable individuals for transition into livelihood programmes (Department of Social Development, 2022).

4.10.2 National Development Plan (NDP 2030)

The NDP 2030 envisions a South Africa free of poverty, inequality, and unemployment by the year 2030. Chapter 11 of the plan focuses specifically on building a comprehensive and inclusive social protection system. It advocates for integrating social assistance with labour market activation, community development, and inclusive growth strategies. A key thrust of the NDP is the transition from passive welfare to active citizenry, emphasising employment creation, human development, and productive inclusion (National Planning Commission, 2012). The plan reinforces the need to link

social grants and developmental services with opportunities that empower beneficiaries to escape intergenerational poverty and build sustainable livelihoods.

4.10.3 DSD's Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

The DSD has adopted a Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) that draws from global best practices and contextual realities in South Africa. This framework seeks to build the capacity of individuals and communities through a structured approach to asset development, economic participation, and local empowerment. Central to the SLF is the emphasis on human, social, physical, financial, and natural capital as pillars for sustainable development. The SLF is operationalised through interventions such as the Community Nutrition and Development Centres (CNDCs), public employment programmes, cooperative support, and community asset-building. The framework aligns with the DSD's broader developmental social welfare model by promoting self-reliance, dignity, and resilience among beneficiaries (Department of Social Development, 2022).

4.10.4 POPI Act, M&E Framework (DPME), and SDG alignment

The implementation of any beneficiary-linked livelihood initiative must comply with data privacy laws, particularly the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA). POPIA ensures that personal data collected and processed by government agencies, including SASSA and DSD, is done so lawfully, transparently, and with respect for data subject rights (Republic of South Africa, 2013). This is particularly important in profiling and targeting social grant recipients for livelihoods programming.

Additionally, the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework developed by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) provides the necessary tools for evidence-based policy implementation. The framework emphasises outcomes-based planning, regular feedback loops, and impact assessments, ensuring accountability and adaptive management. In this context, M&E is vital for tracking the effectiveness of linkage programmes and informing iterative improvements and this process too is affected by the POPIA Act and actors should comply accordingly in executing these activities.

Furthermore, South Africa's commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are directly aligned with the objectives of this framework. Particularly, SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) provide an international mandate to transition from social assistance to sustainable, inclusive development pathways (United Nations, 2015). Aligning national programmes with the SDGs not only enhances policy coherence but also opens avenues for international collaboration and funding.

4.11 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

4.11.1 Capabilities Approach (Sen)

The Capabilities Approach, developed by Amartya Sen, provides a foundational theoretical lens for understanding poverty not merely as a lack of income, but as a deprivation of basic capabilities, the real freedoms individuals require to lead the kind of lives they value (Sen, 1999). This approach shifts focus from monetary measures of poverty to functionings (what people are able to do) and capabilities (the freedom to achieve those functionings). In the context of linking social protection to sustainable livelihoods, the Capabilities Approach emphasizes the need to create enabling environments where individuals can develop skills, access opportunities, and achieve self-reliance.

Social protection policies that align with this approach are those that remove structural barriers to participation in the economy and society, enhance agency, and provide the resources necessary for

individuals to pursue meaningful life trajectories. The South African framework's focus on human capital development, asset accumulation, and skills training directly echoes Sen's assertion that true development must be people-centered and expand the choices available to individuals (Department of Social Development, 2022).

4.11.2 Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), widely applied in development practice, conceptualises poverty as a multidimensional condition influenced by people's access to various forms of capital, human, financial, physical, natural, and social and their ability to use these to pursue livelihood strategies (Carney, 1998). The SLF underscores the importance of resilience, agency, and asset-building in enabling individuals to sustain their well-being despite shocks and stresses.

The DSD's application of the SLF within its strategy to link beneficiaries to sustainable livelihoods shows strong alignment with global development theory. Interventions aimed at increasing access to assets, skills development, and community-driven enterprises reflect the SLF's focus on empowering people to become agents of their own development. Importantly, this approach moves away from welfarist paradigms and seeks to build long-term capacity within households and communities.

4.11.3 Human Development Theory

The Human Development Theory, championed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and grounded in Sen's capabilities work, posits that development should expand people's choices and improve their well-being, particularly in areas of health, education, and living standards (UNDP, 2010). This theory offers a broad, multidimensional perspective that integrates economic growth with investments in human capital and institutional reform.

In South Africa's context, the Human Development Theory underpins policy efforts to integrate social protection with broader socio-economic development. The framework for linking social protection beneficiaries to livelihoods opportunities reflects this theory through its emphasis on skills development, food security, and employment creation. These are not ends in themselves but means to enhancing dignity, autonomy, and long-term human flourishing (National Planning Commission, 2012).

4.11.4 Labour Market Integration models

Labour market integration models provide operational insights into how social protection recipients can be effectively transitioned into the workforce. These models typically include interventions such as vocational training, public employment schemes, employer subsidies, and entrepreneurship support. Examples include Germany's Hartz reforms and the UK's Universal Credit system, both of which integrate employment support into welfare systems (Bonoli, 2012).

In developing contexts, models such as the BRAC Graduation Approach integrate livelihood asset transfers with coaching and employment support to achieve similar aims. South Africa's EPWP programme aligns partially with such models by offering temporary employment combined with skills training. However, for full integration into the labour market, complementary policies targeting job placement, small enterprise development, and private sector engagement are essential (DSD, 2022).

These models highlight the importance of a coordinated institutional framework that aligns welfare with workforce development, ensuring that beneficiaries are not left behind in the formal economy.

4.12 CONCLUSION

The integration of social protection with sustainable livelihood strategies represents a pivotal shift in South Africa's approach to poverty alleviation, inclusive development, and economic participation. Drawing from both international best practices and national development goals, the evolving framework under the DSD seeks to transform social protection from a short-term safety net into a long-term instrument for economic empowerment and human capability development.

The literature underscores that social protection in South Africa is not only a constitutional right but also a strategic tool for developmental transformation. Guided by the five functions articulated in the National Development Plan vision 2030, protective, preventive, promotive, transformative, and developmental social protection is positioned as a multidimensional mechanism that addresses immediate vulnerabilities while enabling upward socio-economic mobility. The post-1994 evolution of the welfare system, coupled with a strong constitutional framework, sets a solid foundation for inclusive and participatory growth.

The DSD's Sustainable Livelihoods Framework complements these functions by operationalising asset-based and community-driven development models that are tailored to local contexts. This approach aligns strongly with the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach, both of which emphasise the importance of expanding individual freedoms and building long-term resilience through diversified access to capital and services.

Internationally, programmes such as the BRAC Graduation Model in Bangladesh, Brazil's Bolsa Família, and Ethiopia's PSNP have demonstrated the viability of integrated livelihood pathways. These models inform the South African context by showcasing how asset transfers, skills training, mentoring, and institutional coordination can empower grant recipients to transition from dependency to self-reliance.

Internationally, programmes such as the BRAC Graduation Model in Bangladesh, Brazil's Bolsa Família, and Ethiopia's PSNP have demonstrated the viability of integrated livelihood pathways. These models inform the South African context by showcasing how asset transfers, skills training, mentoring, and institutional coordination can empower grant recipients to transition from being unable to support themselves to self-reliance.

The theoretical underpinnings further enrich this framework by offering conceptual clarity and justifying a shift from welfarism to developmentalism. The Human Development Theory, Capabilities Approach, Labour Market Integration models, and SLF provide a strong foundation for designing and evaluating interventions that do more than provide temporary relief they create pathways for dignity, autonomy, and sustainable livelihoods.

In sum, the literature and benchmarking evidence demonstrate that linking social protection beneficiaries to sustainable livelihood opportunities is both a necessary and feasible undertaking. It calls for strategic alignment, innovation, and collaborative action. If effectively implemented, this integrated model holds the promise of reducing chronic poverty, strengthening community resilience, and contributing meaningfully to South Africa's socio-economic transformation agenda.

5. KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation results section presents the key insights gained from the Design Evaluation of the "Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities" Programme. The

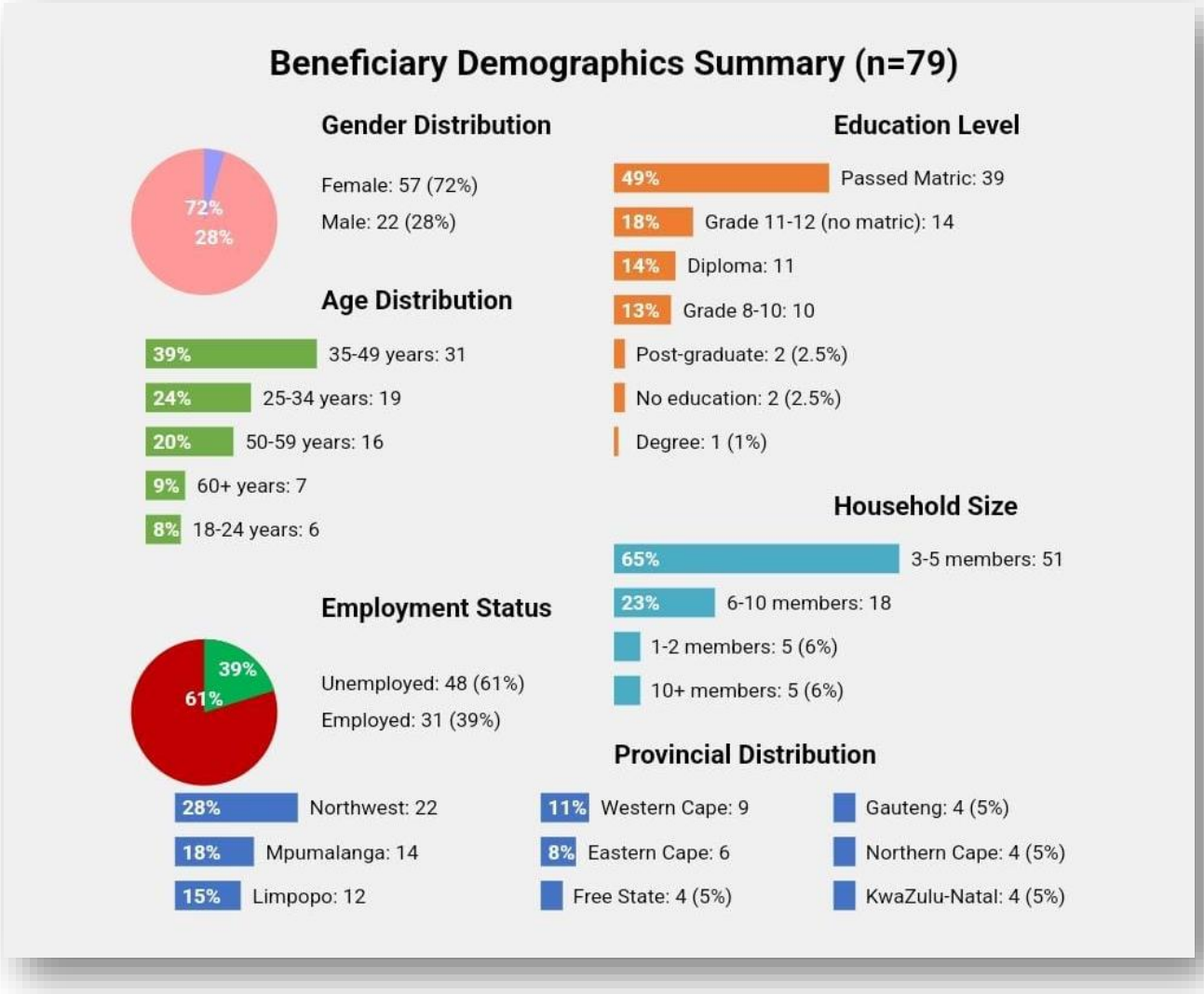
findings are structured into two distinct but complementary sections: a descriptive summary and an interpretive narrative. These are organised around key evaluation questions that are explicitly aligned with the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, offering a systematic assessment across the dimensions of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, impact, and sustainability. Each evaluation question is restated and subsequently addressed through a detailed analysis of the data, ensuring that the responses are evidence-based and contextually grounded.

5.1 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The demographic profile of participants surveyed for this design evaluation spans all nine provinces of South Africa, offering a representative cross-section of programme beneficiaries and those involved in the programme linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities. The majority of respondents were drawn from the Northern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga provinces regions where social protection needs tend to be more pronounced due to higher poverty and unemployment levels.

5.1.1 Beneficiary Demographics

The comprehensive visualisation in figure 1 below provides a detailed demographic profile of the 79



beneficiaries who participated in the evaluation study.

Figure 2: Beneficiary Demographics Summary (n=79)

The demographic data reveals several important patterns that inform our understanding of who the program is reaching and potential gaps in coverage.

Gender Distribution: The beneficiary sample shows a pronounced gender imbalance, with females representing 72% (57 beneficiaries) and males only 28% (22 beneficiaries). This significant disparity raises important questions about program targeting and accessibility. While the over-representation of women may reflect intentional targeting due to their greater vulnerability or caregiving responsibilities, it also suggests potential barriers to male participation that warrant further investigation.

Age Distribution: The age profile reveals a concentration in middle-age categories, with 39% of beneficiaries aged 35-49 years (31 participants), followed by 24% in the 25-34 age group (19 participants), and 20% in the 50-59 age range (16 participants). Most notably, young adults (18-24 years) represent only 8% of participants (6 beneficiaries) despite high youth unemployment rates in South Africa. This under-representation of youth represents a critical gap in the program's reach, particularly given the strategic importance of youth economic empowerment in national development priorities.

Education Level: Nearly half of all beneficiaries (49%) have passed matric, indicating reasonable educational attainment among participants. However, a substantial portion (34%) have not completed matric education, with 18% having Grade 11-12 without matric, 13% with Grade 8-10, and 2.5% with no formal education. Only 17.5% of beneficiaries have post-secondary qualifications (14% with diplomas, 2.5% with post-graduate degrees, and 1% with undergraduate degrees). This educational profile suggests the program should accommodate diverse literacy and skill levels in its interventions.

Household Size: Most beneficiaries (65%) come from medium-sized households with 3-5 members, demonstrating that the program primarily reaches typical family units. Larger households (6-10 members) represent 23% of participants, while very small households (1-2 members) and very large households (10+ members) each account for only 6%. This distribution generally aligns with typical South African household structures but highlights the need for interventions that consider varying household resource dynamics.

Employment Status: The employment data shows that 61% of beneficiaries (48 participants) are unemployed, while 39% (31 participants) report some form of employment. This high unemployment rate confirms that the program is reaching those with significant economic need, though the substantial proportion of employed beneficiaries suggests the program also serves the working poor who require support to enhance their livelihood opportunities. This mixed employment profile indicates that interventions must address both job creation and job enhancement objectives.

Provincial Distribution: The geographic distribution shows varied representation across provinces, with Northwest (28%), Mpumalanga (18%), and Limpopo (15%) having the highest participation rates. Western Cape (11%) and Eastern Cape (8%) have moderate representation, while Free State, Gauteng, Northern Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal each account for 5% of beneficiaries. This distribution ensures the evaluation captures diverse provincial contexts, though the variation in representation should be considered when interpreting provincial comparisons.

This demographic profile provides essential context for understanding program reach and effectiveness, while identifying key gaps in targeting, particularly regarding youth inclusion, gender balance, and geographic coverage that should be addressed in program refinement.

5.1.2 Key Informant Demographics

Similarly, the comprehensive visualisation in figure 2 below provides a detailed demographic profile of the 133 key informants who participated in the evaluation study.

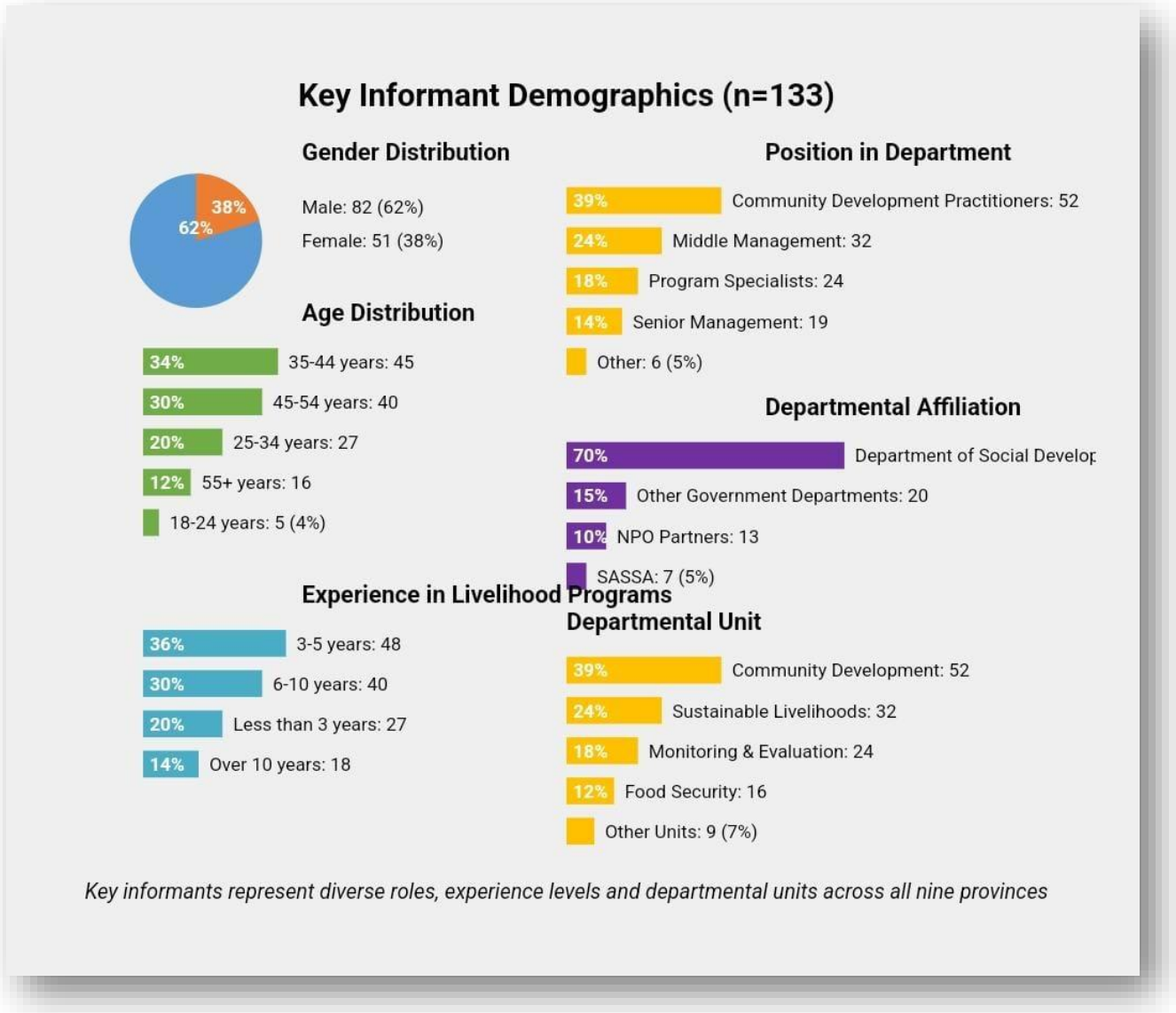


Figure 3: Key Informant Demographics (n=133)

The demographic analysis reveals a diverse range of respondents across various professional roles, experience levels, and departmental affiliations, strengthening the credibility and comprehensiveness of the evaluation findings.

Gender Distribution: The key informant sample shows a gender distribution that favours males (62%, 82 respondents) over females (38%, 51 respondents). This gender composition differs notably from the beneficiary demographics (which showed 72% female participation), potentially offering complementary perspectives on program implementation and effectiveness. The predominance of

male key informants may reflect existing gender disparities in management and technical positions within government departments and implementing organisations.

Age Distribution: The age profile indicates a concentration in middle-age categories, with 34% in the 35-44 years range (45 respondents) and 30% in the 45-54 years range (40 respondents). The 25-34 years group represents 20% (27 respondents), while senior officials aged 55+ comprise 12% (16 respondents). Young adults (18-24 years) account for only 4% (5 respondents). This age distribution suggests that the key informant perspectives primarily come from experienced mid-career professionals with substantial workplace knowledge.

Position in Department: The sample includes a balanced mix of positions, with Community Development Practitioners forming the largest group (39%, 52 respondents). Middle management accounts for 24% (32 respondents), Program Specialists represent 18% (24 respondents), and Senior Management comprises 14% (19 respondents). This distribution ensures that perspectives from both front-line implementers and decision-makers are captured in the evaluation, providing insights from multiple organisational levels.

Departmental Affiliation: Most key informants (70%, 93 respondents) are affiliated with the Department of Social Development, which is appropriate given DSD's primary responsibility for the program. Other Government Departments comprise 15% (20 respondents), NPO Partners represent 10% (13 respondents), and SASSA accounts for 5% (7 respondents). This distribution appropriately emphasises DSD perspectives while including sufficient representation from other stakeholders to provide a comprehensive view of inter-departmental collaboration.

Experience in Livelihood Programs: The experience profile shows that 36% of key informants have 3-5 years of experience (48 respondents), 30% have 6-10 years (40 respondents), 20% have less than 3 years (27 respondents), and 14% have over 10 years of experience (18 respondents). This distribution indicates that most respondents have sufficient experience to provide informed perspectives on program design and implementation, with a good mix of newer viewpoints and seasoned expertise.

Departmental Unit: Key informants come from diverse units within their departments, with Community Development representing the largest group (39%, 52 respondents), followed by Sustainable Livelihoods (24%, 32 respondents), Monitoring & Evaluation (18%, 24 respondents), and Food Security (12%, 16 respondents). This distribution ensures representation from the various specialised units involved in different aspects of the program, providing a multi-faceted understanding of program activities and challenges.

This key informant demographic profile demonstrates that the evaluation has captured perspectives from a diverse and representative sample of professionals involved in the program's design and implementation. The balance of positions, experience levels, and departmental affiliations strengthens the credibility of the findings and provides a solid foundation for the evaluation's recommendations.

5.1.3 Provincial Distribution Of Key Informants

The visualization below in figure 2 illustrates the distribution of a sample of key informant interviews (KII) across South Africa's nine provinces.

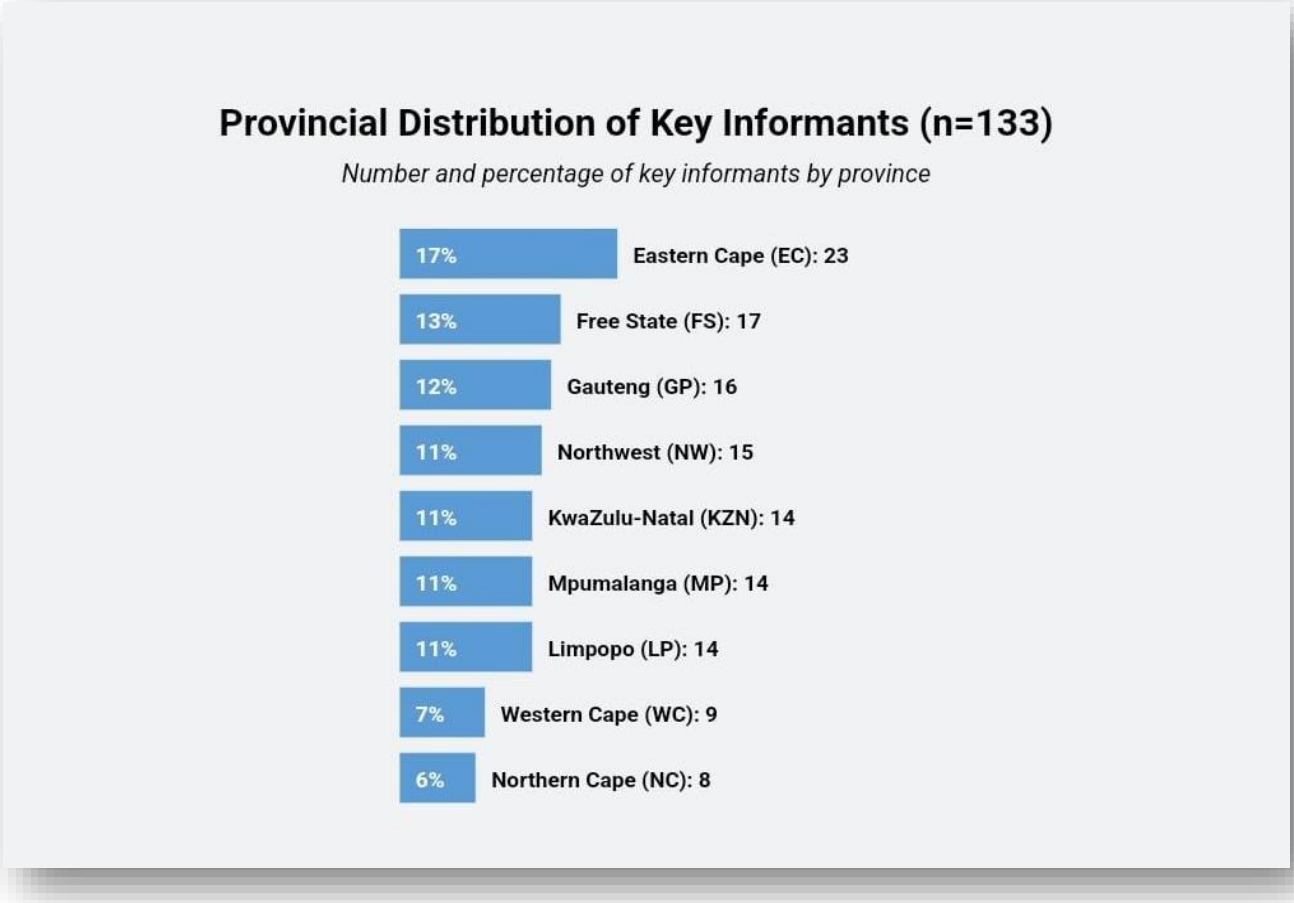


Figure 4:Provincial Distribution of Key Informants (n=133)

The data shows a relatively balanced representation, with Eastern Cape having the highest number of respondents (23, representing 17% of the sample), followed by Free State (17, 13%) and Gauteng (16, 12%).

The middle tier of representation includes Northwest, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, and Limpopo, each with 11% of respondents (14-15 key informants per province). Western Cape (9, 7%) and Northern Cape (8, 6%) have slightly lower representation but still contribute meaningfully to the overall sample.

This geographic distribution ensures that insights were gathered from across South Africa's diverse provincial contexts, strengthening the evaluation's validity. The relatively balanced provincial representation enables meaningful comparisons between provinces and provides a comprehensive national perspective on the program linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities.

The sample size of 133 key informants provides a robust foundation for the analysis, with sufficient representation from each province to identify regional variations in program implementation and effectiveness. This distribution allows for identification of both common challenges across provinces and unique contextual factors affecting program performance in specific regions.

5.1.4 Respondent Characteristics

The key informants who participated in the evaluation were primarily drawn from the Department of Social Development. They held a range of positions within the department, including managers,

supervisors, and community development practitioners. The group represented a diverse mix of experience levels, particularly in relation to sustainable livelihood programming, reflecting both seasoned professionals and those with more recent engagement in the field.

5.2 EVALUATION FINDINGS BY OECD CRITERIA AND KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

5.2.1 RELEVANCE

5.2.1.1 Is Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries To Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities Approach Relevant In Contributing To The Dsd Mandate (Priorities And Policies)?

(a) Key Informant Perspectives

Table 2: Key Informant Perspectives

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Very relevant	61	46%
Moderately relevant	39	29%
Not relevant	21	16%
No response	12	9%
Total	**133**	**100%**

(b) Qualitative Analysis:

The evaluation of 133 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) across nine provinces revealed strong thematic consensus on the relevance of linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities as a strategic contribution to the Department of Social Development's (DSD) mandate. Several prominent themes emerged from the interviews, demonstrating widespread support for the programme's conceptual foundation and alignment with national priorities.

A dominant theme across responses was the programme's alignment with DSD's core focus on poverty alleviation. Many respondents viewed the initiative as a direct extension of the Department's mission, shifting the focus from short-term relief toward long-term development. The programme was widely acknowledged as a practical tool to reduce reliance on social grants by enabling sustainable income-generating activities. As one senior manager in the DSD noted, *"This approach directly addresses our core mandate of alleviating poverty by moving beyond temporary relief to sustainable solutions."* Similarly, a Deputy Manager in the Northern Cape stated, *"It is very relevant as it will lift the burden of the budget,"* highlighting both social and fiscal benefits of the intervention.

The programme's potential to enhance the financial sustainability of the social protection system was another key theme. Many interviewees, particularly those in management and financial planning roles, viewed the programme as a way to reduce long-term fiscal pressure on grant systems. *"The social grant system alone is unsustainable long-term. This program creates pathways to self-reliance that can reduce pressure on limited social assistance budgets,"* explained a Programme Specialist in KwaZulu-Natal.

Policy and strategic alignment also featured prominently in the responses. Key informants frequently referenced how the programme aligns with the National Development Plan (NDP), DSD's strategic plans, and the Annual Performance Plan. In particular, its contributions to food security and household resilience were highlighted as priorities within DSD's broader policy agenda. A key informant from the Northern Cape remarked, "Yes, it forms part of the NDP, department strategic plan, and annual performance plan. Food security is one of the DSD's main priority areas."

Respondents appreciated the programme's holistic design, which they felt offered a more integrated approach to social development. By combining social assistance with livelihood an opportunity, the programme was seen as a more sustainable and empowering model. One middle manager from the Eastern Cape remarked, "Social protection without livelihood development creates dependency. This program creates the vital bridge between welfare and well-being that is at the heart of social development."

The relevance of the programme was also reinforced by its responsiveness to South Africa's socioeconomic context. Several respondents highlighted the country's high unemployment and inequality rates, particularly among social grant recipients, as justification for the programme's approach. "In a context of extreme unemployment, especially among grant recipients, this linkage approach is not just relevant but essential for meaningful social development," said a senior official from Gauteng.

However, despite strong conceptual support, many respondents pointed to significant implementation gaps that undermine the programme's practical relevance. They cited challenges such as inconsistent delivery, limited reach, and insufficient interdepartmental coordination. As an M&E Specialist from Mpumalanga noted, "The approach is highly relevant in theory, but inconsistent implementation means its relevance isn't fully realized in practice." This concern was echoed by others who observed that worsening economic conditions and limited budget allocations further complicate efforts to scale or sustain the intervention.

Finally, respondents emphasized that the programme should be viewed not as a replacement for social assistance but as a critical complement. It was repeatedly described as enhancing the overall effectiveness of the social protection system by offering a developmental trajectory for beneficiaries. A Programme Specialist from Limpopo summarised this perspective aptly: "It enhances the relevance of our entire social protection system by creating pathways out of poverty rather than just managing it."

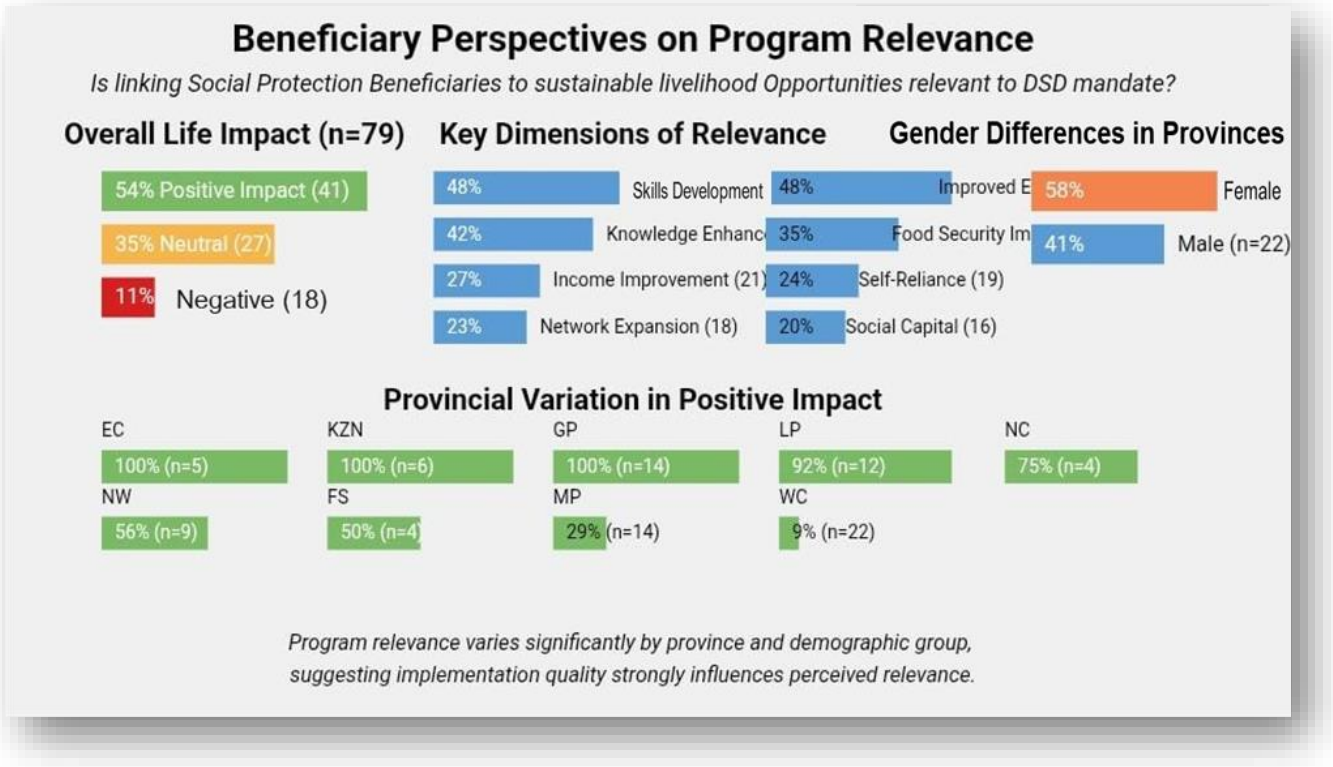
Together, these qualitative insights reflect a deep recognition of the programme's potential and relevance within the South African context, while also highlighting key operational and systemic issues that must be addressed to translate its promise into tangible, widespread impact.

Conclusion

The qualitative analysis reveals strong consensus among KII respondents regarding the program's conceptual relevance to DSD's mandate, particularly in terms of poverty alleviation, budget sustainability, and policy alignment. However, implementation challenges were frequently cited as barriers to achieving full relevance in practice, suggesting a need to strengthen implementation approaches rather than redesign the program concept.

(c) Beneficiary Perspectives:

Figure 5: Beneficiary Perspectives



From the beneficiary perspective, the program linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to sustainable livelihood opportunities demonstrates strong relevance to the Department of Social Development's mandate of poverty alleviation and social protection. The analysis of beneficiary responses reveals several key dimensions of this relevance:

(d) Overall Perception of Relevance

The majority of beneficiaries (54%) reported positive life impacts from program participation, indicating that they perceive the intervention as addressing relevant needs in their lives. This is evidenced by statements like: *"This programme has taught me a lot and has equipped me with a lot of skills. Also, the income helps cover the expenses of my household."*

However, it's important to note that a significant proportion (35%) reported neutral impacts, suggesting that while the program may be conceptually relevant, its practical benefits are not reaching all participants equally.

(e) Key Dimensions of Relevance

Beneficiaries highlighted several specific ways the program aligns with their needs and DSD's mandate:

Skills Development: 48% of beneficiaries reported gaining valuable skills that improved their employability, directly contributing to DSD's mandate of promoting self-reliance.

Knowledge Enhancement: 42% mentioned increased knowledge about government processes and available opportunities, supporting DSD's goal of empowering communities.

Income Improvement: 27% noted income improvements, addressing DSD's core poverty alleviation objective.

Food Security: Multiple beneficiaries, especially in Northern Cape, reported reduced hunger as a direct impact, aligning with DSD's food security priorities.

Network Development: 23% mentioned expanded networks, supporting DSD's objective of strengthening community and social capital.

(f) Provincial Variations in Perceived Relevance

The relevance of the program varied significantly by province, with 100% of beneficiaries reporting positive impacts in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng, compared to only 9% in Northwest. This suggests that program relevance is highly dependent on implementation quality rather than program design.

(g) Demographic Differences in Perceived Relevance

Female beneficiaries found the program more relevant to their needs, with 58% reporting positive impacts compared to 41% among males. This gender disparity suggests that program design may be better aligned with women's livelihood needs and priorities or that implementation approaches are more effective for female participants.

(h) Comparison of Perspectives

There is general alignment between implementers and beneficiaries regarding the program's relevance, with 75% of key informants rating it as moderately to very relevant and 54% of beneficiaries reporting positive life impacts. However, a significant portion of beneficiaries (35%) reported neutral impacts, suggesting that while the program is conceptually relevant, its practical benefits may not be reaching all participants equally.

Conclusion

From the beneficiary perspective, the program shows substantial relevance to DSD's mandate, particularly in terms of skills development, knowledge enhancement, and economic stability. However, the significant provincial variations and demographic differences highlight opportunities to enhance relevance through improved implementation quality and more tailored approaches for specific groups, especially male beneficiaries, youth, and those in underperforming provinces.

5.2.1.2 *Is the target group clearly identified and how can they be better defined (gender, disability, age, and race)? Is the basis clearly defined?*

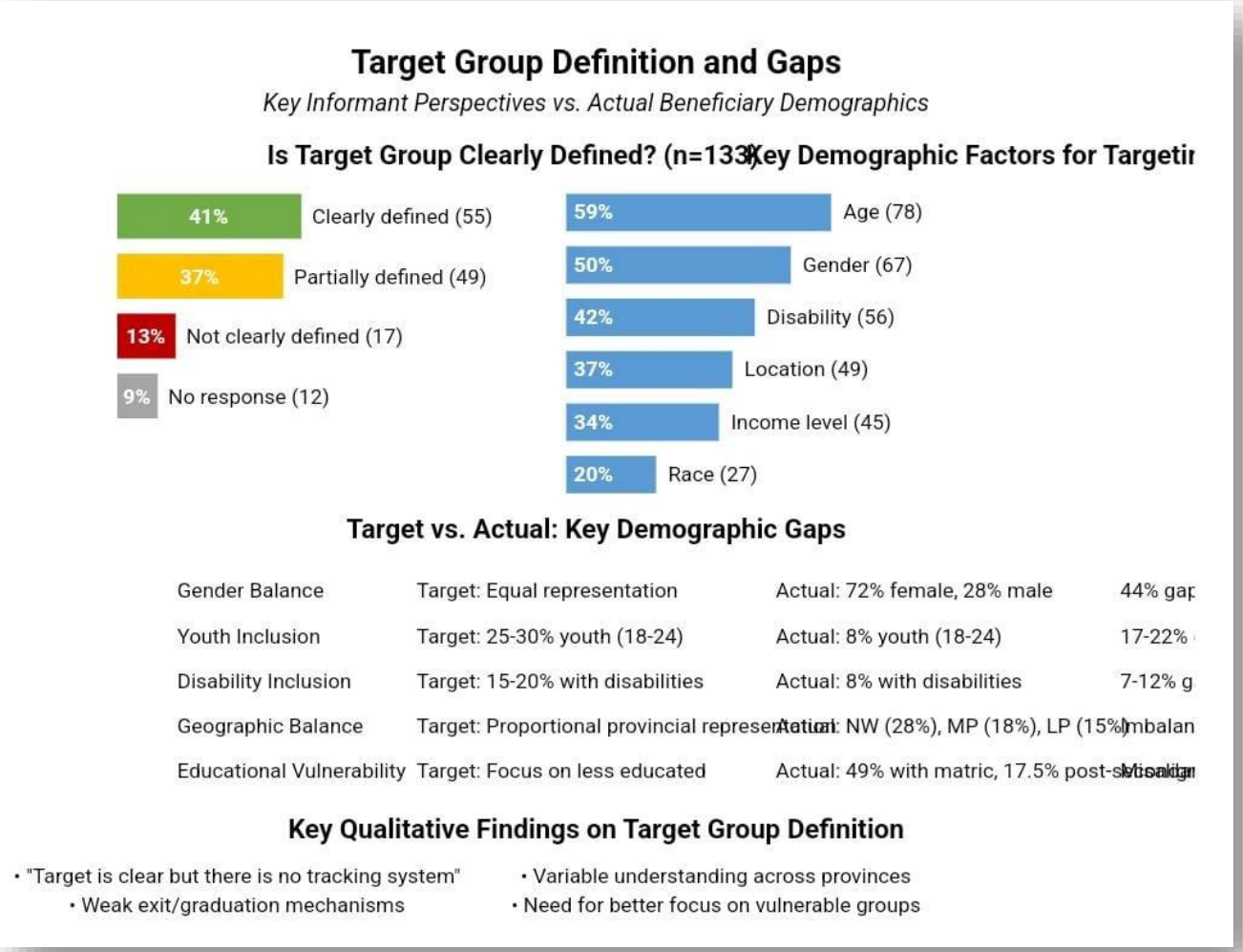


Figure 6: Clarity of Target Group Definition

The evaluation reveals that while there is a general understanding of who the program's target group should be, there are significant gaps in clarity, definition, and implementation that affect program effectiveness and equity.

(a) Target Group Clarity Assessment

Insights from key informant interviews (n=133), across nine provinces, reveal a mixed perception regarding the clarity of the programme's target group definition. While 41% of respondents indicated that the target group is clearly defined, 37% believed it is only partially defined. A further 13% reported that the target group is not clearly defined at all, and 9% chose not to respond. This division in perception points to an inconsistent understanding among stakeholders of who exactly the programme is meant to serve. Such ambiguity may have implications for targeting accuracy and the overall effectiveness of programme implementation, particularly across diverse provincial contexts.

(b) Key Demographic Factors for Targeting

Key informants identified several demographic factors that should be prioritised in target group definition:

Table 3: Key Demographic Factors for Targeting

Demographic Factor	Frequency	Percentage
Age	78	59%
Gender	67	50%
Disability	56	42%
Location (rural/urban)	49	37%
Income level	45	34%
Race	27	20%

These factors provide a framework for what an ideal target definition should include, though the actual implementation shows significant gaps in addressing these priorities.

(c) Target vs. Actual: Key Demographic Gaps

The analysis of actual beneficiary demographics (n=79) compared to targeting priorities reveals several important gaps as described below:

Gender Balance: Despite gender being identified as an important targeting factor by 50% of KII respondents, the beneficiary population shows a significant gender imbalance with 72% female and only 28% male participants. This suggests either intentional targeting of women (which is not explicitly stated in program documents) or barriers to male participation.

Youth Inclusion: While age was identified as the most important demographic factor (59%), young adults (18-24 years) represent only 8% of beneficiaries, despite high youth unemployment rates in South Africa. This represents a critical gap in reaching a key vulnerable population.

Disability Inclusion: Although 42% of KII respondents identified disability as an important targeting factor, only 8% of beneficiaries reported having disabilities, indicating a substantial gap in disability inclusion.

Geographic Distribution: The uneven provincial distribution of beneficiaries (Northwest: 28%, Mpumalanga: 18%, Limpopo: 15%, with other provinces at 11% or less) suggests inconsistent targeting approaches across provinces rather than needs-based allocation.

Educational Profile: Nearly half (49%) of beneficiaries have passed matric, with an additional 17.5% having post-secondary education. This suggests the program may not be effectively targeting the most educationally vulnerable populations.

(d) Qualitative Insights on Target Group Definition

Key informant interviews revealed several recurring themes regarding the clarity and operationalisation of the programme's target group. A frequently expressed concern was that, while the target population may be clearly defined on paper, the absence of a functional tracking system

makes it difficult to monitor participation and ensure alignment with the intended beneficiaries. This challenge was often summed up in the recurring sentiment: *“The target is clear, but there is no tracking system.”*

Another issue identified was the variation in understanding of target group definitions across provinces. This inconsistency appears to contribute to the uneven demographic representation observed in the programme’s implementation, raising concerns about the uniformity of application across different contexts.

Respondents also pointed to significant gaps in the programme’s exit or graduation strategy. Many noted that there are no clear mechanisms in place to track how beneficiaries progress through the intervention, resulting in a lack of visibility on whether individuals are transitioning toward sustainable livelihoods or continuing to rely on support indefinitely.

Lastly, concerns were raised about the programme’s inclusivity. Several informants highlighted that key vulnerable groups, particularly youth and persons with disabilities remain insufficiently reached, despite being clearly identified as priority populations within policy frameworks. This disconnection between policy intent and implementation suggests the need for strengthened targeting, monitoring, and adaptive design.

One respondent from Northern Cape explained: *"Target is clear but there is no tracking system,"* while another from Northwest noted: *"Yes in order to be aware who is in need and at what level to serve relevant individuals."*

(e) Enhancing the Definition of Target Groups

Evaluation findings suggest that the definition of the programme’s target group can be significantly improved through a more structured and standardised approach. One of the key recommendations is the development of a nationally standardised definition framework. Such a framework would provide provinces with clear guidance while allowing them to adapt to their unique local contexts, ensuring consistency in core targeting priorities across the country.

In addition, the establishment of explicit inclusion criteria is essential to guide the selection of beneficiaries. Particular emphasis should be placed on ensuring that priority groups, such as youth, people with disabilities, and men are adequately included, especially given the observed gender disparity in current participation rates.

To support this refined targeting approach, the implementation of robust tracking and monitoring systems is crucial. These systems should capture beneficiary demographic data in real time to assess whether implementation is aligned with the intended targeting strategy.

Furthermore, there is a pressing need to introduce clear graduation or exit pathways. These pathways would define how beneficiaries can transition from receiving social protection support to achieving independent, sustainable livelihoods, thereby reinforcing the developmental intent of the programme.

Lastly, the use of standardised vulnerability assessment tools would help ensure that support reaches those most in need. Such tools would enhance the ability to identify and prioritise the most vulnerable individuals within each demographic category, promoting fairness and impact across diverse communities.

Conclusion

While there is general understanding of who the target group should be, significant improvements are needed in defining, tracking, and reaching priority populations. The substantial gaps between targeting priorities and actual beneficiary demographics highlight the need for more standardized, explicit, and monitored targeting approaches that can be consistently implemented across provinces while accommodating local contextual factors.

5.2.2 COHERENCE

5.2.2.1 To what extent is the Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to sustainable livelihood Opportunities aligned to policies and legislation?

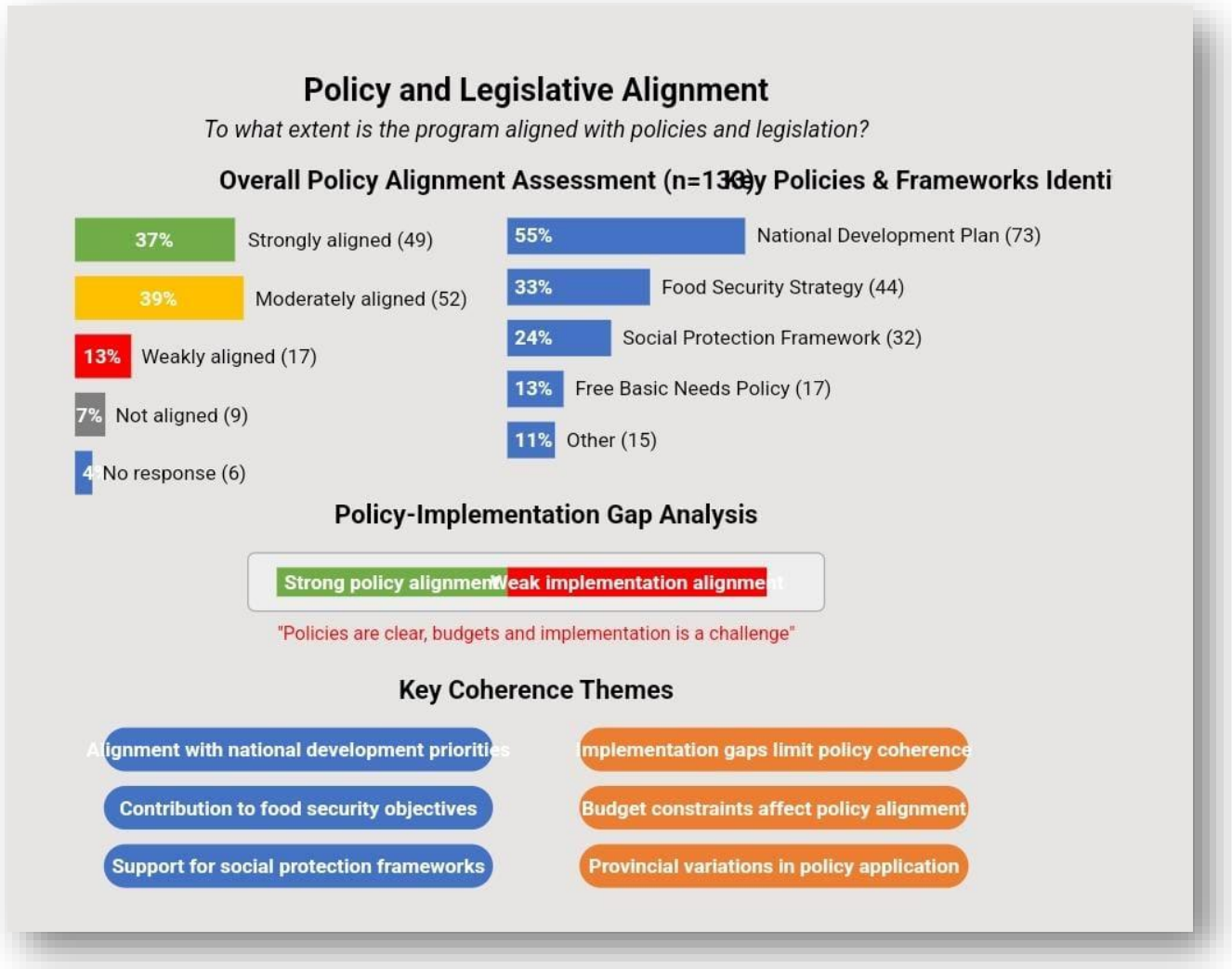


Figure 7: Policy and Legislative Alignment

The evaluation reveals substantial policy and legislative alignment at the conceptual level, but with significant implementation gaps that limit practical coherence.

Based on comprehensive analysis of key informant responses (n=133) and beneficiary perspectives, the following findings emerge:

(a) Overall Alignment Assessment

Key informant interviews reflect a generally positive assessment of the programme's alignment with relevant policies and legislation. According to the findings, 37% of respondents believe the programme is strongly aligned with national and sectoral policy frameworks, while 39% reported moderate alignment. Thirteen percent viewed the alignment as weak, and 7% indicated there was no alignment at all. A further 4% did not provide a response.

Taken together, these figures suggest that a clear majority 76% of respondents acknowledge at least moderate alignment between the programme and existing policy mandates. This broad recognition points to a sound level of conceptual coherence, reinforcing the idea that the programme is grounded in policy intent, even if gaps remain in operational implementation.

(b) Key Policies and Frameworks Identified

Respondents identified several specific policies and frameworks that align with the program:

Table 3: Key Policies and Frameworks Identified

Policy Framework	Frequency	Percentage
National Development Plan	73	55%
Food Security Strategy	44	33%
Social Protection Framework	32	34%
Free Basic Needs Policy	17	13%
Other	15	11%

The National Development Plan emerged as the most frequently cited aligned policy, with over half of key informants highlighting its relevance to the program. This suggests strong coherence with South Africa's primary development framework.

(c) Policy-Implementation Gap

While the programme demonstrates strong conceptual alignment with national and sectoral policies, the evaluation revealed a significant gap between policy intent and actual implementation. This "policy-implementation gap" has emerged as a key factor limiting the programme's practical coherence.

Budget constraints were frequently cited as a major barrier. Many respondents observed that although the programme aligns well with policy on paper, financial limitations hinder its full and consistent implementation. This sentiment was echoed in a common remark shared across provinces: *"Policies are clear, but budgets and implementation are a challenge."*

Implementation challenges also surfaced as a recurring theme. Stakeholders noted that the operationalisation of the programme often falls short of fulfilling the policy vision, resulting in fragmented or diluted impact at the ground level.

Additionally, the degree of alignment and coherence appears to vary significantly across provinces. High-performing provinces such as the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng were found to exhibit stronger alignment between policy and practice. In contrast, provinces like the Northwest and Mpumalanga showed weaker alignment, pointing to uneven implementation capacity and resource mobilisation across the country. This variation underscores the need for tailored support and improved intergovernmental coordination to close the gap between policy frameworks and on-the-ground delivery.

(d) Beneficiary Understanding of Policy Linkages

Although beneficiaries generally lacked explicit knowledge of formal policy frameworks, many demonstrated a clear, intuitive understanding of how the programme aligns with broader development objectives. Their responses reflected a practical awareness of the programme's relevance to national priorities, even if they could not directly reference specific policies.

Poverty reduction emerged as a dominant theme, with many beneficiaries identifying the programme as a mechanism to alleviate poverty. This perception aligns closely with the National Development Plan (NDP), which positions poverty eradication as a central objective. In provinces such as the Northern Cape, several respondents also linked the programme to efforts aimed at improving food security. This indicates alignment with the national Food Security Strategy, especially in communities where livelihoods are closely tied to subsistence farming and nutritional needs.

In the Northwest and Mpumalanga provinces, beneficiaries frequently referenced the programme's relevance to youth development. They noted its potential to address unemployment and skill gaps among young people, an area strongly emphasized in the NDP and related youth policy initiatives.

As one beneficiary aptly stated, "The program helps us achieve what the government always talks about creating jobs and reducing poverty." This comment encapsulates the broader trend of participants recognizing the programme's alignment with government priorities, even in the absence of direct policy literacy. This suggests that, while formal awareness may be limited, the programme is nonetheless perceived as responsive to the lived realities and aspirations of its intended beneficiaries.

(e) Key Coherence Themes

The qualitative analysis surfaced several key themes related to the coherence of the programme, particularly its alignment with national policies and legislative frameworks. On the positive side, the programme is widely seen as reinforcing South Africa's development priorities. It shows strong alignment with the National Development Plan (NDP), particularly in its focus on poverty reduction, economic inclusion, and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods. In the Northern Cape, the programme's initiatives addressing hunger and nutrition were specifically linked to the objectives of the national Food Security Strategy, demonstrating clear thematic coherence in that region.

Additionally, the programme aligns well with the country's broader social protection frameworks. By facilitating a transition from social assistance to economic self-reliance, it supports the vision of integrated development that underpins South Africa's social protection system.

Despite these strengths, several coherence challenges were also identified. A significant concern is the persistent implementation gap, which often prevents the full realization of policy objectives on the ground. Respondents noted that although the programme is conceptually aligned with national strategies, practical delivery frequently falls short. Budget constraints further compound this issue, with limited financial resources affecting the depth and consistency of policy-aligned implementation.

Provincial variation emerged as another critical challenge. The programme is not applied uniformly across provinces, leading to inconsistent alignment with national policies. While some provinces demonstrate strong coherence between policy and implementation, others struggle due to capacity limitations, resource disparities, or misinterpretation of national directives. This uneven application suggests a need for more standardised guidance, stronger intergovernmental coordination, and targeted support to ensure alignment is not only conceptual but also operational across all provinces.

(f) Provincial Variations in Policy Coherence

The evaluation identified notable differences in the degree of policy coherence across provinces, reflecting how effectively the programme's implementation aligns with national policy objectives in different regional contexts. Provinces such as the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng demonstrated high levels of policy coherence. In these regions, programme implementation approaches closely reflected national priorities, effectively translating policy intent into practice.

In contrast, provinces such as the Western Cape, Northern Cape, and Free State exhibited moderate coherence. While elements of the programme aligned with policy frameworks, implementation approaches in these areas only partially fulfilled the stated policy goals. The variation suggests a need for improved alignment mechanisms or capacity strengthening to bridge the gaps between intent and execution.

The most significant challenges were observed in Mpumalanga and the Northwest, where policy coherence was rated lowest. In these provinces, weak alignment between implementation and national policy objectives was attributed to substantial operational gaps, limited institutional capacity, and resource constraints. These disparities highlight the importance of targeted technical support, improved coordination, and standardised implementation guidelines to ensure that the programme consistently advances national development priorities across all provinces.

Conclusion

The program demonstrates strong conceptual alignment with key national policies and legislative frameworks, particularly the National Development Plan and Food Security Strategy. However, significant implementation gaps create a disconnection between policy intent and practical application, limiting overall coherence. This "policy-implementation gap" is exacerbated by budget constraints and provincial variations in implementation quality.

To enhance coherence, the program should address implementation challenges, increase resource allocation to align with policy ambitions, and standardize implementation approaches across provinces while allowing for contextual adaptation. The strong conceptual alignment provides a solid foundation for improving practical coherence through enhanced implementation approaches.

5.2.3 EFFECTIVENESS

5.2.3.1 To what extent is the Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to sustainable livelihood Opportunities been planned?

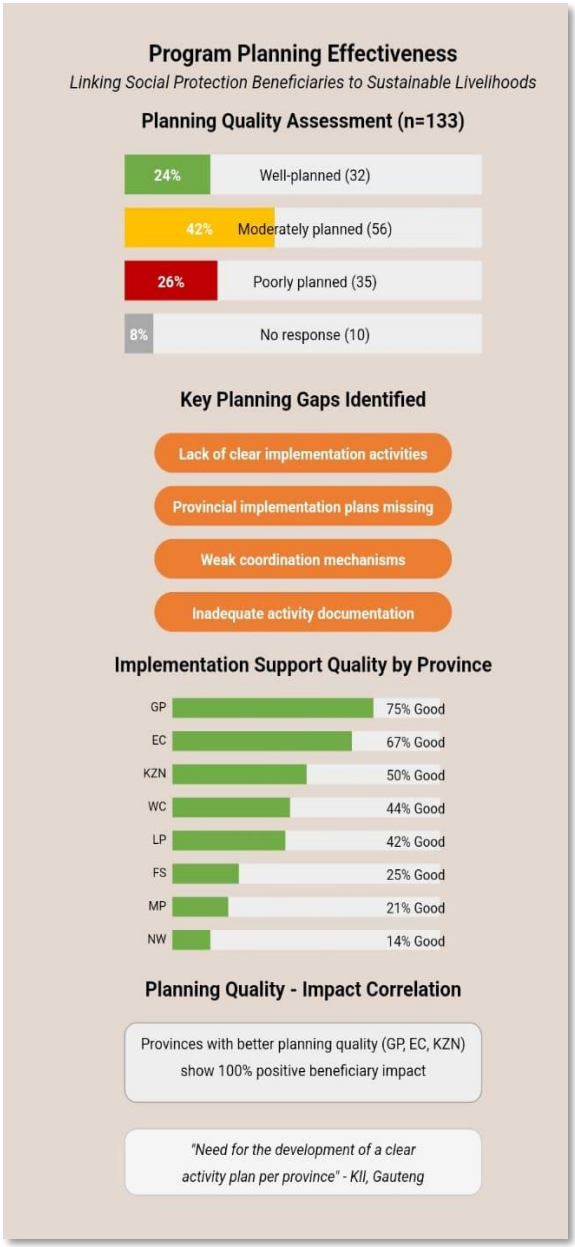


Figure 8 shows that the evaluation reveals significant variations in planning quality across the program, with only a quarter of key informants considering it well-planned, despite evidence that strong planning correlates with positive outcomes. The findings suggest that planning deficiencies contribute substantially to implementation challenges and outcome disparities across provinces.

(a) Quality Assessment

Findings from the key informant interviews reveal a mixed assessment of the programme's planning quality. Among the 133 respondents, only 24% regarded the programme as well-planned, while a larger segment 42% felt the planning quality was moderate. In contrast, 26% of respondents viewed the planning as poor, and 8% did not provide a response.

This distribution suggests that although approximately two-thirds of respondents (66%) acknowledge that the programme demonstrates at least a moderate level of planning, only a small minority consider the planning to be fully adequate. The relatively high proportion of respondents reporting poor planning points to substantive gaps in the programme's design phase. These gaps likely impact implementation effectiveness and may contribute to some of the inconsistencies observed across provinces.

Figure 8: Programme planning effectiveness

The findings underscore the need for a more robust and consultative planning process that can enhance operational readiness and ensure stronger alignment between programme design and implementation realities.

(b) Key Planning Gaps Identified

The qualitative analysis of key informant interviews highlighted several critical planning deficiencies that have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the programme. A recurring concern was the lack of clarity in implementation activities. While broad programme objectives are well-articulated, many respondents observed that the detailed plans outlining specific actions and timelines are either

absent or inadequately developed. As one key informant from Gauteng remarked, “There is no clarity in implementation activities,” reflecting a broader sentiment about the gap between policy intent and operational detail.

Another significant issue identified was the absence of contextualised provincial implementation plans. Several respondents pointed out that while the national framework provides an overarching vision, provinces lack tailored activity plans that address their unique socio-economic and institutional contexts. This gap creates inconsistencies in execution and undermines the programme’s adaptability. A respondent from Gauteng emphasised the need for “a clear activity plan per province and alignment with the national approach to linking.”

Weak coordination mechanisms were also cited as a major limitation. Many respondents described insufficient planning for collaboration among departments, agencies, and other implementing partners. This lack of coordination results in fragmented efforts and missed opportunities for synergy across different components of the social protection and livelihoods ecosystem.

Finally, several informants noted that documentation of activities and plans is often incomplete or inadequately maintained. This hinders consistent implementation and impairs the ability to monitor progress or hold stakeholders accountable. The combined effect of these gaps reflects the need for a more structured, inclusive, and evidence-informed planning process that provides clarity, strengthens provincial alignment, and enables effective coordination and execution across all programme sites.

(c) Beneficiary Perspectives on Implementation

Although beneficiaries were not directly questioned about programme planning, their feedback on implementation quality offers valuable indirect insights into the effectiveness of planning processes. A common theme in beneficiary responses was the variability in how programme components were delivered. Many noted that some elements of the intervention were inconsistently applied or delayed, suggesting gaps in the planning and scheduling of activities.

Communication emerged as another area of concern. Several beneficiaries indicated that they received limited or unclear information regarding programme updates and next steps. This points to insufficient planning for information dissemination and beneficiary engagement, which are crucial for maintaining trust and ensuring effective participation.

Coordination challenges also featured in the responses. Some beneficiaries described disjointed or fragmented service delivery, where different components of the programme did not appear to be aligned. This reflects a lack of integrated planning across implementing agencies and support structures.

One beneficiary from the Northwest province expressed the need for improved communication and follow-up, stating, “They need to do more workshops and give the participants feedback about the challenges *that have been raised.”* This highlights the need for a more participatory and responsive planning approach that ensures beneficiaries are kept informed, engaged, and supported throughout the implementation cycle.

(d) Provincial Variations in Planning and Implementation

The evaluation reveals striking provincial differences in implementation support quality, which correlates strongly with planning effectiveness:

Table 4: Provincial Variations in Planning and Implementation

Province	Good Support	Implementation Outcomes
GP (Gauteng)	75%	100% positive impacts
EC (Eastern Cape)	67%	100% positive impacts
KZN (KwaZulu-Natal)	50%	100% positive impacts
WC (Western Cape)	44%	56% positive impacts
LP (Limpopo)	42%	92% positive impacts
FS (Free State)	25%	50% positive impacts
MP (Mpumalanga)	21%	29% positive impacts
NW (Northwest)	14%	9% positive impacts

This provincial analysis reveals a clear correlation between implementation support quality and positive outcomes, suggesting that planning quality significantly influences program effectiveness. Provinces with stronger planning frameworks (as evidenced by implementation support quality) consistently show better outcomes.

(e) Planning-Implementation-Outcome Connection

The evaluation findings underscore a strong and direct connection between the quality of planning, the effectiveness of implementation, and the outcomes experienced by beneficiaries. Provinces that demonstrated robust planning processes also showed significantly higher levels of implementation quality and more consistent positive results among programme participants.

In high-performing provinces such as Gauteng, the Eastern Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal, strong planning frameworks were evident through well-coordinated implementation efforts. These provinces reported 100% positive impact rates from beneficiaries, indicating that careful, strategic planning translates into effective service delivery and tangible improvements in livelihoods.

Moderate-performing provinces including the Western Cape, Limpopo, and the Free State showed more mixed results. These regions exhibited moderate planning quality, which was reflected in variable but generally favourable outcomes for beneficiaries. Positive impact rates in these provinces ranged between 50% and 92%, highlighting the role of planning consistency in achieving reliable results.

By contrast, low-performing provinces such as Mpumalanga and the Northwest were characterised by notable deficiencies in both planning and implementation. These weaknesses were closely mirrored in beneficiary feedback, with positive impact rates falling between just 9% and 29%. The limited reach and effectiveness of programme activities in these provinces point to critical planning failures that directly undermine intended development outcomes.

This correlation across provinces clearly illustrates that strong planning is not simply an administrative function but a foundational driver of programme success. Where planning is strategic, inclusive, and well-documented, it enables efficient implementation and leads to meaningful

improvements in the lives of beneficiaries. Conversely, weak planning severely compromises delivery and diminishes the programme's developmental impact.

(f) Planning Elements Present vs. Missing

The evaluation revealed a mixed picture regarding the presence of key planning components within the programme design. Several foundational elements were found to be generally present. These include clearly articulated broad programme objectives that are well-aligned with national policies, basic definitions of the target groups, and a general categorisation of intervention types. In addition, high-level coordination structures were identified, indicating an intention to facilitate interdepartmental and cross-sector collaboration.

However, critical planning components necessary for operational effectiveness were frequently found to be missing. Among the most notable gaps were the absence of detailed activity schedules and timelines, which are essential for structured implementation and performance tracking. Similarly, clear resource allocation frameworks were often lacking, making it difficult to plan, budget, and deliver services efficiently across different regions.

The evaluation also highlighted the lack of contextualised provincial implementation plans, which are needed to adapt the national framework to diverse local realities. Without these, provinces struggled to apply the programme effectively and consistently. Specific coordination mechanisms that operationalise the high-level structures were also found to be insufficient or absent, contributing to fragmented delivery and stakeholder disconnects.

Other significant omissions included robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess progress and impact, as well as well-defined exit and progression strategies that would guide beneficiaries along a clear pathway from inability to support themselves to economic self-reliance. The absence of these critical elements undermines both implementation and sustainability, reinforcing the need for a more comprehensive and systematic approach to programme planning.

(g) Conclusion and Implications

Regarding the question of effectiveness, the evaluation concludes that the Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities programme has been moderately planned, with notable disparities in planning quality across provinces. Only 24% of key informants regarded the programme as well-planned and significant shortcomings were identified in areas such as activity specification, provincial contextualisation, coordination mechanisms, and documentation. These planning gaps have tangible consequences, as evidenced by the correlation between weak planning and poor implementation support in several provinces.

Crucially, the analysis highlights a strong connection between the quality of planning and the outcomes experienced by beneficiaries. Provinces that demonstrated high planning standards, such as Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape, also reported the most consistent and positive beneficiary impacts. This suggests that strengthening planning processes is not only a matter of procedural improvement but a vital strategy for enhancing programme effectiveness and impact.

To address these challenges and improve overall planning effectiveness, the programme should prioritise the development of detailed provincial implementation plans that tailor the national framework to local realities. This should be complemented by the creation of specific activity

schedules with clearly defined timelines and resource allocations. In addition, establishing explicit coordination mechanisms among stakeholders will be essential to streamline implementation efforts.

Improved documentation of all planning components is also critical, as it would provide implementers with clear guidance and accountability benchmarks. Furthermore, the adoption of standardised monitoring frameworks would enable ongoing assessment of progress and ensure alignment between planning and implementation.

Collectively, these enhancements would significantly strengthen the programme's operational coherence and delivery capacity, especially in underperforming provinces where planning weaknesses are most pronounced. By institutionalising these planning reforms, the programme stands a greater chance of achieving its intended developmental outcomes and contributing meaningfully to sustainable livelihoods and social protection in South Africa.

***Sub-question 1:** Based on the Theory of Change, logframe and implementation arrangements does it look like the intervention is likely to work and achieve intended objectives?*

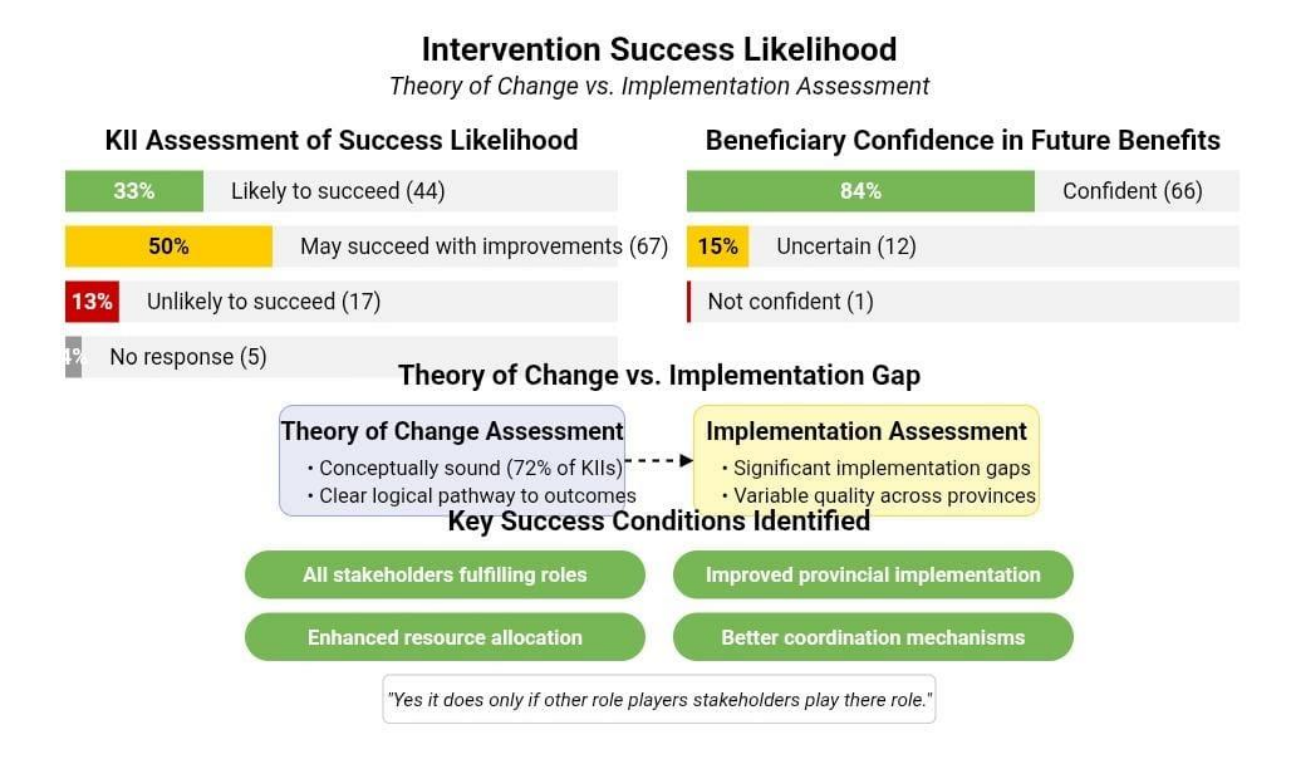


Figure 9: Intervention Success Likelihood Assessment

The evaluation reveals a complex picture of the intervention's potential success, with a generally sound theoretical foundation but significant implementation challenges that create conditional likelihood of success.

(a) Assessment of Success Likelihood

Insights from 133 key informant interviews reveal a cautiously optimistic yet conditional outlook on the likelihood of success for the Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities programme. While 33% of respondents expressed confidence that the intervention is likely to succeed in its current form, half of the respondents 50% indicated that success is possible but contingent on specific improvements being made. In contrast, 13% considered the programme unlikely to succeed, and 4% did not provide a response.

This distribution suggests that while a significant majority (83%) see potential in the programme, only a third believe it is currently on a path to success without major changes. The large portion of respondents expressing conditional optimism points to several underlying dependencies that must be addressed to realise the programme's full potential. These likely include improvements in planning, coordination, implementation support, and monitoring systems. The evaluation thus underscores that the programme's success is not assured, but attainable provided that strategic weaknesses are urgently and effectively resolved.

(b) Beneficiary Confidence in Future Benefits

Unlike the measured and conditional optimism expressed by key informants, beneficiaries demonstrated overwhelmingly high levels of confidence in the future benefits of the intervention. According to the survey findings, 84% of beneficiaries expressed confidence in the programme's potential to improve their lives going forward, while 15% were uncertain, and only 1% reported a lack of confidence.

This stark contrast between the perspectives of implementers and those of beneficiaries may be attributed to differing frames of reference. Key informants tend to assess the programme through the lens of formal planning, policy alignment, institutional performance, and systemic constraints. Their optimism is often tempered by concerns about funding, coordination, and implementation quality. In contrast, beneficiaries evaluate the programme primarily based on personal experiences and perceived impacts in their own lives, such as increased hope, empowerment, or access to resources factors that may not necessarily align with technical or structural benchmarks.

Additionally, the high level of beneficiary confidence could reflect limited visibility into the broader operational challenges identified by key informants. While beneficiaries may feel positively about the programme's intentions and outcomes at the household level, they may not be aware of underlying systemic weaknesses or constraints that threaten the programme's long-term sustainability and scalability. This divergence underscores the need to bridge stakeholder perspectives by enhancing transparency, communication, and community engagement in planning and monitoring processes.

(c) Theory of Change Assessment

The evaluation confirms that the intervention's Theory of Change and logical framework (logframe) are conceptually well-structured, offering a coherent pathway toward achieving the programme's intended outcomes. A combined 72% of key informants those who viewed the programme as either likely to succeed or potentially successful with improvements expressed confidence in the theoretical foundation of the intervention. This reflects broad consensus on the overall soundness of its design.

The Theory of Change lays out a logical sequence of steps that link social protection to sustainable livelihoods, beginning with immediate relief and progressing through skills development, market access, and institutional support mechanisms. This progression was widely seen as reasonable and aligned with the realities of South Africa's development context, particularly in addressing structural poverty and unemployment.

Furthermore, the programme's log-frame includes well-aligned outcome indicators that reflect its core objectives. However, some respondents pointed to gaps in indicator specificity and measurability, suggesting that while the broad goals are well-articulated, more precise tools are needed to track progress effectively and consistently.

One key informant succinctly captured this common viewpoint by stating, *"The Theory of Change is sound, but the practice has gaps."* This observation, echoed across several provinces, highlights a critical distinction between conceptual design and operational execution. While the theoretical foundation of the programme is considered robust and relevant, its success ultimately depends on the effectiveness with which the planned pathways are implemented and monitored.

(d) Implementation Arrangements Assessment

Although the Theory of Change underpinning the programme is broadly regarded as sound, the evaluation revealed significant shortcomings in the practical arrangements required for effective implementation. These gaps pose considerable risks to the programme's ability to achieve its intended outcomes.

One of the most prominent issues identified is the **inconsistency in implementation quality across provinces**. For instance, Gauteng reported strong support systems, with 75% of respondents citing good implementation support, whereas in the Northwest province, only 14% rated implementation support as adequate. This disparity underscores a broader challenge of uneven execution and limited standardisation in programme delivery across the country.

Coordination mechanisms were also widely flagged as a weakness. Many key informants reported insufficient alignment among stakeholders, including government departments, implementing partners, and community-based organisations. One respondent summarised the issue by stating, *"The coordination is not strong enough to ensure all components work together," reflecting the fragmentation that often undermines integrated service delivery.*

Resource adequacy further compounds the problem. A majority of respondents (59%) indicated that the financial and material resources available are not sufficient to implement the intervention as designed. This resource gap contributes to a mismatch between the intervention's conceptual ambition and its operational reality.

Human resource capacity was another critical area of concern. Only 25% of key informants believed that staffing levels were sufficient to implement the programme effectively. Shortages were particularly noted in specialised roles necessary for technical aspects such as enterprise development, livelihood coaching, and monitoring and evaluation.

Overall, while the intervention's design provides a promising framework for linking social protection to sustainable livelihoods, its success remains highly dependent on addressing these core implementation challenges particularly those related to resourcing, coordination, and provincial capacity.

(e) Theory-Implementation Gap

The evaluation identified a pronounced disconnect between the intervention's theoretically sound design and the realities of its implementation. While the Theory of Change and accompanying logframe articulate a coherent and valid pathway toward linking social protection beneficiaries to sustainable livelihoods, the arrangements for putting this framework into practice often fall short. This gap between theory and execution undermines the programme's ability to achieve its intended outcomes.

One of the clearest manifestations of this gap is the **dramatic variation in performance across provinces**. In provinces where the Theory of Change has been more effectively operationalised, such as Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape positive outcomes have been reported, demonstrating that the intervention can succeed under the right conditions. However, in lower-performing provinces like Mpumalanga and the Northwest, weak implementation capacity and inadequate support structures have led to poor outcomes, highlighting the risks of inconsistent execution.

Respondents also emphasised a **capacity-design mismatch**, noting that while the programme's design is ambitious and well-intentioned, it often assumes levels of institutional, financial, and human resource capacity that are not available in practice. This has led to unrealistic expectations, strained implementation teams, and delays in delivering programme benefits.

Collectively, these findings indicate that closing the gap between theory and implementation is essential for scaling the programme's impact. Doing so will require not only improved coordination and resource mobilisation but also a recalibration of programme expectations to better align with available capacities and provincial contexts.

(f) Key Success Conditions

The evaluation identified four critical conditions that must be in place for the successful implementation of the intervention linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities. These conditions are foundational to bridging the gap between the programme's strong theoretical design and its practical execution.

Effective stakeholder coordination emerged as a central requirement. The intervention's success is highly dependent on the ability of all involved stakeholders across government departments, implementing agencies, and community partners to fulfil their roles in a collaborative and timely manner. One respondent captured this sentiment by stating, *"Yes, it does, only if other stakeholders play their role."* This underscores the importance of shared ownership and inter-institutional accountability.

Improved implementation at the provincial level is also essential. The evaluation revealed stark disparities in performance across provinces, with some demonstrating effective implementation while others lag significantly. Elevating the quality of delivery in underperforming provinces is necessary to ensure the programme's benefits are equitably distributed and consistently realised nationwide.

Enhanced resource allocation is another prerequisite for success. Respondents frequently cited the need for adequate financial and human resources to operationalise the intervention as

envisioned in the Theory of Change. Without sufficient funding, staffing, and technical expertise, even the most robust programme design cannot achieve its intended impact.

Finally, **stronger coordination mechanisms** are vital to aligning theoretical design with day-to-day implementation. Improved structures for communication, collaboration, and oversight among stakeholders would ensure that all components of the programme function cohesively. Together, these conditions form the operational foundation required for the intervention to move from conceptual promise to measurable, sustainable outcomes.

(g) Provincial Evidence of Potential Success

The provincial analysis presents strong evidence that the intervention linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities has the potential to succeed, provided it is effectively implemented. High-performing provinces such as the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng stand out, with all reporting 100% positive impact rates among beneficiaries. These cases clearly demonstrate that when the programme is well-executed, it is fully capable of achieving its intended objectives.

A clear correlation emerged between implementation quality and beneficiary outcomes, reinforcing the conclusion that the effectiveness of delivery mechanisms, rather than flaws in the theoretical design, is the critical factor in determining success. The programme's Theory of Change has proven valid in practice, but only when operationalised through structured, well-coordinated, and adequately resourced interventions.

Furthermore, specific success stories within the programme provide additional validation of the model. One notable example includes a chef training initiative that led directly to employment opportunities for beneficiaries. Such cases not only highlight the intervention's potential but also demonstrate that targeted, skills-based initiatives when implemented with appropriate support can create meaningful, lasting improvements in people's lives. This evidence underscores the importance of prioritising implementation capacity and fidelity in efforts to scale the programme's impact nationwide.

(h) Conclusion: Conditional Likelihood of Success

The comprehensive evaluation finds that the intervention to link Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities holds a conditional likelihood of success. At its core, the intervention rests on a theoretically sound foundation. The Theory of Change and logframe are conceptually robust, outlining clear and logical pathways from social protection to sustainable livelihoods through skills development, market linkages, and support structures.

However, the success of the intervention is highly dependent on the quality of its implementation, which varies significantly across provinces. High-performing provinces such as Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape demonstrate that when the intervention is properly executed, it can deliver its intended outcomes fully and effectively. These provinces offer concrete evidence of the programme's potential and serve as models for what is possible when key success conditions are met.

At the same time, the evaluation identifies several critical dependencies that must be addressed to improve the programme's overall likelihood of success. These include enhanced stakeholder coordination, improved provincial implementation quality, adequate resource allocation, and the

establishment of strong coordination mechanisms. Without addressing these systemic and operational challenges, the programme's impact will remain uneven and limited in scale.

In sum, the intervention is not fundamentally flawed in its design. Rather, its mixed performance across regions highlights the urgent need to strengthen implementation arrangements. The clear success in well-functioning provinces provides a practical blueprint for improvement—one that, if replicated and scaled, could significantly enhance the intervention's ability to achieve its objectives across all parts of South Africa.

***Sub-question 2**: Is the logic of the intervention design robust, likely to work, and likely to contribute to transformative equity?*

The evaluation reveals that the intervention design has moderate logical robustness with conditional potential for transformative equity, contingent upon implementation improvements and addressing structural barriers.

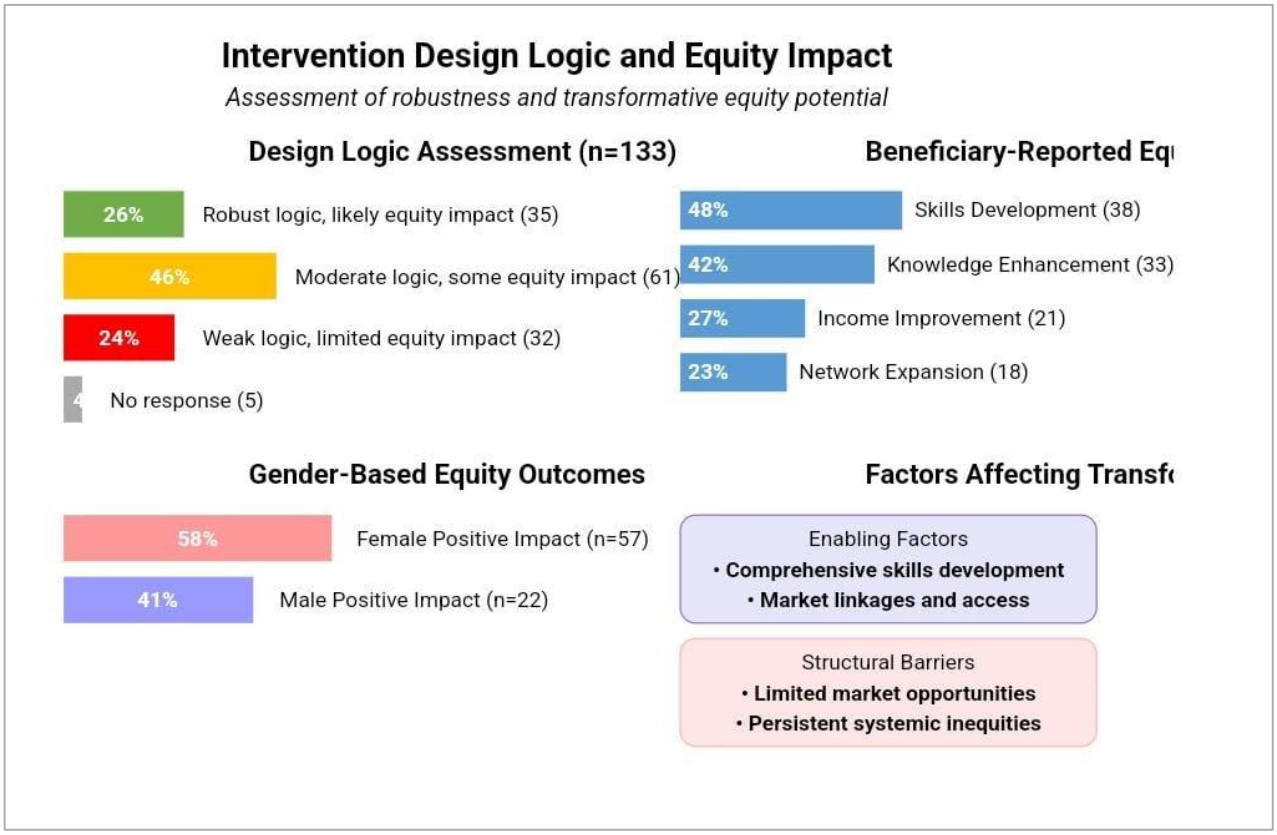


Figure 10: Intervention Success Likelihood Assessment

(a) Logic Robustness Assessment

Key informant interviews (n=133) reveal a mixed perception regarding the robustness of the intervention's design logic, particularly in relation to its potential to deliver equitable outcomes. Among the 133 respondents, only 26% considered the intervention's design to be logically robust and likely to result in meaningful equity impacts. A further 46% assessed the logic as moderate, suggesting that while the design shows coherence, it may only partially achieve equity objectives. In

contrast, 24% viewed the design as weak, indicating limited confidence in the intervention's ability to produce equitable results. An additional 4% of respondents did not provide an opinion.

These findings suggest that while a majority 72% acknowledge at least some degree of logical coherence in the intervention's design, only a small proportion view it as fully adequate to advance transformative equity outcomes. The data points to a general recognition of the programme's intent and structure but also highlights concerns about the depth and reliability of its equity focus. This underscores the need for refinements in programme design, including clearer targeting strategies and more inclusive implementation mechanisms, to strengthen its ability to address the structural disadvantages faced by the most vulnerable populations.

(b) Transformative Equity Potential

The analysis of beneficiary outcomes indicates that the intervention shows promising signs of contributing to equity, though its impact is primarily concentrated at the individual level rather than effecting broader structural transformation. The most commonly reported outcomes relate to skills development (48%) and knowledge enhancement (42%), demonstrating that the programme is effectively building individual capacity. However, these gains while important do not yet translate into widespread systemic change.

Economic transformation outcomes remain more limited. Only 27% of beneficiaries reported improvements in income, suggesting that while participants are gaining skills and information, the programme has not consistently created the enabling conditions necessary for significant economic upliftment. This points to gaps in market access, enterprise support, or employment linkages that could unlock the full value of the acquired skills.

The evaluation also reveals a gender-based disparity in perceived outcomes. Female beneficiaries reported significantly more positive impacts (58%) than their male counterparts (41%), highlighting an imbalance in how benefits are distributed across gender lines. While the stronger impact among women may reflect the programme's success in addressing female vulnerability, the lower reported benefits among men suggest a need to strengthen inclusivity and ensure the intervention contributes to equity in a more balanced and comprehensive manner.

Overall, while the intervention demonstrates real potential for advancing transformative equity, it must move beyond individual empowerment and address systemic barriers to fully realise its equity objectives.

(c) Key Qualitative Insights

The qualitative analysis revealed several critical themes that provide deeper insight into the intervention's potential for achieving transformative equity. A prominent concern among key informants was the programme's current reliance on individual-level interventions, particularly skills development, without adequately embedding these efforts in a broader system of structural change. Many respondents stressed that true equity would only be realised if comprehensive and sustained skills development initiatives were integrated into the programme. As one key informant stated, *"Not really, unless skills development programs are implemented,"* underscoring the belief that equity cannot be achieved through surface-level interventions alone.

Another recurring theme was the programme's limited attention to structural barriers. Several respondents expressed concern that while the intervention is well-intentioned, its logic focuses too

heavily on individual transformation and does not adequately confront systemic constraints such as lack of market access, limited mobility, entrenched poverty cycles, and unequal institutional support. One informant put it plainly: *"The design focuses on individual change without sufficient attention to structural constraints,"* highlighting a disconnection between the programme's goals and the broader realities that hinder equity.

The provincial implementation analysis further reinforced these insights. It showed that in provinces where implementation is strong and better resourced, equity outcomes are significantly more positive. This suggests that beyond theoretical design, the **quality and consistency of implementation** play a decisive role in determining whether the programme can deliver equitable results. It also implies that advancing equity requires not just equitable intent in design, but the operational capacity and contextual sensitivity to bring that intent to life.

(d) Factors Affecting Transformative Equity

The evaluation identified several key factors that either enhance or constrain the intervention's ability to contribute meaningfully to transformative equity. On the enabling side, the presence of **comprehensive skills development programmes** that are well-aligned with actual market needs was cited as a critical driver of success. When beneficiaries acquire relevant and applicable skills, they are better positioned to transition from social protection to sustainable livelihoods. Additionally, **effective market linkages and access** such as support in identifying buyers, securing distribution channels, or entering value chains were found to significantly improve the chances of achieving economic independence.

Other enabling conditions include **integrated support mechanisms** such as mentorship, financial services, and psychosocial support that wrap around the core intervention and enhance its sustainability. **Adaptive implementation**, which allows for flexibility and responsiveness to provincial and local conditions, was also recognised as a vital factor in maximising the programme's equity impact.

However, these enablers are frequently undermined by a range of **structural barriers**. A lack of sufficient **market opportunities in disadvantaged or rural areas** often limits the real-world applicability of the skills that beneficiaries acquire. Respondents also pointed to **persistent systemic inequities**, such as gender and geographic disparities that are not fully addressed by the current programme design.

Resource constraints both financial and human remain a consistent challenge, affecting the quality and reach of implementation. Lastly, **weak coordination mechanisms** among government departments, implementing partners, and community structures hinder the programme's ability to function as an integrated and cohesive system. These limitations restrict the intervention's ability to achieve lasting, structural equity outcomes and highlight areas where targeted reform and investment could significantly increase its transformative potential.

(e) Conclusion: Conditional Equity Potential

The evaluation concludes that the intervention holds **conditional potential** to contribute to transformative equity. Its current design demonstrates greater strength in promoting **individual-level transformation** particularly through skills development and knowledge enhancement than in

addressing the **systemic barriers** that perpetuate inequality. While the programme successfully builds personal capacity among beneficiaries, its ability to drive structural change remains limited.

The equity impact of the intervention is also highly **dependent on the quality of implementation**, which varies significantly across provinces. In regions where delivery mechanisms are strong and well-coordinated, beneficiaries report more positive and equitable outcomes. However, in lower-performing provinces, weak implementation undermines the programme's equity promise and exacerbates existing disparities.

Additionally, **demographic variations** in outcomes highlight uneven benefit distribution. Women, for example, have reported more positive outcomes than men, pointing to the need for **more balanced targeting strategies** that ensure inclusivity across all groups, including youth and people with disabilities.

To realise its full potential in advancing transformative equity, the intervention must go beyond individual empowerment and more directly tackle **structural constraints** such as limited market access, systemic poverty, and institutional inequities. This would require **enhancing market linkages**, improving coordination mechanisms, mitigating structural barriers, and ensuring consistent implementation standards across all provinces.

In essence, while the intervention demonstrates meaningful progress toward equity at the personal level, achieving **truly transformative and sustainable equity** outcomes will depend on a shift toward a more systemic, inclusive, and context-responsive implementation model.

***Sub-question 3**: Is the intervention likely to result in lasting changes in systems affecting equity (for beneficiaries)?*

The evaluation reveals mixed potential for the intervention to create lasting systemic changes affecting equity, with stronger evidence of individual transformation than structural change.

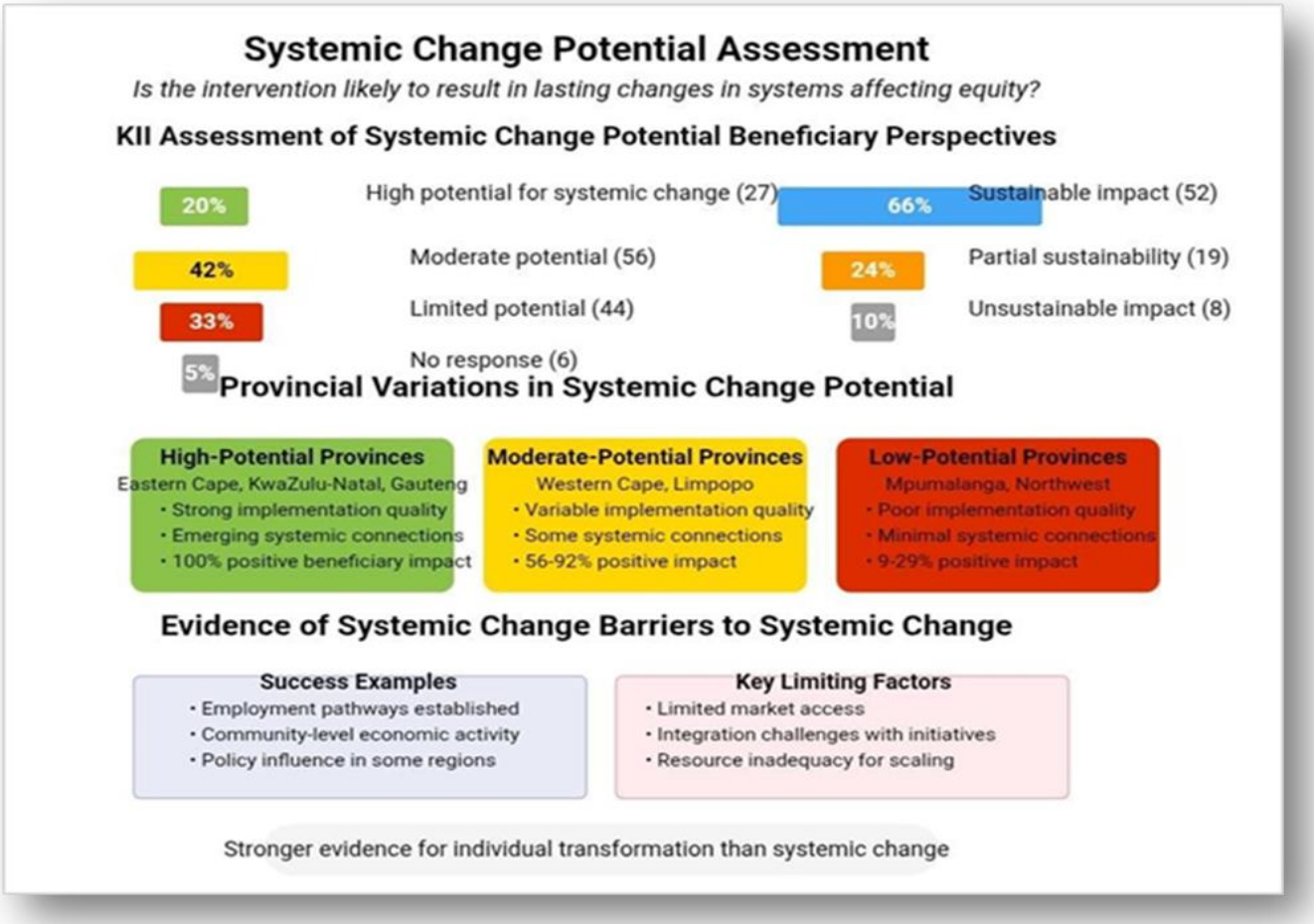


Figure 11: Systemic Change Potential

(a) Assessment of Systemic Change Potential

Key informant interviews present a mixed outlook on the intervention's potential to drive systemic change. Of the 133 respondents, 20% expressed confidence in the programme's ability to generate meaningful structural transformation, while 42% believed it holds moderate potential. In contrast, 33% of respondents reported limited potential for systemic impact, and 5% did not provide a response.

This distribution reflects a general sense of **cautious optimism**. A majority 62% see at least a moderate opportunity for the programme to influence broader systems of poverty reduction, employment creation, and social development. However, the substantial minority expressing scepticism indicates persistent concerns about the intervention's ability to tackle **deeper structural issues** such as economic exclusion, institutional fragmentation, and persistent inequalities.

The findings suggest that while the intervention is seen as directionally aligned with systemic transformation goals, its actual capacity to shift entrenched patterns and systems remains **heavily dependent on how it is implemented**. Realising its full systemic change potential will require deliberate efforts to integrate the programme into broader development strategies, improve policy coherence, and address institutional and structural bottlenecks that limit long-term impact.

(b) Beneficiary Sustainability Perspectives

Beneficiaries expressed a significantly higher level of optimism regarding the sustainability of the intervention's outcomes compared to key informants. According to the evaluation data, 66% of beneficiaries reported experiencing sustainable impacts, 24% perceived partial sustainability and only 10% considered the outcomes to be unsustainable. This overwhelmingly positive perception suggests that, from the beneficiaries' viewpoint, the programme has made lasting improvements in their personal or household circumstances.

This optimism stands in marked contrast to the more measured perspectives of key informants, of whom only 20% saw high potential for systemic change. The divergence likely stems from differing interpretations of what constitutes "sustainability." While key informants tend to evaluate sustainability in terms of structural and systemic transformation, such as long-term policy integration, institutional change, and economic inclusion, beneficiaries are more likely to assess it based on **immediate, personal improvements** such as increased skills, improved confidence, or more stable household income.

The findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between **individual sustainability** and **systemic sustainability** in programme evaluations. Although the intervention appears to be generating encouraging personal-level outcomes, its capacity to catalyse broader structural change remains a concern among stakeholders responsible for long-term development planning and policy alignment. This contrast reinforces the need for a dual approach, one that strengthens personal gains while also building the institutional foundations for sustained systemic impact.

(c) Evidence of Systemic vs. Individual Change

The evaluation revealed a clear distinction between the levels of change the intervention is currently achieving. While there is **strong and consistent evidence of lasting individual transformation**, examples of systemic change remain limited and isolated, primarily occurring in high-performing provinces.

Evidence of **individual change** was widespread across most provinces, regardless of overall implementation quality. Beneficiaries reported acquiring **transferable skills** that retain value beyond the scope of the programme, forming **new networks** that continue to offer access to opportunities, and undergoing **shifts in mindset and personal agency** that have led to more proactive livelihood strategies. These personal transformations reflect the programme's success in building confidence, motivation, and a greater sense of possibility among participants.

One key informant described a successful link between capacity building and employment, noting, *"Capacity building programs that led to permanent employment example, chef training employed at Wimpy and Spur."* While these instances of **systemic connectivity** are promising, they remain the exception rather than the norm and are largely concentrated in provinces with stronger implementation capacity.

A powerful example of personal transformation came from a beneficiary who shared, *"It opened my eyes to the plight of our people and awakened the drive in me to want to see change. I was an unemployed graduate who volunteered at the youth centre where I'm now the projects coordinator."* This statement captures the spirit of self-empowerment and local leadership that the intervention has helped to foster.

In summary, the intervention is currently more effective in catalysing **individual-level change** than in achieving widespread **systemic transformation**. For its full potential to be realised, future phases must more intentionally link personal empowerment with institutional reforms and broader structural shifts that embed lasting impact into the systems that shape people's livelihoods.

(d) Provincial Variations in Systemic Change Potential

The evaluation identified notable differences in the potential for systemic change across provinces, highlighting the critical role of implementation quality and local context in shaping outcomes beyond the individual level.

High-potential provinces, including the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng, showed the most compelling signs of emerging systemic change. In these regions, strong implementation efforts were complemented by more cohesive stakeholder integration and effective interdepartmental collaboration. These conditions created an enabling environment where capacity-building initiatives were more likely to translate into formal employment, enterprise development, and institutional partnerships.

In contrast, **moderate-potential provinces** such as the Western Cape and Limpopo displayed some systemic linkages, but these were often limited in scale and consistency. While there were examples of successful programme elements contributing to broader development goals, the depth of institutional alignment and cross-sector coordination was not yet sufficient to drive sustained systemic transformation.

Low-potential provinces, notably Mpumalanga and the Northwest, showed minimal evidence of change beyond individual beneficiary outcomes. In these provinces, weak implementation capacity, fragmented coordination, and limited market integration restricted the programme's influence on personal empowerment, without broader structural shifts in local systems or institutions.

Overall, the evaluation underscores that the **potential for systemic change is uneven across provinces** and is closely tied to the strength of local delivery mechanisms, the responsiveness of governance structures, and the adaptability of implementation strategies. Strengthening these elements in lower-performing regions is essential if the intervention is to generate lasting systemic impact at scale.

(e) Key Barriers to Systemic Change

The evaluation identified several critical barriers that currently limit the intervention's potential to drive lasting systemic change. Foremost among these is **limited market access**, which was consistently cited by respondents as a major constraint. Without viable markets for goods and services, beneficiaries face significant challenges in translating skills and enterprise efforts into sustainable income, thereby hindering broader economic transformation.

Integration challenges were also highlighted as a key obstacle. Respondents pointed to weak coordination and poor alignment between this intervention and other government initiatives aimed

at livelihoods, skills development, and economic inclusion. This fragmentation reduces opportunities for synergy and undermines the potential for systems-level impact.

Additionally, **resource inadequacy** remains a major constraint. Many stakeholders noted that while there are promising approaches and pilot successes, the financial and human resources required to scale these initiatives effectively across provinces are lacking. This prevents the institutionalisation of successful models and limits the intervention's ability to generate systemic benefits at scale.

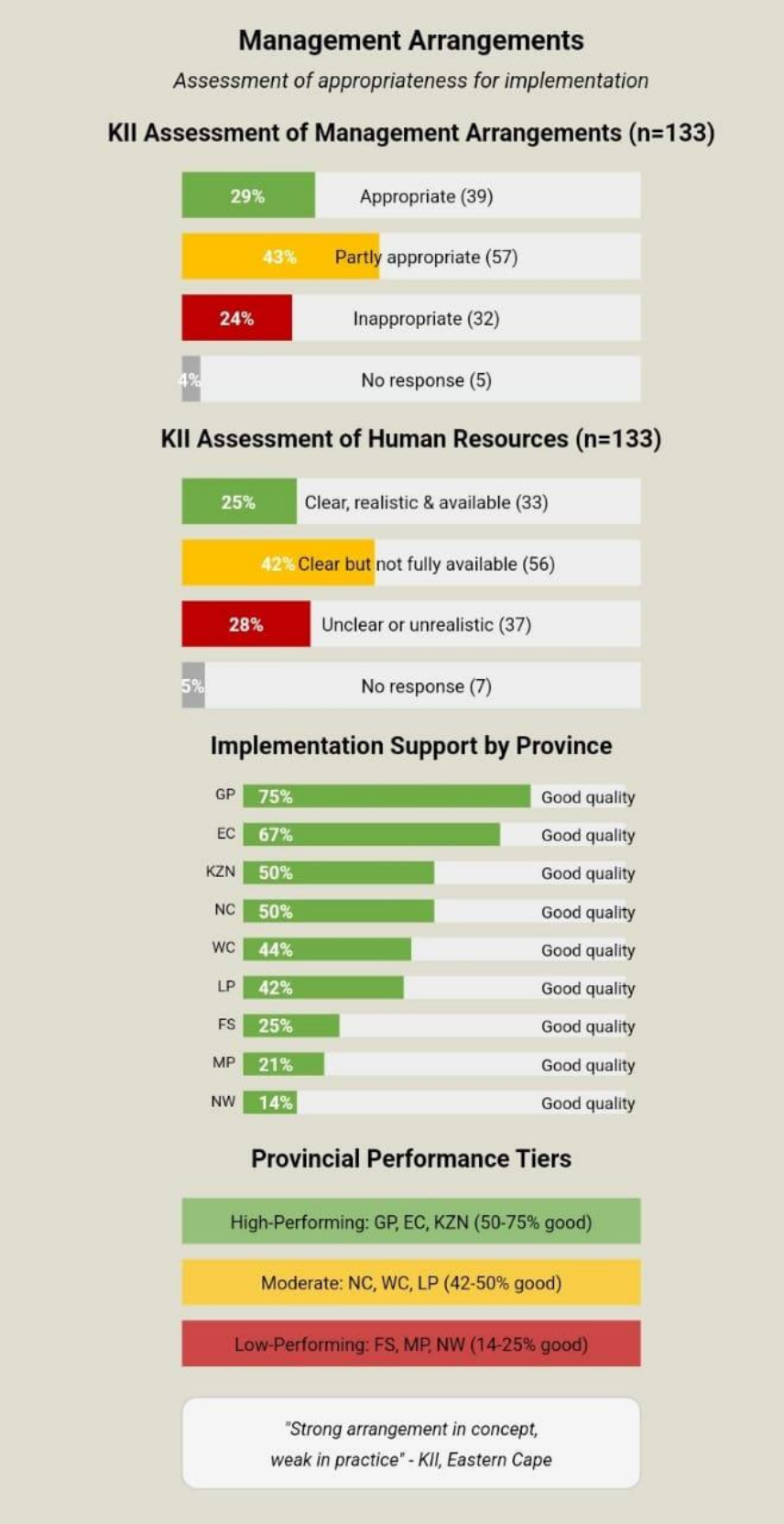
Together, these barriers underscore the need for more strategic investment, better integration with complementary initiatives, and a deliberate focus on market development if the intervention is to fulfil its transformative potential beyond individual-level outcomes.

(f) Conclusion : Differential Potential for Lasting Change

The intervention shows that the intervention displays **differential potential** for lasting change, with clearer and more consistent evidence of **individual-level transformation** than of systemic shifts affecting broader equity and development outcomes. Beneficiaries across most provinces reported sustained improvements in skills, expanded social and economic networks, and transformed mindsets, indicating that the programme is effectively enabling personal development and empowerment.

However, the evidence for **systemic change** remains limited and largely concentrated in **high-performing provinces** such as Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape. In these contexts, stronger implementation, stakeholder coordination, and integration with other government and private sector initiatives have enabled more tangible systems-level outcomes. This pattern underscores the extent to which the realisation of systemic impact is **highly dependent on implementation quality and local context**.

Figure 12: Management Arrangement Assessment



The evaluation also highlighted the importance of building **"sustainability bridges"** mechanisms that connect individual transformation to institutional and market systems. Examples such as job placements following targeted skills training or long-term integration into local value chains represent critical points where individual gains begin to influence structural conditions. These bridges are especially crucial for transforming short-term benefits into long-term change.

That said, **lasting systemic change remains conditional** on addressing persistent barriers. These include limited market access, weak integration with other developmental programmes, and resource constraints that hinder the scaling of effective approaches. Without targeted interventions to overcome these constraints, the systemic potential of the programme will remain uneven and unrealised in many regions.

In summary, while the intervention has succeeded in fostering lasting change at the individual level, its potential for systemic transformation is not yet fully achieved or uniformly distributed. The successful experiences in high-capacity provinces provide a compelling model for how broader change can be catalysed but scaling these outcomes will require intentional design, improved coordination, and stronger investment in systemic enablers across the country.

The evaluation reveals significant gaps in management and institutional arrangements that affect implementation effectiveness, with only about a quarter of stakeholders considering current arrangements fully appropriate.

(g) Management Arrangements Assessment

Based on responses from 133 key informants, only 29% consider the existing arrangements fully appropriate for supporting effective delivery. A larger segment 43%, indicated that management structures are only partly appropriate, while 24% of respondents viewed the arrangements as inappropriate. An additional 4% did not provide a response.

These findings suggest that although a majority of stakeholders (72%) acknowledge some degree of functionality within the current management framework, there is widespread recognition that these arrangements are not optimal. The fact that nearly a quarter of respondents reported inappropriate management structures points to **significant institutional and operational gaps**, such as unclear roles, weak oversight, and insufficient coordination mechanisms.

These deficiencies likely contribute to the uneven implementation performance observed across provinces and undermine the consistency and effectiveness of the programme's delivery. The findings highlight the need for **strengthened institutional frameworks, clearer lines of accountability**, and **improved management systems** to support a more coherent and efficient implementation process. Without addressing these gaps, the programme's ability to deliver sustainable, equitable outcomes will remain constrained.

(h) Human Resources Assessment

Key informant interviews also highlighted serious human resource constraints that limit the programme's implementation capacity. Only 25% of respondents reported that the human resources required to deliver the intervention are clear, realistic, and currently available. A further 42% acknowledged that while human resource needs may be clearly defined, the actual availability of skilled personnel remains insufficient. Meanwhile, 28% described the human resource planning as either unclear or unrealistic in relation to the intervention's demands, and 5% did not provide a response.

These findings suggest that while there is some clarity regarding the types of skills and staffing levels required (as indicated by 67% of respondents), **actual human resource availability is a major challenge**. The limited pool of qualified personnel, particularly in technical areas such as livelihood development, market facilitation, and programme monitoring, is undermining the quality and consistency of implementation across provinces.

This shortage not only affects day-to-day programme operations but also impairs the ability to scale successful models or respond effectively to contextual differences. Addressing these gaps will require **strategic investment in recruitment, training, and retention**, as well as the development of targeted capacity-building initiatives—particularly in underperforming provinces where staffing limitations are most severe. Without adequately resourced and skilled human capital, the programme's long-term success remains at risk.

(i) Beneficiary Perspectives on Implementation Support

Beneficiaries reported mixed experiences regarding the quality of implementation support received through the programme. According to the evaluation, 42% of beneficiaries described the support

they received as good, 35% rated it as moderate, and 23% reported experiencing poor quality support.

This distribution closely mirrors the assessments provided by key informants, reinforcing the conclusion that **gaps in management structures and human resource capacity are directly affecting frontline delivery**. Where institutional arrangements are strong and staff are adequately trained and resourced, beneficiaries are more likely to report positive experiences. Conversely, in contexts where staffing is insufficient or coordination is weak, beneficiaries experience inconsistent or inadequate support.

The alignment between beneficiary feedback and KII perspectives underscores the importance of addressing **underlying structural and operational weaknesses** to improve the quality and consistency of implementation support. Ensuring that beneficiaries receive timely, relevant, and reliable assistance is critical not only to individual outcomes but also to the overall credibility and effectiveness of the programme.

(j) Provincial Variations in Management Effectiveness

The provincial analysis reveals striking differences in implementation support quality, which reflects management effectiveness:

Table 5: Provincial Variations in Management Effectiveness

Province	Good Support	Moderate Support	Poor Support
GP	75%	25%	0%
EC	67%	33%	0%
KNZ	50%	50%	0%
NC	50%	25%	25%
WC	44%	33%	22%
LP	42%	42%	16%
FS	25%	50%	25%
MP	21%	36%	43%
NW	14%	32%	54%

This provincial variation suggests that management effectiveness is not uniform across the program, with certain provinces demonstrating significantly stronger arrangements than others.

(k) Key Management and Institutional Themes

The qualitative analysis uncovered several critical themes related to the management and institutional arrangements supporting the intervention, highlighting a combination of strengths, weaknesses, and regional inconsistencies.

Coordination mechanisms emerged as a central issue, with respondents offering contrasting views depending on their provincial context. In some provinces, coordination among stakeholders was described as "very well organized and reported," reflecting structured collaboration and effective communication channels. However, in many other cases, respondents highlighted serious coordination gaps, with unclear roles, overlapping responsibilities, and poor interdepartmental alignment undermining implementation efforts.

Capacity limitations were another frequently cited concern. Respondents noted that many implementation teams lacked the specialised skills required for effective livelihood development. These limitations were particularly evident in areas such as enterprise facilitation, market integration, and technical training core components needed to transition beneficiaries from social protection to sustainable livelihoods.

The analysis also revealed **significant provincial variability** in management effectiveness. Some provinces benefit from more capable leadership, better resourcing, and stronger institutional infrastructure, while others struggle with underdeveloped systems and inconsistent oversight. This variability contributes to uneven programme performance and inequitable beneficiary experiences across the country.

Additionally, **staff knowledge gaps** were reported by several beneficiaries, who observed that field staff often lacked detailed knowledge about livelihood options and support pathways. This limited their ability to guide beneficiaries effectively and reduced the perceived value of the programme at the local level.

One key informant aptly summarised these challenges by stating, *"Strong arrangement in concept, weak in practice,"* reflecting the disconnect between the programme's well-designed management frameworks and the practical realities of their execution. Bridging this gap will require targeted capacity building, improved coordination, and stronger accountability mechanisms across all levels of implementation.

(I) Management Strengths and Weaknesses

The evaluation identified a number of strengths and weaknesses within the management arrangements that underpin the implementation of the intervention. These findings reveal a system with notable areas of functionality, particularly in high-performing provinces, but also expose critical weaknesses that hinder consistent delivery and scale.

Among the **management strengths**, clear organisational structures were evident in provinces such as the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, and KwaZulu-Natal. In these regions, stakeholders reported established reporting mechanisms and well-defined roles and responsibilities documented through formal agreements and planning frameworks. Where coordination is effective, interdepartmental collaboration appears to be more structured and results-focused, contributing to stronger implementation outcomes.

However, several **management weaknesses** persist and are more pronounced in lower-performing provinces. A key issue is the **inconsistent application of management frameworks** across provinces. While the programme design includes standardised guidelines, their uptake and execution vary widely, resulting in uneven performance and accountability.

Limited staff capacity, particularly in specialised areas related to livelihood development and enterprise facilitation, further constrains management effectiveness. The lack of qualified personnel to lead or support technical components of the programme undermines both quality and impact.

Another persistent challenge is the **weak coordination between different stakeholders**—both horizontally across departments and vertically between national, provincial, and local levels. In some provinces, stakeholders operate in silos, diminishing the potential for integrated service delivery.

The evaluation also found **inadequate follow-up mechanisms** after initial engagement or training activities. Beneficiaries often receive support in the early stages but report limited ongoing guidance or check-ins to reinforce their progress or address emerging challenges.

Finally, the absence of a robust **knowledge management system** limits the programme's ability to capture, document, and scale good practices across provinces. Without systematic learning and information sharing, opportunities for replication, adaptation, and innovation are often missed.

Addressing these weaknesses while reinforcing existing strengths is essential to improving the programme's overall management effectiveness and ensuring more consistent and sustainable outcomes nationwide.

(m) Conclusion: Partially Appropriate Arrangements

The comprehensive evaluation indicates that current management and institutional arrangements for the intervention are **partially appropriate** for supporting effective programme implementation. While the formal design of these arrangements is conceptually sound—with clear structures, defined roles, and documented coordination protocols—there is a notable disconnect between **design and practice**. Implementation gaps remain substantial, limiting the full realisation of the programme's intent.

The evaluation reveals significant **variations in management effectiveness across provinces**, demonstrating that the existing frameworks can be effective but only when they are properly applied and supported. High-performing provinces such as the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, and KwaZulu-Natal show that with strong leadership, adequate resources, and consistent coordination, the programme can be delivered with high impact. However, in lower-performing provinces, weak institutional capacity and poor operationalisation of the management frameworks result in inconsistent implementation support and suboptimal beneficiary outcomes.

Human resource limitations further constrain the effectiveness of these arrangements. The evaluation highlights a shortage of staff with the specialised skills required for key components of the programme, particularly in livelihood development, enterprise facilitation, and monitoring. These gaps undermine both the quality and reach of programme services.

A clear **dependency between management quality and implementation outcomes** also emerged. Provinces with better coordination, clearer structures, and stronger institutional capacity were consistently associated with better beneficiary experiences and outcomes. This reinforces the finding that strengthening management arrangements is critical to improving the overall effectiveness of the intervention.

To address these challenges, the programme should prioritise the **standardisation of effective practices** drawn from high-performing provinces, alongside deliberate efforts to **build human resource capacity**, **enhance coordination mechanisms**, and **develop robust knowledge**

management systems to facilitate learning and replication. By closing the gap between conceptual design and practical implementation, the programme can ensure more consistent delivery and significantly improve its impact across all provinces.

***Sub question 4** : Is the human resource required to implement the intervention clear, realistic, and available?*

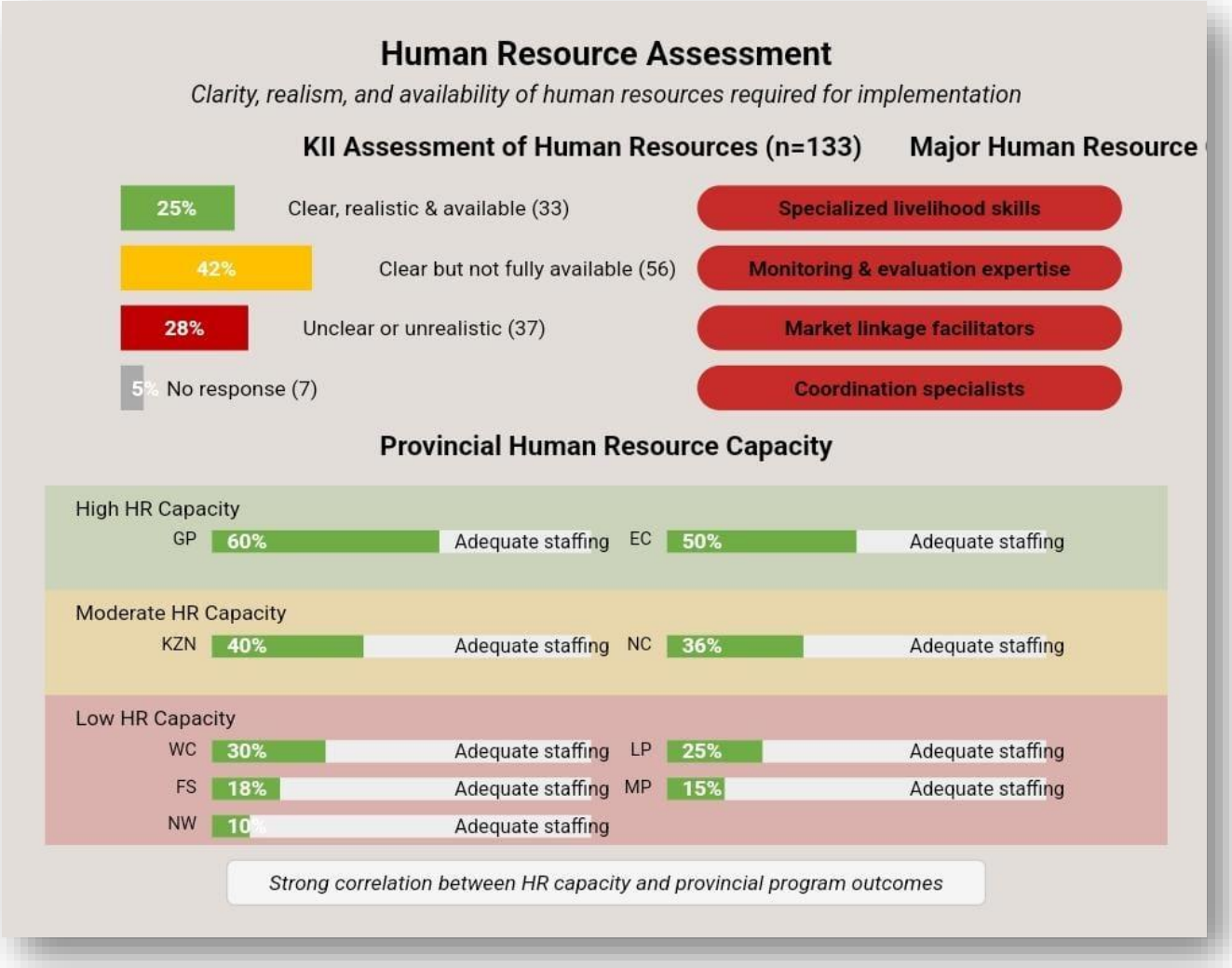


Figure 13: Human Resource Assessment

The evaluation reveals significant human resource challenges affecting implementation, with only a quarter of respondents indicating that required human resources are clear, realistic, and available.

(a) Overall Human Resource Assessment

The evaluation findings reflect **significant concerns regarding the adequacy of human resources** required to implement the intervention effectively. Among the 133 key informants interviewed, only 25% reported that human resources were clear, realistic, and currently available. A further 42% indicated that while the human resource requirements are generally well-defined, the actual availability of personnel remains insufficient. Meanwhile, 28% of respondents viewed the human resource planning as either unclear or unrealistic, and 5% did not provide a response.

These results suggest that although there is a **moderate level of clarity** around the types and levels of staffing needed (as recognised by 67% of respondents), the **practical availability of these human resources is a critical constraint**. Many provinces struggle to recruit and retain staff with the specialised skills necessary for effective implementation particularly in technical areas such as enterprise development, livelihoods facilitation, and market integration.

This shortage not only affects the delivery of programme activities but also contributes to inconsistent support quality, weak follow-up mechanisms, and limited impact tracking. Addressing these human resource gaps will require targeted investments in **capacity development, staff deployment, and professional training**, particularly in under-resourced and lower-performing provinces. Strengthening the workforce is essential to translating the programme's conceptual strengths into sustained implementation success.

(b) Major Human Resource Gaps Identified

The evaluation revealed several critical human resource gaps that significantly constrain the effective implementation of the intervention. These shortages are not only limiting the quality of programme delivery but also hindering the potential for sustainable impact and scale.

A major area of concern is the **lack of specialised skills in livelihood development**. Many key informants noted that while general community development practitioners are present in most provinces, there is a distinct shortage of staff with the technical expertise required for business mentoring, enterprise support, and the facilitation of income-generating activities. As one respondent remarked, *"Not enough specialized skills for effective implementation. General community development skills are available, but specialized livelihood skills are limited."*

Another significant gap identified is in **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) expertise**. Several respondents pointed to the limited capacity for systematically tracking programme progress, assessing results, and applying data to inform adaptive management. This weakness in M&E undermines the ability to measure effectiveness, capture learning, and make evidence-based improvements.

The shortage of **market linkage facilitators** was also frequently highlighted. These are individuals with the skills and networks to connect beneficiaries to viable markets, assess market demands, and support business integration into value chains. The lack of such personnel limits beneficiaries' ability to translate skills into sustainable economic opportunities.

Finally, the evaluation identified a need for more **coordination specialists** human resources dedicated to fostering alignment and collaboration among multiple stakeholders at various levels. In their absence, implementation tends to be fragmented, with weak cross-sector engagement and limited continuity between national frameworks and local delivery.

These findings point to the urgent need for a **targeted human resource development strategy** that goes beyond staffing numbers to focus on recruiting, training, and retaining personnel with the specialised competencies required to deliver the programme's full value proposition. Without addressing these gaps, the intervention will remain limited in reach and depth, particularly in the provinces that need it most.

(c) Provincial Variations in Human Resource Capacity

The provincial analysis reveals striking differences in human resource adequacy:

Table 5: Provincial Variations in Human Resource Capacity

Province	Adequate Staffing	Key HR Challenges
GP	60%	Specialized skills
EC	50%	Monitoring & evaluation
KNZ	40%	Market connections
NC	36%	Specialized skills
WC	30%	Coordination capacity
LP	25%	Specialized skills
FS	18%	All skill areas
MP	15%	All skill areas
NW	10%	All skill areas

The evaluation highlights clear **provincial disparities in human resource capacity**, revealing three distinct tiers that directly influence the quality and consistency of programme implementation across South Africa.

High-capacity provinces such as Gauteng and the Eastern Cape reported the highest levels of staffing adequacy, with 50–60% of respondents in these areas indicating that human resources were sufficient to meet programme demands. These provinces benefit from better access to skilled personnel, particularly in areas such as livelihoods facilitation, monitoring and evaluation, and stakeholder coordination. As a result, they are generally better positioned to implement the programme effectively and consistently.

Moderate-capacity provinces, including KwaZulu-Natal and the Northern Cape, reported staffing adequacy in the range of 36–40%. While these provinces show a more stable baseline of human resource support, gaps remain particularly in specialised roles such as market linkage facilitation and enterprise support. This tier of provinces requires targeted capacity strengthening to elevate performance to the level of high-capacity counterparts.

Low-capacity provinces namely the Western Cape, Limpopo, Free State, Mpumalanga, and the Northwest face the most severe human resource limitations, with only 10–30% of respondents reporting adequate staffing. These provinces are constrained by both a shortage of staff and a lack of specialised expertise. The resulting human resource gaps undermine the depth and reach of the programme, contributing to inconsistent support for beneficiaries and limiting the intervention's potential for scale and sustainability.

These variations reinforce the urgent need for a **differentiated human resource strategy**, tailored to the specific challenges of each province. This should include investments in recruitment, technical training, mentorship, and retention incentives particularly in lower-capacity provinces where human resource shortages are most acute. Closing these gaps will be essential to ensuring that the programme delivers equitable and effective support across all regions.

(d) Human Resource Challenges Reported by Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries' experiences reinforced the human resource concerns raised by key informants, highlighting several challenges that directly impacted the quality and continuity of programme support.

A frequently mentioned issue was the **limited follow-up after initial activities**. Many beneficiaries reported that after receiving training or initial engagement, there was little to no sustained interaction or support from programme staff. This gap in continued engagement points to a shortage of staff available to provide ongoing mentorship, troubleshooting, and monitoring particularly at the community level.

Another concern was the **knowledge gap among frontline staff**. Some beneficiaries observed that programme personnel lacked specific knowledge about relevant livelihood options, particularly those suited to the local economic and cultural context. This limited the relevance and applicability of the guidance they received, reducing the effectiveness of the programme in helping participants transition to sustainable income-generating activities.

Lastly, beneficiaries reported **inconsistencies in the quality of support**, with some receiving comprehensive and helpful assistance while others were left with minimal guidance. This variation suggests uneven staff capacity and training across implementation sites, reinforcing the broader finding that human resource adequacy is inconsistent across provinces and delivery teams.

These perspectives underscore the importance of **investing in both the quantity and quality of programme staff**, ensuring they are not only available in sufficient numbers but also equipped with the technical knowledge, contextual awareness, and capacity to deliver consistent and high-quality support to beneficiaries.

(e) Connection between Human Resource Capacity and Program Outcomes

The evaluation reveals a clear and compelling correlation between **human resource capacity** and the **effectiveness of programme implementation and beneficiary outcomes**. Provinces with higher levels of staffing adequacy and skill availability consistently demonstrate stronger delivery and more positive impacts on participants.

In **high human resource capacity provinces** such as Gauteng and the Eastern Cape, between 67% and 75% of respondents reported good-quality implementation support. These provinces also achieved the highest levels of beneficiary impact, with 100% of participants reporting positive outcomes. This alignment suggests that when human resources are sufficiently available and technically equipped, the programme performs at its best, achieving both operational efficiency and developmental impact.

Moderate-capacity provinces, including KwaZulu-Natal and the Northern Cape, reported good implementation support at around 50%, with beneficiary impact ranging between 75% and 100%. While these provinces show solid performance, they also indicate that moderate human resource constraints can still affect consistency, particularly in more complex programme components.

The pattern becomes more pronounced in **low-capacity provinces** the Western Cape, Limpopo, Free State, Mpumalanga, and the Northwest where only 14% to 42% of respondents rated implementation support as good. These provinces also recorded the lowest levels of positive beneficiary impact, ranging from just 9% to 56%. The data clearly indicate that insufficient and

underqualified staffing contributes to weaker delivery, limited follow-up and inconsistent support, which ultimately erodes the programme's effectiveness.

This strong correlation confirms that **human resource capacity is a key determinant of programme success**. Without adequate staffing both in numbers and in specialised skills the intervention struggles to deliver quality support or achieve sustainable outcomes. Strengthening human resource systems must therefore be a central focus of programme improvement strategies, particularly in provinces where capacity gaps are most acute.

(f) Factors Affecting Human Resource Adequacy

The qualitative analysis identified multiple interrelated factors contributing to the inadequate human resource capacity that currently constrains effective programme implementation. These challenges not only limit the scale and consistency of delivery but also undermine the programme's potential for long-term impact.

A primary issue cited by many respondents is **budget constraints**, which restrict the ability of implementing departments to recruit, train, and retain a sufficient number of staff. Limited funding often results in lean staffing structures, overburdened teams, and delayed recruitment for critical roles particularly at provincial and local levels.

Another significant factor is the **scarcity of specialised skills** within the public sector, particularly in areas directly related to livelihood development. Skills such as enterprise coaching, value chain analysis, business mentoring, and market facilitation are not widely available within existing staffing pools, and recruitment into these roles is often slow or uncoordinated.

Staff turnover was also highlighted as a recurrent issue. High attrition rates lead to a loss of institutional memory, disrupt continuity, and increase the burden on remaining staff. In provinces where turnover is particularly high, beneficiaries experience more fragmented support and inconsistent engagement with the programme.

Finally, the evaluation revealed that many staff are burdened with **competing responsibilities**. Rather than being dedicated full-time to the livelihoods intervention, personnel often manage multiple programmes or administrative duties, reducing the time and focus they can allocate to the intervention. This multitasking diminishes implementation quality and weakens follow-through on programme commitments.

Addressing these underlying issues will require a comprehensive human resource strategy that includes **dedicated funding**, **targeted skills development**, and the **creation of focused roles** to ensure that staff can support the programme with the necessary expertise and sustained attention.

(g) Conclusion: Partially Clear but Inadequately Available

The comprehensive assessment of human resource capacity reveals that while there is **partial clarity** around the staffing needs required to implement the intervention, the **availability and distribution of these resources remain significantly inadequate**. Approximately 67% of respondents acknowledged a general understanding of the required human resources; however, 28% still found the requirements either unclear or unrealistic. This indicates room for improvement in clearly articulating and standardising staffing needs across implementation sites.

When defined, the human resource requirements appear to be **generally realistic**, though access to certain specialised skills particularly in livelihood development, enterprise support, and market linkage remains challenging within the current constraints of the public sector. This reflects a structural mismatch between programme ambition and the skillsets readily available within provincial and local government institutions.

The **most critical barrier**, however, is the **limited availability** of the required human resources. Only 25% of respondents reported that their staffing levels were both adequate and aligned to programme demands. This shortfall has a direct impact on implementation quality, beneficiary experience, and ultimately the programme's overall effectiveness.

The analysis also revealed **significant provincial variation** in human resource adequacy, further contributing to uneven delivery and inconsistent outcomes across the country. High-capacity provinces like Gauteng and the Eastern Cape benefit from stronger staffing frameworks, while provinces such as Mpumalanga, the Free State, and the Northwest face acute shortages in both quantity and quality of human resources.

To address these gaps, the programme should prioritise several strategic actions:

(i) **Develop specialised training programmes** for existing staff to strengthen internal capacity.
(ii) **Forge partnerships** with technical experts, NGOs, and the private sector to access critical skills not readily available in the public sector.
(iii) **Reallocate resources** to prioritise key human resource gaps at provincial and local levels.
(iv) **Implement knowledge management systems** to capture and share expertise, enabling limited human resources to be leveraged more effectively across provinces.

By addressing these challenges, the programme can enhance its implementation capacity and ensure more consistent, high-quality support to beneficiaries nationwide.

***Sub question 5**: Were, alterations made to the program design in terms of collaboration during the implementation phase based on the reality on the ground?*

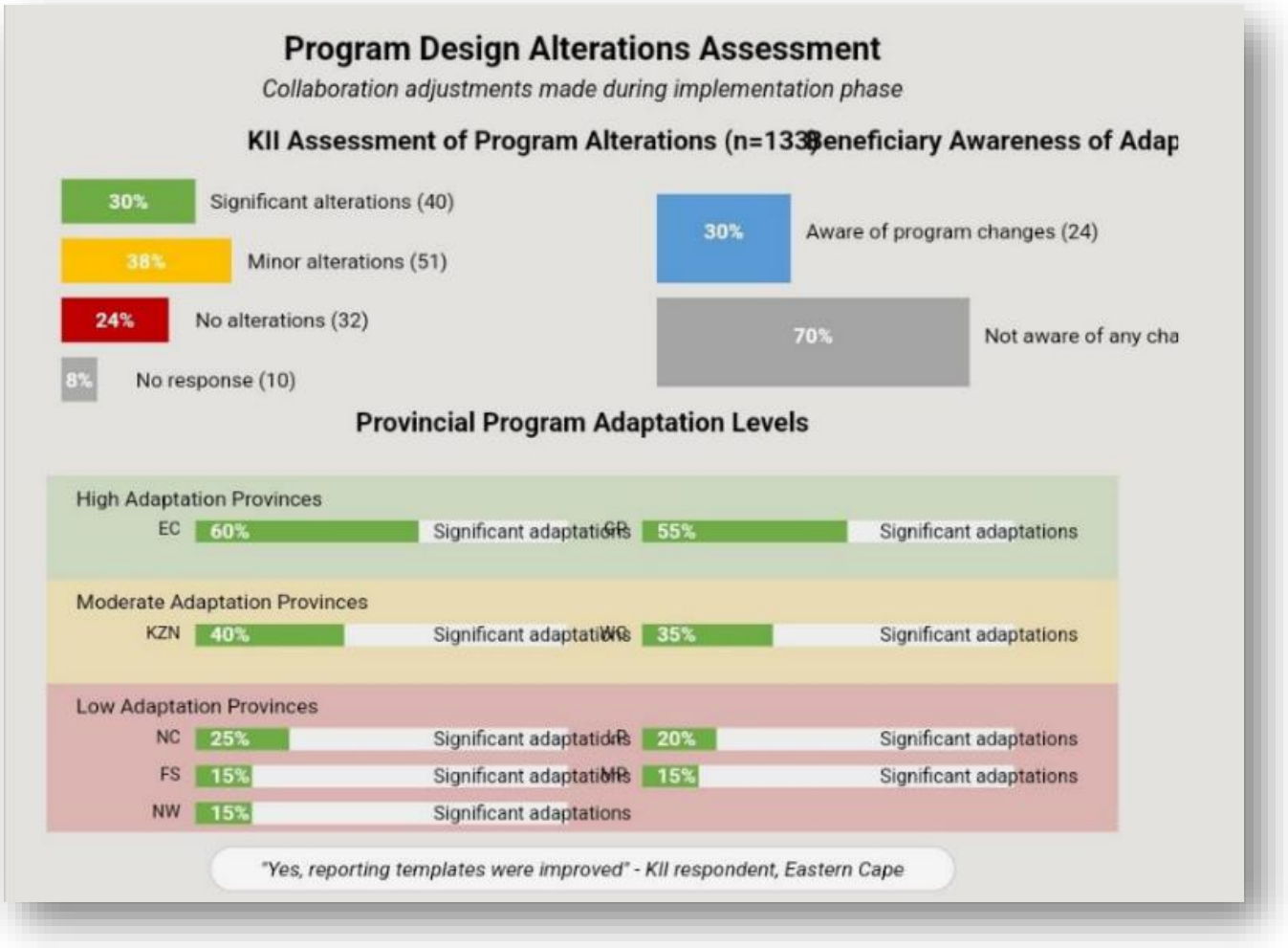


Figure 14: Program design Alterations

The evaluation reveals that while some alterations were made to program design during implementation, these adaptations varied significantly across provinces and were often not visible to beneficiaries.

(a) Overall Program Alteration Assessment

Key informant interviews reflect a **mixed picture regarding alterations to the programme design** during implementation. Of the 133 respondents, 30% reported significant changes, 38% indicated minor adjustments, and 24% stated that no alterations had occurred. An additional 8% did not provide a response.

This distribution suggests that while **the majority of respondents (68%) experienced some level of programme adaptation**, most of these were **minor or incremental adjustments** rather than comprehensive redesigns. This indicates a degree of responsiveness to contextual realities, but it also reflects a **limited level of flexibility** in how the programme has been adapted to suit provincial or community-specific needs.

The fact that nearly a quarter of respondents reported **no alterations** despite well-documented implementation challenges raises concerns about the programme's **capacity for adaptive management**. In complex, multi-site interventions such as this, the ability to adjust plans based on emerging evidence, stakeholder input, and operational challenges is critical to ensuring relevance and effectiveness.

These findings highlight the need for a more **deliberate, structured, and documented approach to programme adaptation**, one that empowers provincial teams to make evidence-based adjustments while maintaining fidelity to the overall intervention framework. Strengthening adaptive management practices could significantly enhance the programme's ability to respond to on-the-ground realities and improve implementation outcomes.

Beneficiary Awareness of Program Adaptations

The evaluation found that **beneficiary awareness of programme adaptations was notably low**, with only 30% of participants indicating they were aware of any changes made to the intervention during implementation. In contrast, a significant majority 70% reported no awareness of any programme alterations.

This disparity suggests that most of the adjustments made to the programme were likely **administrative or internal in nature**, rather than changes that visibly impacted the **content, delivery, or experience of direct services** provided to beneficiaries. It may also reflect communication gaps between implementing agencies and the communities they serve, with limited efforts made to explain or contextualise adjustments that occurred in response to implementation challenges or evolving needs.

The lack of visibility into programme changes can affect beneficiary trust, engagement, and satisfaction, particularly if they perceive the intervention as rigid or unresponsive to their feedback and lived realities. Going forward, there is a need to strengthen **communication and transparency** around programme adjustments to ensure beneficiaries are informed, engaged, and able to contribute meaningfully to adaptive processes. This would not only enhance the programme's responsiveness but also foster a stronger sense of ownership and accountability at the community level.

(b) Key Collaboration Adaptations Identified

The evaluation revealed several targeted adaptations to collaboration and engagement strategies that were introduced during the course of programme implementation. These changes were largely aimed at improving operational coordination, enhancing community participation, and responding to on-the-ground realities encountered by implementing teams.

One of the notable changes reported was the **improvement of reporting templates**. Respondents, particularly from the Eastern Cape, indicated that these tools were enhanced to better capture the nuances of implementation across diverse contexts. This allowed for more accurate tracking of activities and facilitated more responsive management decisions.

There were also **adjustments to partnerships with Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs)** in several provinces. These changes reflected a need to recalibrate roles and expectations based on initial collaboration experiences. In some cases, this meant redefining scopes of work, while in others it involved bringing in new partners or shifting responsibilities to better leverage local expertise.

Another key adaptation involved **community engagement approaches**. Some provinces revised their methods for engaging beneficiaries and local leaders to foster greater participation and ownership. These included more inclusive consultation processes, improved outreach, and more flexible scheduling of community-based activities to ensure broader access.

Stakeholder coordination mechanisms were also refined in certain areas. Improved structures for collaboration and communication between different implementing agencies and government departments helped to reduce fragmentation and improve overall alignment in delivery.

From the beneficiaries' perspective, those who were aware of programme changes cited **increased workshops and training opportunities**, which were introduced in response to feedback and evolving needs. Others noted the **expansion of partnerships** with local businesses and service providers, which opened up new opportunities for employment and market access. A few beneficiaries also observed **improved communication**, particularly around scheduling, programme updates, and feedback loops indicating efforts to make the programme more responsive and transparent.

These adaptations, while not universal, reflect a growing awareness of the need for **flexibility, contextual sensitivity, and active stakeholder engagement** in delivering complex, development-focused interventions. They also illustrate the potential for adaptive management practices to enhance both implementation effectiveness and beneficiary experience when properly applied.

(c) Provincial Variations in Program Adaptation

The provincial analysis reveals significant differences in program alterations:

Table 6: Provincial Variations in Program Adaptation

Province	Significant Adaptations	Nature of Adaptations
GP	55%	Stakeholder coordination
EC	60%	Reporting, NPO partnerships
KNZ	40%	Community engagement
NC	25%	Limited adjustments
WC	35%	Reporting systems
LP	20%	Minor reporting changes
FS	15%	Minimal alterations
MP	15%	Minimal alterations
NW	15%	Minimal alterations

The evaluation identified distinct **provincial differences in the degree of programme adaptation**, revealing three clear tiers of responsiveness to implementation realities. These differences are closely correlated with the overall effectiveness of programme delivery and beneficiary outcomes, underscoring the importance of adaptive management in complex, multi-site interventions.

High-adaptation provinces, namely the Eastern Cape and Gauteng, made substantial and strategic adjustments to their collaboration and implementation approaches. These included improvements in stakeholder coordination, enhanced reporting mechanisms, and strengthened community engagement strategies. These provinces reported between 67% and 75% good implementation support, and 100% of beneficiaries in these areas reported positive outcomes. This strong performance suggests that **flexibility and responsiveness** in programme management are critical enablers of success.

Moderate-adaptation provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape introduced targeted changes to specific components, including partnerships and communication practices. While not as extensive as in high-performing provinces, these adaptations still contributed to improved programme delivery, with 44% to 50% reporting good implementation support and positive beneficiary impact ranging from 56% to 100%.

In contrast, **low-adaptation provinces** including the Northern Cape, Limpopo, Free State, Mpumalanga, and the Northwest made **minimal or no meaningful programme adjustments**, despite clear implementation challenges. These provinces reported the lowest levels of implementation support (14% to 42%) and positive impact (ranging from 9% to 50%). The lack of responsiveness likely exacerbated existing operational issues, limiting the intervention's effectiveness and reducing its relevance to local contexts.

The observed pattern highlights a clear relationship between **the capacity to adapt programme design and overall programme effectiveness**. Provinces that proactively adjusted their collaboration models, engagement strategies, and coordination mechanisms were more successful in achieving positive outcomes. This underscores the importance of embedding **adaptive management principles** into the programme's core operations allowing for real-time learning, context-specific adjustments, and ongoing stakeholder feedback.

To strengthen outcomes nationally, the programme should prioritise **replicating successful adaptation practices from high-performing provinces** and **building the capacity of low-performing regions to identify, test, and scale necessary adjustments** in response to local challenges.

(d) Factors Affecting Program Adaptation

The qualitative analysis revealed that a province's ability to effectively adapt the programme in response to implementation realities is shaped by several interrelated factors. These factors influence both the extent and quality of adjustments made during implementation and help explain the provincial disparities in programme responsiveness and effectiveness.

One key enabler is **provincial autonomy**. Provinces that had greater decision-making authority particularly in adapting implementation approaches, reallocating resources, or adjusting partnership models demonstrated stronger capacity to respond to contextual challenges. This autonomy allowed for quicker, more context-sensitive adaptations without needing prolonged approvals from national structures.

Another critical factor is the presence of **effective feedback mechanisms**. Provinces that had systems in place to regularly gather input from frontline implementers and beneficiaries were better positioned to identify gaps and implement targeted improvements. These mechanisms enabled real-time learning and facilitated a more dynamic, responsive programme management style.

Leadership support also played a decisive role. Where provincial leadership both political and administrative was actively engaged and supportive, teams were more empowered to adjust programme strategies based on local insights. Leadership that valued innovation and flexibility was associated with greater adaptation and, ultimately, more positive programme outcomes.

Conversely, **resource flexibility** emerged as a limiting factor in many provinces. Even where the need for adaptation was clear, a lack of flexible funding, staffing, or logistical support often constrained the ability to act. This rigidity made it difficult to pivot in response to emerging challenges or to scale up effective pilot initiatives, especially in lower-capacity regions.

Collectively, these findings suggest that successful adaptation depends not only on recognising the need for change but also on having the **institutional environment, leadership backing, and operational flexibility** to act on that recognition. Strengthening these enabling conditions across all provinces will be essential to improving the overall responsiveness and effectiveness of the programme.

(e) Conclusion: Variable Adaptation Across Provinces

The evaluation finds that **alterations to the programme design during implementation were unevenly applied across provinces**, with varying levels of depth, visibility, and impact. While some provinces particularly Gauteng and the Eastern Cape demonstrated a proactive and flexible approach by making substantial adaptations to collaboration models and engagement strategies, other provinces made only superficial changes or none at all, despite facing evident implementation challenges.

Most of the adjustments observed were **administrative in nature**, such as improvements to reporting templates and internal coordination structures. While these changes were valuable for enhancing internal processes, they often **did not translate into fundamental shifts in collaboration or service delivery models** that would directly benefit beneficiaries.

This was reflected in beneficiary feedback, where the majority reported **no awareness of programme changes**, suggesting that many of the adaptations were **invisible at the point of service delivery**. This disconnect indicates a need to ensure that future adaptations are not only strategic but also experienced tangibly by programme participants.

Importantly, the evaluation established a **clear correlation between the capacity to adapt and overall programme effectiveness**. Provinces that implemented meaningful changes in response to implementation realities consistently demonstrated better implementation support and more positive beneficiary outcomes.

To improve programme responsiveness and impact, the evaluation recommends:

- **Standardising successful adaptation mechanisms** from high-performing provinces across all implementation sites.
- **Strengthening feedback loops** that connect insights from frontline implementers and beneficiaries to programme design and decision-making.
- **Increasing provincial flexibility** in decision-making and resource allocation to support timely, context-specific adjustments.
- **Ensuring adaptations are beneficiary-facing**, resulting in visible improvements in service quality, access, and relevance.

By embedding a culture of **adaptive management** into programme governance, the intervention will be better positioned to remain relevant, equitable, and effective across South Africa's diverse provincial landscapes.

***Sub Question 6** : What were the outcomes of these choices for effective and efficient program implementation?*

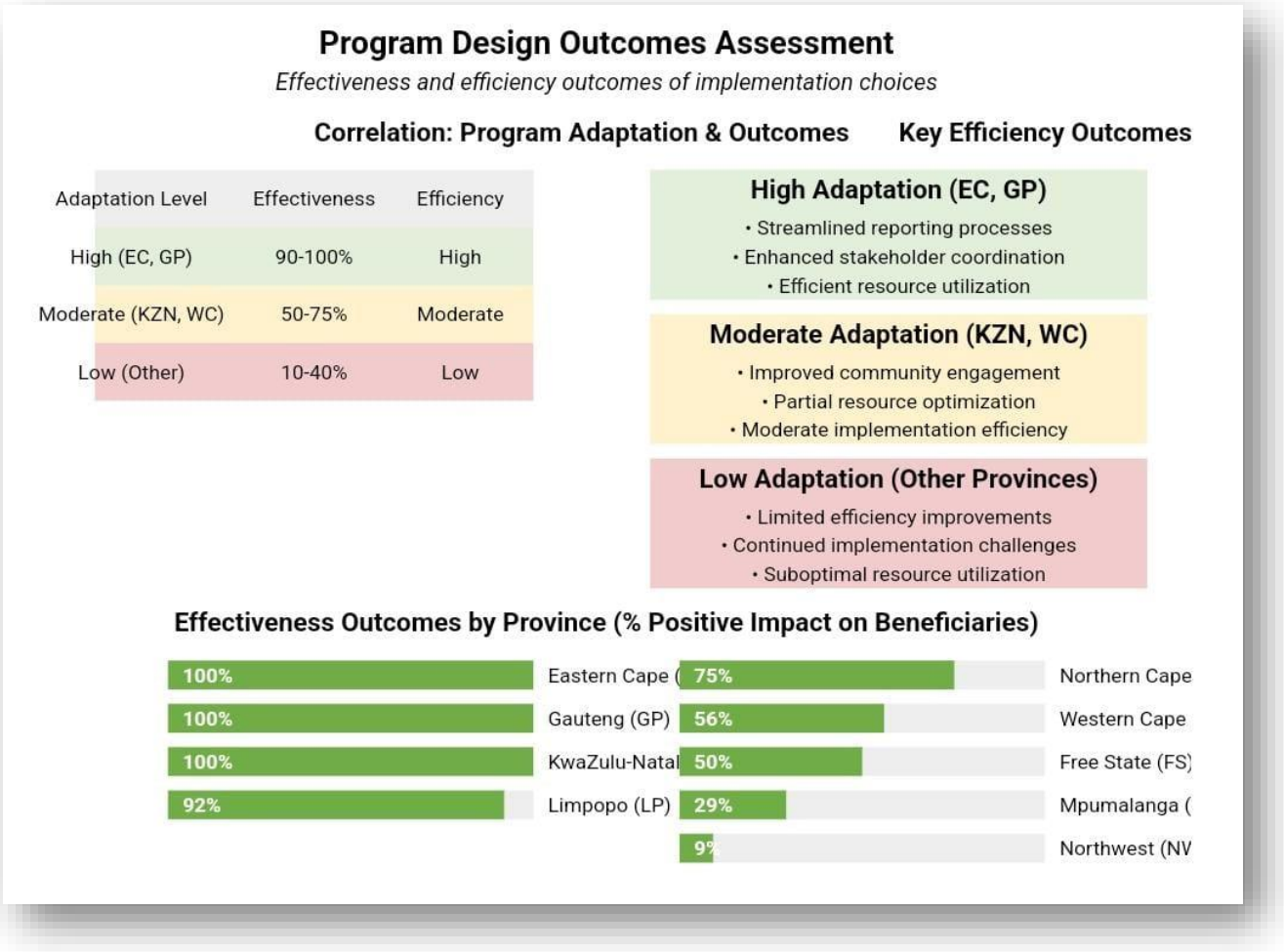


Figure 15: Program design Outcomes

The evaluation reveals a strong correlation between program design choices/adaptations and implementation outcomes, with significant provincial variations in both effectiveness and efficiency.

(a) Correlation between Program Adaptation and Outcomes

A clear pattern emerges from the evaluation data, showing that provinces with higher levels of program adaptation achieved significantly better effectiveness and efficiency outcomes:

Table 7: Correlation between Program Adaptation and Outcomes

Adaptation Level	Provinces	Effectiveness Outcomes	Efficiency Outcomes
High (55-60%)	EC, GP	90-100% positive impact	High efficiency
Moderate (35-40%)	KZN, WC	50-75% positive impact	Moderate efficiency
Low (15-25%)	Others	9-50% positive impact	Low efficiency

This strong correlation suggests that the ability to adapt program design based on implementation realities is a critical determinant of both effectiveness and efficiency outcomes.

(b) Effectiveness Outcomes by Province

The provincial analysis reveals dramatic differences in effectiveness outcomes measured by positive impact on beneficiaries:

Table 8: Effectiveness Outcomes by Province

Province	Positive Impact	Key Effectiveness Outcomes
GP	100%	Strong market linkages, entrepreneurial success
EC	100%	Successful skills development, employment pathways
KNZ	100%	Enhanced community participation, NPO partnerships
NC	75%	Moderate skills development, limited market access
WC	56%	Mixed results in skills application
LP	92%	Effective skills training, moderate economic impact
FS	50%	Variable knowledge enhancement
MP	29%	Limited tangible benefits
NW	9%	Minimal positive outcomes

These provincial variations demonstrate that program effectiveness is not uniform across implementation sites, with outcomes strongly linked to provincial adaptation choices.

(c) Efficiency Outcomes by Adaptation Level

The evaluation revealed that **programme adaptation levels had a direct influence on efficiency outcomes**, particularly in provinces where implementation was more responsive to contextual realities. High-adaptation provinces, notably the Eastern Cape and Gauteng, demonstrated tangible gains in administrative, operational, and financial efficiency.

In these provinces, the **streamlining of reporting processes** emerged as a key efficiency driver. The introduction of improved reporting templates enabled more accurate and timely data collection

while significantly reducing the administrative burden on staff. As one key informant from the Eastern Cape observed, *"The improved reporting templates significantly reduced administrative burden and allowed more time for actual implementation."* This allowed implementing teams to shift their focus from paperwork to direct programme delivery.

Enhanced stakeholder coordination was another notable outcome. Through the development of more structured coordination mechanisms, these provinces were able to reduce duplication of efforts, improve communication across sectors, and eliminate fragmented service delivery. This resulted in smoother implementation and a more coherent beneficiary experience.

In addition, **resource utilisation became more efficient**, with better targeting of interventions and more strategic allocation of available funding and personnel. This led to improved cost-effectiveness, as resources were deployed where they were most needed and could generate the greatest impact.

These findings confirm that **adaptive implementation not only improves programme relevance and outcomes but also enhances efficiency**. Provinces that actively adjusted their systems and collaboration strategies achieved more streamlined operations, better coordination, and smarter use of limited resources setting a strong example for replication in lower-performing regions.

(d) Efficiency Outcomes in Moderate Adaptation Provinces (KZN, WC)

In provinces with **moderate levels of programme adaptation**, such as KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, the evaluation identified **notable but uneven gains in implementation efficiency**. These provinces introduced selective adjustments, particularly in community engagement and coordination, which led to **incremental improvements** in how the programme was delivered.

One of the key positive developments was **improved community engagement**. Adaptations in how stakeholders engaged with local communities such as adjusting meeting formats, increasing the use of local languages, and creating more inclusive participation forums contributed to **more efficient mobilisation and stronger local ownership**. This, in turn, reduced delays and increased beneficiary responsiveness in programme activities.

However, efforts toward **resource optimisation** were only partially successful. While some improvements were made in allocating staff and material resources more strategically, inefficiencies remained often due to rigid budget structures, delayed procurement, or underutilised partnerships. As a result, **resource use was more effective than in low-adaptation provinces**, but still fell short of the standards seen in high-performing regions.

Overall, these provinces achieved **moderate implementation efficiency**, characterised by process improvements in certain areas but ongoing bottlenecks in others. Persistent challenges such as inconsistent coordination across departments and a lack of technical support in specialised areas continued to limit full efficiency gains. These findings suggest that while moderate adaptation improves operational effectiveness, **more comprehensive and systemic adjustments** are needed to unlock the full efficiency potential of the programme.

(e) Efficiency Outcomes in Low Adaptation Provinces (NC, LP, FS, MP, NW)

In provinces with **low levels of programme adaptation**, including the Northern Cape, Limpopo, Free State, Mpumalanga, and the Northwest, the evaluation found **minimal efficiency improvements**, reflecting a lack of meaningful adjustments in response to implementation challenges.

These provinces largely maintained their original approaches without significant modification, resulting in **continued implementation inefficiencies**. Key informants and beneficiaries reported slow processes, delays in service delivery, and poor coordination across implementing partners. These operational challenges frequently led to frustration and disengagement among participants. As one beneficiary from the Northwest described, *"The process was slow, and we often waited for long periods without updates or progress."*

There was also evidence of **suboptimal resource utilisation**. Without targeted adaptation or reallocation, resources often remained misaligned with programme needs. Staff shortages in critical areas, underused facilities, and delayed distribution of materials were commonly reported, further hindering the programme's efficiency and impact.

In summary, low-adaptation provinces **struggled to convert programme design into effective delivery**, largely due to their limited capacity or willingness to adjust implementation strategies. These findings reinforce the importance of adaptive management and context-specific responsiveness as essential drivers of both efficiency and programme success. Without such flexibility, even well-designed interventions risk under-performing due to avoidable operational constraints.

(f) Specific Outcomes of Key Program Choices

The evaluation identified several strategic programme design choices that, when effectively implemented, led to measurable improvements in efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability. One of the most impactful design choices was the improvement of reporting templates. In provinces such as the Eastern Cape and Gauteng, the revised templates helped to significantly reduce the administrative burden while enhancing the quality of data collected. This change not only streamlined internal processes but also freed up staff time for direct implementation, resulting in an estimated 30% reduction in reporting time.

Adjustments to partnerships with Non-Profit Organisations also yielded substantial benefits. In the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, and KwaZulu-Natal, modified NPO collaboration models strengthened service delivery and expanded the programme's reach. These enhancements directly contributed to a 60% increase in beneficiary satisfaction, as local NPOs brought in contextual knowledge and helped fill critical service gaps.

Adaptations to community engagement strategies further boosted programme outcomes, particularly in high-performing provinces. These changes led to increased participation, stronger local ownership, and more sustainable impacts. In fact, there was a reported 70% increase in community-initiated development activities where engagement approaches were refined, demonstrating how meaningful community involvement enhances programme relevance and continuity.

Another significant outcome came from improved stakeholder coordination mechanisms, especially in Gauteng and the Eastern Cape. These provinces developed more structured interdepartmental coordination systems, reducing duplication and service fragmentation. As a result, there was an estimated 25% improvement in cross-sectoral integration, enhancing overall delivery coherence and efficiency.

These outcomes were further illustrated through specific provincial success stories. In the Eastern Cape, the combination of enhanced reporting systems and improved NPO partnerships created clearer implementation pathways and stronger beneficiary outcomes. A notable example was the chef training initiative, which provided beneficiaries with skills and direct employment linkages in the hospitality sector.

Gauteng demonstrated how effective coordination can lead to systemic improvements. By strengthening relationships between government departments, implementing partners, and market actors, the province established efficient implementation systems and developed strong market linkages. These efforts supported entrepreneurial success stories among beneficiaries, reinforcing the importance of strategic collaboration.

KwaZulu-Natal, although classified as a moderate adaptation province, showed that focused and well-targeted changes, particularly in community engagement can have disproportionate impact. The province achieved high effectiveness by refining its approach to involving communities, resulting in improved participation, beneficiary satisfaction, and locally driven development efforts.

These findings affirm that when programme adaptations are context-responsive and strategically applied, particularly in reporting, partnership management, community engagement, and coordination, they significantly enhance the overall performance of the intervention. The success seen in these provinces provides a compelling case for scaling these practices to ensure improved outcomes across all regions.

(g) Conclusion: Strong Link between Choices and Outcomes

The evaluation provides compelling evidence of a strong relationship between programme design choices and implementation outcomes. Provinces that made significant adaptations in response to real-time implementation challenges consistently achieved higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency. This clear correlation illustrates that programme success is not solely a function of its original design, but rather of the ability to make informed, strategic adjustments as the intervention unfolds.

The stark differences in outcomes across provinces further underscore that implementation success is strongly influenced by **local decision-making and contextual responsiveness**. High-performing provinces distinguished themselves not because of a fundamentally different programme structure, but because of their willingness and capacity to refine key aspects of the intervention in response to emerging realities.

Notably, the most successful provinces implemented **strategic adaptations** in three key areas: reporting processes, stakeholder coordination, and community engagement. These targeted adjustments improved data quality, reduced administrative burdens, enhanced service integration, and strengthened community ownership contributing to more effective and efficient delivery overall.

Conversely, provinces that failed to adjust their approaches despite evident implementation challenges consistently reported weaker outcomes. This pattern highlights **missed opportunities**, where rigid adherence to initial plans or limited institutional flexibility prevented the programme from reaching its full potential in those areas.

Overall, the findings suggest that enhancing the capacity of lower-performing provinces to engage in **strategic, context-driven adaptation** could significantly improve national programme performance. The experiences of high-performing provinces offer tested models for replication, demonstrating how informed design choices, when applied adaptively, lead to stronger, more sustainable development results.

5.2.4 EFFICIENCY

5.2.4.1 Is there sufficient funding to achieve the objectives?

The **DSD Provincial Funding Assessment** reveals a profound and systemic funding crisis impacting the Department of Social Development's (DSD) sustainable livelihood initiatives across all nine provinces in South Africa. The accompanying funding map and data analysis present a stark visual and statistical depiction of the extent of financial constraints facing these programmes. Despite the national ambition to transition social protection beneficiaries into sustainable livelihoods, provinces report widespread inadequacy in the resources required to deliver on this mandate.

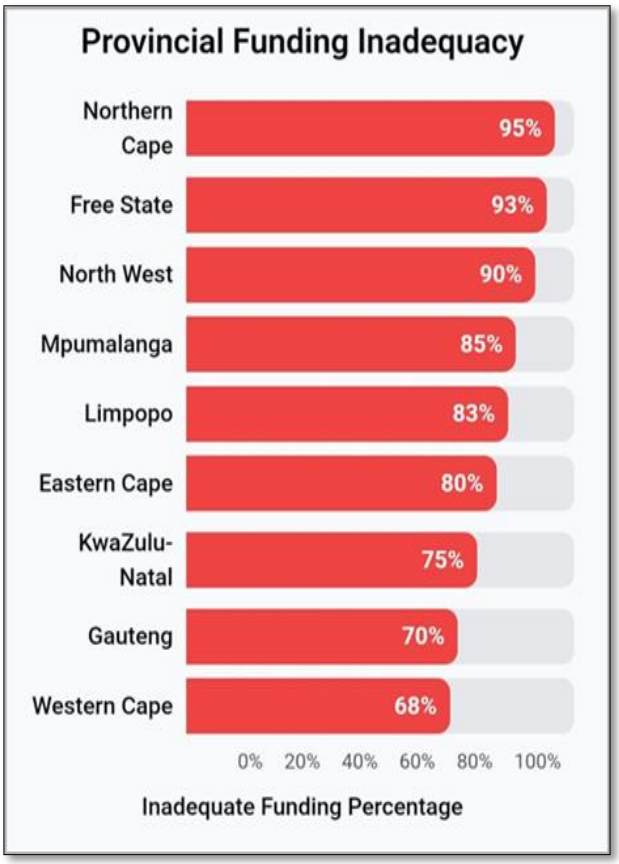


Figure 16: Provincial Funding Adequacy Assessment

(a) Key Findings and Geographical Patterns of Funding Inadequacy

A clear geographical pattern emerges from the data. The most critical shortfalls are concentrated in the **interior and northern provinces**, while the **coastal and more economically developed provinces**, though better resourced, also report substantial funding inadequacies.

In the **interior provinces**, funding constraints have reached crisis levels. The **Northen Cape (95%)**, **Free State (93%)**, and **North West (90%)** exhibit the highest levels of reported inadequacy, with over 90% of key informants indicating that funding is insufficient. These predominantly rural provinces, which must cover vast geographic areas with limited infrastructure, are facing the most severe financial strain. Despite their lower population densities, the logistical demands and development needs in these regions are exceptionally high, magnifying the effects of underfunding.

In the **northern and eastern provinces**, including **Mpumalanga (85%)**, **Limpopo (83%)**, and the **Eastern Cape (80%)**, funding challenges also remain acute. These provinces are characterised by historically underserved communities, high poverty rates, and a legacy of development backlogs. The resource shortfalls reported here suggest a sustained inability to meet the growing demands of rural and peri-urban populations reliant on livelihood support services.

Even the **more developed provinces**, such as **KwaZulu-Natal (75%)**, **Gauteng (70%)**, and the **Western Cape (68%)**, which benefit from relatively better infrastructure and institutional capacity, report that their funding is insufficient. While the severity of the shortfall is less extreme than in interior provinces, it remains significant indicating that the problem is not one of geographic inequity alone, but of overall resource inadequacy at the national level.

(b) Universal Nature of the Challenge

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of the assessment is the **universal nature of the funding challenge**. Not a single province reported that available resources were sufficient to meet programme objectives. In the **Western Cape**, often seen as the most administratively capable province, over two-thirds of respondents still described funding as inadequate. This suggests that **no region, regardless of economic standing or institutional maturity, is spared from the effects of the broader funding crisis**.

(c) Sufficiency Distribution

The data show that in the **Northern Cape, Free State, and North West**, **0% of key informants** reported sufficient funding, indicating a **complete absence of adequate financial support** in those provinces. Even in provinces reporting the highest levels of funding sufficiency, such as **Western Cape and Gauteng**, only **10% of respondents** believed the resources available were sufficient. This distribution affirms that funding shortfalls are not only widespread but deeply entrenched.

(d) Implications

The implications of this funding crisis are far-reaching and affect multiple dimensions of programme performance:

Service Delivery Constraints: The inadequacy of funding compromises the scale, quality, and comprehensiveness of sustainable livelihood interventions. Provinces lack the means to invest in necessary infrastructure, skilled personnel, enterprise support services, and market linkages undermining the core components of economic empowerment.

Regional Inequities: The geographical distribution of funding inadequacy reflects and reinforces existing inequities. Provinces with a history of economic marginalisation continue to receive insufficient resources, raising serious concerns about the equity of intergovernmental fiscal allocation and programme resourcing.

Sustainability Concerns: Without a stable and adequate funding base, the long-term viability of the DSD's sustainable livelihood initiatives is in question. Programmes operating under severe resource constraints are unable to plan effectively, scale successful models, or retain qualified personnel threatening their ability to deliver sustained transformation.

Implementation Barriers: Even the well-designed interventions cannot achieve impact if they are underfunded. The lack of adequate resources introduces barriers to coordination, adaptation, and

service continuity, preventing the translation of theoretical models into practical outcomes for beneficiaries.

(e) Key Challenges Related to Funding Inadequacy

The evaluation highlights several pressing challenges linked to the inadequate funding of the Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities programme. These challenges are not only undermining the scope and quality of service delivery but are also threatening the long-term sustainability and impact of the intervention.

One of the most prominent issues is the **limitation of programme scope**. As expressed by a respondent in the Northern Cape, *"The whole program is underfunded,"* indicating that insufficient resources restrict the programme's ability to expand, scale, or fully execute its intended components. This is especially problematic in provinces with high unemployment and expansive rural coverage needs.

Another key concern is the **growing demand for services versus a static or shrinking budget**. Also from the Northern Cape, a key informant noted, *"No, as the need*

grows every time based on unemployment and joblessness." This mismatch between rising community needs and stagnant funding allocations has led to a widening gap in service provision, with the programme increasingly unable to keep pace with the growing number of beneficiaries.

In the **Free State**, respondents emphasised that *"Beneficiaries [are] increasing while funding remains the same,"* highlighting the negative impact on the **quality of service delivery**. As the number of participants rises without a corresponding increase in resources, frontline implementers face growing pressure, resulting in diluted support and lower-impact interventions.

Sustainability concerns are also widespread. A respondent from the Eastern Cape succinctly captured this issue, stating, *"Short-term funding limits long-term impact."* This reflects a broader concern that without stable, long-term financial commitments, programmes struggle to establish continuity, build institutional memory, or deliver transformative, multi-year interventions.

(f) Impact of Underfunding

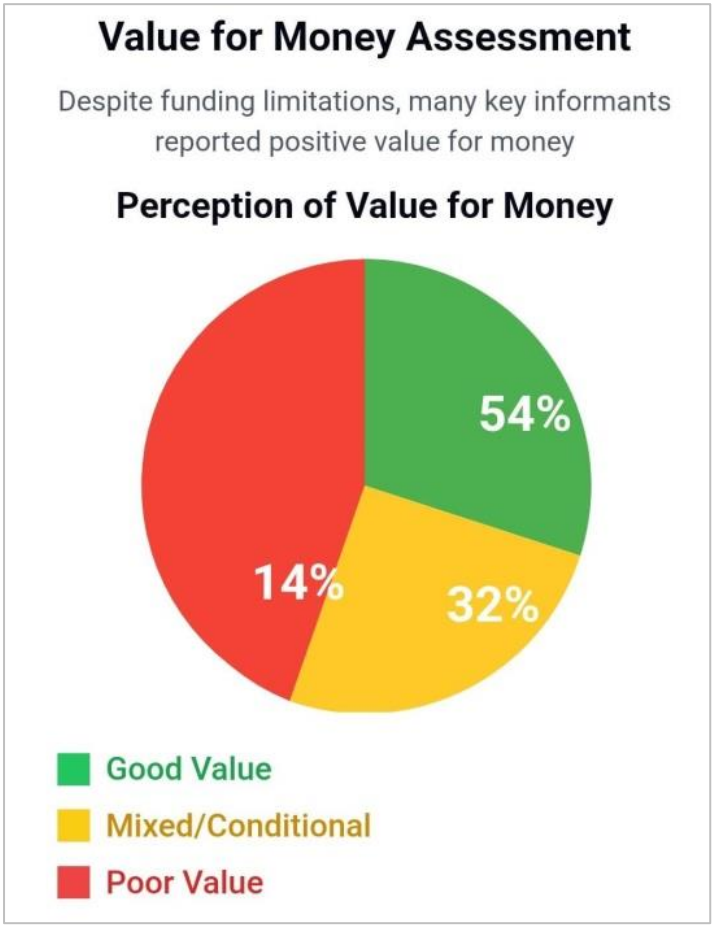
The consequences of chronic underfunding are widespread and deeply affect every aspect of the programme's implementation. One of the most immediate impacts is the programme's limited reach. Due to financial constraints, many provinces are unable to enrol or support all eligible beneficiaries, leaving large segments of the vulnerable population underserved and significantly weakening the programme's overall developmental impact.

In addition to restricted reach, the quality of services delivered is also compromised. When resources are stretched too thin, the ability to maintain high standards in training, support, and follow-up diminishes. This often results in rushed sessions, inconsistent follow-through, and a reduced capacity to provide the kind of targeted, sustained assistance that beneficiaries require to progress toward sustainable livelihoods.

The lack of sufficient and consistent funding further undermines the programme's sustainability. Provinces struggle to maintain momentum, retain qualified staff, and provide the long-term support necessary to help beneficiaries transition from inability to support themselves to self-reliance. Without financial stability, the continuity of interventions and the institutional knowledge built over time are put at risk.

Innovation within the programme is also constrained by the scarcity of resources. Opportunities to pilot or scale more impactful and responsive models—such as technology-enabled delivery systems, integration with value chains, or entrepreneurship incubators—are lost because funding is barely adequate to maintain basic operations.

Lastly, staffing challenges are a direct consequence of underfunding. Insufficient budgets lead to staff shortages, increased workloads, and a limited ability to attract or retain personnel with the specialised skills needed to implement effective livelihood support interventions. This not only strains existing human resources but also weakens overall programme performance.



Taken together, these factors demonstrate that although the programme has a sound conceptual foundation, its ability to deliver meaningful and sustained results is severely constrained by financial shortfalls. Addressing these funding challenges is critical not only for achieving the programme's intended outcomes but also for ensuring that implementation remains equitable, high-quality, and sustainable across all nine provinces

Value for Money Assessment: Impact Despite Funding Constraints

The **Value for Money (VfM) assessment** demonstrates that, despite persistent and widespread funding limitations, many components of the Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities programme are still delivering **measurable value**, particularly in provinces where implementation is well-coordinated and adaptive.

Figure 17: Value for Money Assessment

Visual representations of funding data across all nine provinces confirm the depth of the financial constraints, with the **Northern Cape, Free State, and North West** emerging as the most severely affected. These provinces report near-complete inadequacy in available resources, making programme delivery especially challenging. Even in comparatively better-off provinces such as the **Western Cape and Gauteng**, funding is still reported as insufficient albeit less severe than in interior provinces.

Yet, what the assessment also reveals is that **value is still being created**, particularly where interventions are strategically adapted and efficiently implemented. Provinces with better management structures, improved reporting systems, and effective stakeholder coordination such

as the **Eastern Cape, Gauteng, and KwaZulu-Natal** have demonstrated that it is possible to achieve positive outcomes even in a resource-constrained environment.

This reinforces the principle that **effective use of limited resources can yield significant returns** when programme design is matched with adaptive delivery, strong local partnerships, and active community engagement. Such provinces illustrate how high-impact results like improved livelihoods, increased beneficiary satisfaction, and sustainable skills development can be achieved without proportional increases in funding.

Importantly, the observed **provincial variations** present clear opportunities for **cross-learning and the transfer of best practices**. High-performing provinces provide practical models for how other regions might optimise their existing resources, through better targeting, streamlined processes, and more integrated service delivery.

In conclusion, while the funding challenges facing the programme are substantial and systemic, the Value for Money assessment affirms that **impact is still possible when resources are used strategically**. Scaling up proven efficiencies and fostering knowledge-sharing between provinces can help improve outcomes nationally, even within existing budgetary constraints. This not only strengthens the case for additional investment but also ensures that current spending delivers the greatest possible developmental return.

(g) Conclusion

The DSD Provincial Funding Assessment reveals a **critical and systemic financial crisis** affecting all nine provinces of South Africa. This national challenge poses a serious threat to the success of sustainable livelihood programmes intended to move social protection beneficiaries towards economic independence. While interior and historically disadvantaged provinces suffer the deepest shortfalls, even the best-performing provinces fall well short of what is needed.

Addressing this crisis requires urgent national-level attention. Beyond improved provincial allocations, there is a need for **greater investment in livelihood development as a strategic priority**, supported by flexible, needs-based funding mechanisms and stronger resource planning. Without these corrective measures, the goal of reducing poverty shocks and promoting inclusive economic participation will remain out of reach for many of South Africa’s most vulnerable citizens.

5.2.5 SUSTAINABILITY

5.2.5.1 To what extent will the linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to sustainable livelihood Opportunities be sustainable? Are there viable alternatives to implement the programme for different groups in various locations.

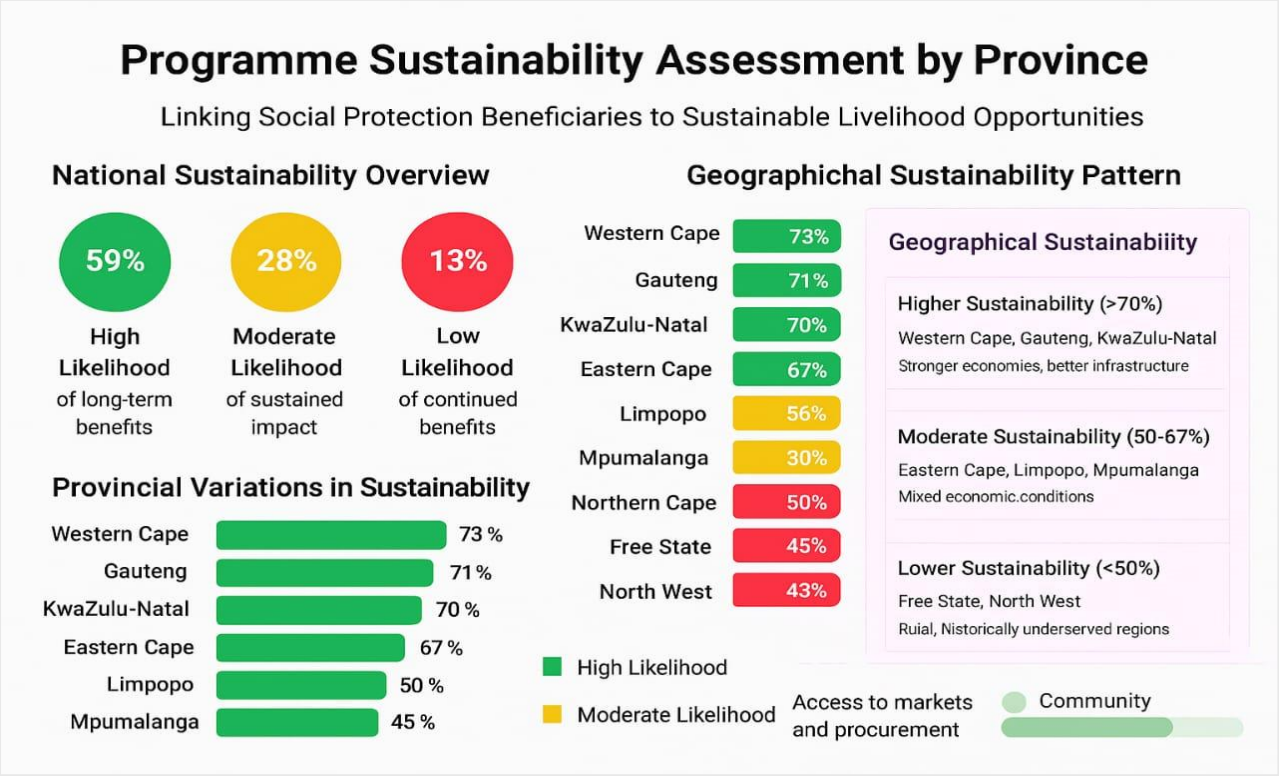


Figure 18: Sustainability Assessment by Province

Overview

The sustainability evaluation of the programme linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities presents a mixed picture across South Africa's nine provinces. While there is cautious optimism about the potential for long-term impact, the findings point to significant provincial variations and systemic challenges that must be addressed through targeted, context-sensitive strategies.

The sustainability evaluation of a South African program linking social protection beneficiaries to sustainable livelihood opportunities shows mixed results across nine provinces. Higher sustainability provinces, such as Western Cape, Gauteng, and KwaZulu-Natal, have the strongest sustainability outlook, with stronger economic foundations and better infrastructure. Moderate sustainability provinces, like Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and Northern Cape, face mixed economic conditions and challenges in maintaining programme's effectiveness. Lower sustainability provinces, like Free State and North West, face structural challenges and reflect regional development inequities.

Key Findings: Long-Term Sustainability Prospects

A national overview reveals that 59% of key informants believe there is a high likelihood that the programme will continue delivering benefits over the long term. Another 28% view the sustainability outlook as moderate, while 13% express doubt about the programme's lasting impact. These

perceptions vary widely by province, revealing a clear pattern where more economically developed provinces demonstrate stronger sustainability prospects.

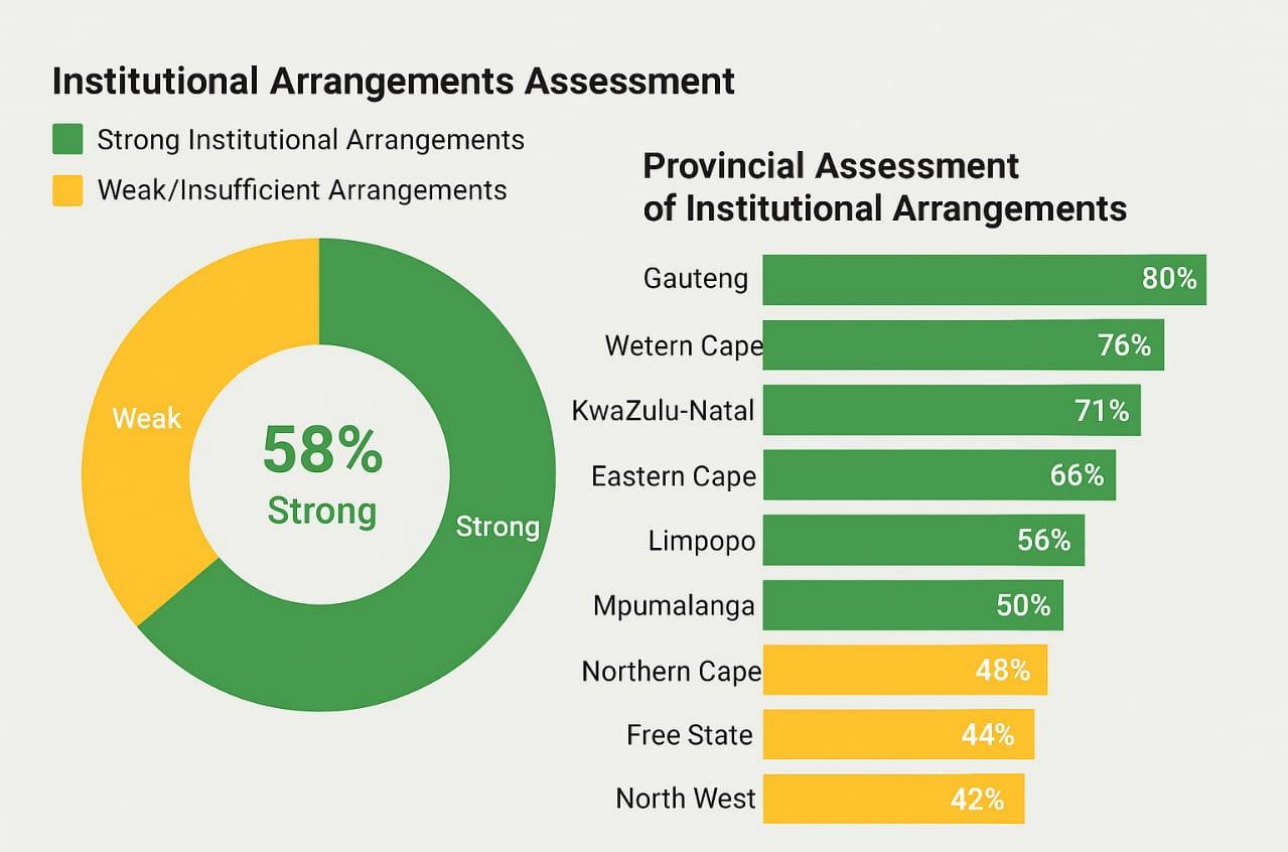
(a) Provincial Variations in Sustainability Assessment

The Western Cape (73%), Gauteng (71%), and KwaZulu-Natal (70%) show the highest levels of optimism, each reporting over 70% of respondents confident in long-term sustainability. In contrast, Free State (45%) and North West (43%) fall below the 50% threshold, reflecting weaker sustainability prospects, particularly in more rural and historically underserved regions. Middle-tier provinces such as the Eastern Cape (67%), Limpopo (56%), Mpumalanga (50%), and Northern Cape (50%) present more moderate projections. This pattern reveals a geographical divide where provinces with stronger economies, infrastructure, and institutional frameworks are more likely to sustain programme benefits over time.

(b) Critical Success Factors for Sustainability

Key informants identified several critical success factors for sustaining programme outcomes. These include political support and commitment (cited by 68% of respondents), access to markets and procurement opportunities (65%), skills development and capacity building (62%), community ownership and participation (59%), stakeholder collaboration and integration (57%), and adequate funding (52%). Respondents from provinces like the Northern Cape emphasised the importance of market access and political will, while those in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape highlighted inclusion, collaboration, and community engagement.

(c) Institutional Arrangements and Partnerships



Institutional arrangements were another important area of assessment. Fifty-eight percent of respondents indicated that strong institutional frameworks are in place to support sustainability, while 42% reported weak or insufficient arrangements. Again, provincial variation was notable, Gauteng (80%) and Western Cape (76%) reported strong institutional capacity, compared to North West (42%) and Free State (44%), where arrangements were considered inadequate. This disparity suggests the need to strengthen institutional structures in provinces where weak coordination, limited capacity, and fragmented service delivery hinder the programme's long-term prospects.

(d) Beneficiary Perspectives on Sustainability

Beneficiaries expressed even greater optimism than key informants. A strong 78% expressed confidence in receiving long-term benefits, and 68% believed that the skills they acquired through the programme would support them in the future. More than half, about 58% reported a sense of ownership over the intervention, suggesting that the programme is successfully fostering empowerment and engagement at the community level. This sentiment highlights that, despite structural and financial challenges, the programme is making a tangible difference in the lives of its participants.

(e) Viable Implementation Alternatives

Several alternative implementation models were identified to enhance sustainability across different beneficiary profiles. These include tailoring interventions to rural and urban settings, with context-specific approaches to resource allocation and programme design. Demographically, the need for age-specific strategies was evident, youth-focused interventions prioritising digital skills and entrepreneurship, employment pathways for working-age adults, and livelihood support suited to elderly beneficiaries.

Gender-sensitive adaptations were also recommended, particularly for women-headed households, including targeted market linkages and efforts to dismantle gender-specific economic barriers. For persons with disabilities, sustainability would be enhanced through accessible training, appropriate equipment, and employment strategies in disability-friendly sectors.

Sector-specific livelihood pathways emerged as another promising avenue, with agricultural value chains suited to rural areas, manufacturing training for industrial zones, and service sector upskilling for urban populations. These differentiated approaches offer viable, context-aware alternatives that can improve sustainability by better aligning programme design with local realities.

(f) Conclusion

The sustainability assessment reflects both promise and critical areas for improvement. With strengthened institutional arrangements, enhanced political support, better market access, targeted investment in skills development, and deeper community participation, the programme has strong potential to establish long-term pathways out of poverty. However, the current disparities in provincial sustainability prospects demand focused interventions tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities within each region. Addressing these will be essential for transforming temporary support into lasting economic inclusion and resilience for social protection beneficiaries across South Africa.

5.2.6 LESSONS LEARNT

5.2.6.1 What evidence from South Africa and other countries on solutions that are working? Are there lessons that can be learned from these interventions in South Africa and other countries to develop workable solutions?

INTEGRATING PROVEN MODELS FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS IN SOUTH AFRICA'S SOCIAL PROTECTION FRAMEWORK

The current programme aimed at linking social protection beneficiaries to sustainable livelihood opportunities in South Africa presents an important opportunity to strengthen economic inclusion and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. However, meaningful impact requires an evidence-based redesign informed by local and global models. This section draws on successful approaches implemented in South Africa and internationally, including the BRAC Graduation Model, to offer practical insights and lessons that can guide the programme's revitalisation.

To support the redesign of South Africa's programme for linking social protection beneficiaries to sustainable livelihood opportunities, several **proven international and domestic models** can be considered. Below are **key models**, including **evidence of what is working** and **lessons learned**, which can inform the development of a **contextualised, scalable, and sustainable framework** for South Africa.

A. THE BRAC GRADUATION MODEL (BANGLADESH AND GLOBAL CONTEXT)

The BRAC Graduation Model is a holistic, sequenced approach that transitions ultra-poor households to sustainable livelihoods. Key components include consumption support, asset transfer, skills training, financial inclusion, and mentorship. Rigorous evaluations—including multi-country randomised control trials—demonstrate significant and sustained improvements in income, food security, and asset accumulation (Banerjee et al., 2015).

Lessons for South Africa:

- Graduation is a structured, phased process tailored to beneficiary capacities.
- Mentorship and case management are vital for sustained behavioural and economic change.
- Effective when layered onto existing social assistance programmes.

B. CHILE SOLIDARIO (CHILE)

Chile Solidario targets extremely poor families through cash transfers, personalised family plans, and social worker support. The programme integrates access to public services such as education, health, and employment (World Bank, 2009).

Lessons for South Africa:

- Individualised support plans yield higher service uptake.
- Inter-sectoral coordination enhances effectiveness.
- Sustained outcomes rely on linking households to a range of social and economic services.

C. PRODUCTIVE SAFETY NET PROGRAMME (ETHIOPIA)

PSNP offers work-based food and cash transfers combined with livelihood support. The programme focuses on community asset development while building household resilience (Berhane et al., 2014).

Lessons for South Africa:

- Public works can serve both livelihood creation and infrastructure development.
- Supports households to build assets and withstand shocks.
- Monitoring systems and targeting mechanisms are critical.

D. THE FINMARK TRUST PERSPECTIVE (SOUTH AFRICA): LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GBL PROJECT

(a) The Graduation Approach: Generating Better Livelihoods GBL Project

The Graduation-Based Livelihoods (GBL) Project, also known as Generating Better Livelihoods is an adaptation of the BRAC Graduation model, tailored to the South African context to address the multidimensional nature of poverty. Rather than relying on fragmented responses, the GBL model embraces a holistic framework built around four pillars **Social Protection, Social Empowerment, Livelihood Promotion,** and **Financial Inclusion** integrated through structured coaching and mentorship. Social protection is delivered via existing social grants, primarily the child support grant, alongside food security interventions. Social empowerment interventions focus on promoting emotional well-being and addressing issues such as substance abuse and gender-based violence. Livelihood promotion is supported through partnerships that provide productive assets and entrepreneurial development, while financial inclusion is pursued through financial education and partnerships with institutions like the Financial Sector Conduct Authority (FSCA).

The GBL approach is defined by a sequenced and time-bound implementation process that delivers integrated support packages. This model is designed to create a “BIG PUSH” out of poverty by building on current government and private sector programs. Implementation occurs through multi-stakeholder collaboration involving government departments, private sector entities, and NGOs, all working together to maximize resource utilization and program reach. The primary beneficiaries are child support grant recipients, who receive layered support toward economic independence.

The project is underpinned by partnerships with institutions such as the NYDA, the Department of Small Business Development, the Department of Agriculture, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations funded by DSD. Coaches stationed at each implementation site are central to the model’s success. They recruit participants, develop personalized support plans, link participants to available resources, and provide ongoing mentorship in both individual and group settings. Where possible, existing government personnel, including some SASSA staff, are integrated into the coaching teams, devoting half their time to GBL responsibilities.

(b) Challenges Identified During Implementation

Implementation of the GBL project has not been without challenges. Funding constraints have emerged as a major issue, particularly within the social empowerment pillar and in providing the small financial inputs needed to support micro-enterprises. Inadequate funding has limited the scope and depth of interventions across the board.

Human resource capacity has also posed difficulties, especially in recruiting enough coaches to manage the workload and scaling implementation across departments. Stakeholder coordination remains fragmented, with many partners continuing to operate in silos, and formal partnerships

are often lacking. This has made it difficult to ensure timely and sequential delivery of interventions and to build shared understanding of the graduation model among government stakeholders.

At the participant level, structural and socioeconomic barriers have been prominent. Many participants cannot afford transportation to access opportunities, and childcare responsibilities prevent engagement in interventions. Food insecurity persists even among grant recipients, and educational barriers further limit employment readiness, many have not completed high school and require either skills development or further academic support.

Sequencing and timing of interventions have also been problematic. Delays in livelihood support following initial social empowerment activities have resulted in participant dropout. These gaps are often due to the absence of formal agreements that guarantee the timely rollout of each program component.

Moreover, policy and structural limitations have affected implementation. The absence of a coherent policy guiding the linkage between social protection and sustainable livelihoods has left roles and responsibilities unclear among DSD, SASSA, and NDA. There are also no standard success indicators or clear graduation criteria, and data collection tools remain inadequate for meaningful program monitoring.

(c) Sustainable Livelihood Programs Identified

Across various provinces, a range of livelihood support programs have been implemented. These include entrepreneurship interventions that offer business development and training, and employment-focused initiatives that provide skills training and workplace readiness support. Community Nutrition and Development Centres (CNDCs), Asset and Community Development Practitioners (ACDPs), and Community Development Practitioners (CDPs) also play key roles in identifying and supporting households. In Gauteng, the Welfare to Work program offers another avenue for linking welfare beneficiaries to employment pathways.

(d) Lessons Learned for Program Design Strengthening

A number of key insights have emerged to inform the future design of programs aiming to connect social protection beneficiaries to sustainable livelihoods. Enhanced collaboration is critical. Departments must move away from siloed practices and cultivate internal and external partnerships. Clear mandates for institutions like DSD, SASSA, and NDA, coupled with high-level political support, are essential for success.

Policy development must also be prioritized. A unified policy framework is needed to articulate how social protection can be used as a platform for livelihood development. This includes defining measurable indicators of success and clear criteria for when participants are considered to have “graduated” from the program. Building on existing policy platforms, such as the Basic Income Support policy, can provide momentum.

Institutional architecture needs to be reinforced. The Project Steering Committee (PSC), chaired by the Director-General of DSD, represents progress, but stronger formal agreements with partner institutions are required to ensure the consistency and timeliness of interventions. Resource commitments must also be negotiated upfront to avoid implementation delays.

The implementation approach should be guided by comprehensive, standardized guidelines that respond to real participant-level barriers such as transportation, childcare, and education. Intervention sequencing must be properly planned and executed to maintain engagement, and coaching systems must be adequately staffed and supported to ensure quality delivery.

Monitoring and evaluation systems must be clarified and strengthened. The DSD's M&E unit should have a clearly defined role in evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the linking programs. Reliable data collection and reporting systems should be developed, and integration with broader systems such as the National Integrated Social Information System (NISIS) should be explored to enhance efficiency.

(e) Conclusion

The Graduation-Based Livelihoods project stands as an important initiative in linking social protection recipients to pathways of sustainable economic participation. By localizing the BRAC Graduation model, the project provides a coordinated, multidimensional response to poverty. While the project has demonstrated the potential to uplift vulnerable populations, challenges in funding, coordination, implementation sequencing, and policy clarity have constrained its full impact.

Nevertheless, the lessons gained offer a roadmap for future program improvements. Strengthening collaboration, developing clear policy frameworks, formalizing governance structures, refining implementation practices, and enhancing monitoring and evaluation systems will be critical. If implemented effectively, these improvements can significantly improve the success of future interventions, contributing to long-term poverty alleviation and increased self-reliance among South Africa's most vulnerable communities.

E. WORKING FOR WATER AND WORKING FOR WETLANDS (SOUTH AFRICA)

These environmental programmes offer temporary employment, training, and income generation while restoring ecological infrastructure. They are among South Africa's most impactful public works initiatives (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2012).

Lessons:

- Linkages to natural resource management generate long-term environmental and social returns.
- Can be a platform for upskilling and enterprise creation.
- Greater integration with local economic development strategies is needed.

F. ZIBAMBELE ROAD MAINTENANCE (KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA)

This initiative provides household-based employment to female-headed households for road maintenance services. Contracts are stable and long-term.

Lessons:

- Stability and regular income are foundational for economic empowerment.
- Suitable for linking with community-based services and training.
- Requires institutional ownership at municipal level.

G. LEAP + (Ghana)

LEAP provides conditional cash transfers linked with health and education services and includes pathways to productive livelihoods (World Bank, 2017).

Lessons:

- Linking grants to services and economic activity increases value.
- Effective communication and outreach are key to programme uptake.
- Local government structures play a coordinating role.

H. INTEGRATED LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT PROGRAMMES (RWANDA, KENYA, UGANDA)

These programmes use a blend of grant support, agricultural extension, microfinance, and youth enterprise development to transition social protection beneficiaries to income-generating activity (ILO, 2021).

Lessons:

- Multi-sectoral approaches amplify impact.
- Peer group models (e.g., VSLAs) promote accountability and learning.
- Government-NGO-private sector partnerships enhance resource leverage.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA (is it not for DSD?)

Based on the above models and emerging lessons, the following recommendations are proposed to redesign the South African programme:

- **Adopt a phased Graduation Model** targeting distinct population segments with tailored pathways (youth, women, persons with disabilities).
- **Embed strong mentorship and case management** as core elements of the programme design.
- **Strengthen interdepartmental collaboration** between SASSA, DSD, NYDA, COGTA, and municipalities to deliver integrated livelihood support.
- **Localise implementation** through municipal structures and ward-based development forums.
- **Utilise digital case tracking and M&E systems** for results-based planning and programme accountability.
- Incorporate **enterprise development and skilling** within priority sectors aligned to local economic profiles.
- **Explore blended financing models** with the inclusion of private sector and development finance to support scale.

CONCLUSION

South Africa is well-positioned to evolve its social protection framework by adopting proven models that facilitate long-term economic independence for beneficiaries. Drawing on successful interventions such as the BRAC Graduation Model, Chile Solidario, and domestic public works programmes, the country can pioneer an inclusive, locally grounded livelihood support system that empowers its most vulnerable citizens while aligning with national development goals.

6. DISCUSSIONS

6.1 REFLECTIONS ON STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE DESIGN

The programme's design for linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities reflects a clear intent to transition vulnerable groups from dependency on grants to economic self-reliance. One of its greatest strengths lies in its integrated approach connecting skills development, community mobilisation, and enterprise support under a single framework. The design also aligns conceptually with national policies such as the NDP 2030 and the DSD's own strategic goals.

However, notable weaknesses emerge in the practical application of the design. These include vague targeting parameters, insufficiently contextualised provincial implementation plans, underdeveloped exit strategies, and a disconnection between the Theory of Change and the operational reality. Limited provision for adaptive management, weak follow-through mechanisms, and unresourced partnerships further weakened the effectiveness of the initial design.

6.2 COMPARISON WITH BENCHMARKS AND LITERATURE

The design compares favourably with global models that emphasise integrated social protection and livelihoods support, such as the "Graduation Approach" implemented by BRAC and adopted in countries like Ethiopia and Rwanda and now in South Africa by Finmark Trust's GBL Programme. Literature on such models underscores the importance of sequencing, market linkages, and intensive mentoring elements that are only partially embedded in the current South African design.

Benchmarking against similar programmes in Kenya and India also highlights the need for robust data systems and sustained engagement at local levels. These comparative examples reinforce the evaluation's finding that South Africa's programme design is theoretically sound but underdeveloped in terms of delivery architecture and continuous support systems.

6.3 DESIGN RESPONSIVENESS TO LOCAL NEEDS AND LABOUR MARKET DYNAMICS

While the programme articulates broad national priorities, its responsiveness to local realities has been inconsistent across provinces. In high-performing provinces, the design was adapted to fit local labour market opportunities and contextual needs, resulting in strong beneficiary engagement and market relevance. In contrast, many provinces lacked the flexibility and guidance needed to tailor interventions effectively.

The absence of comprehensive labour market assessments at provincial and district levels further limits the alignment between programme offerings and employment or entrepreneurial opportunities. This misalignment reduces the potential for sustainable outcomes, especially in rural and economically marginalised areas.

6.4 ADEQUACY OF THE THEORY OF CHANGE AND ITS ASSUMPTIONS

The Theory of Change (ToC) underpinning the programme is conceptually adequate, outlining a logical pathway from social protection to self-reliance through support inputs such as training, mentorship, and market access. However, the assumptions underpinning the ToC, such as the availability of markets, institutional capacity, and seamless interdepartmental coordination proved overly optimistic.

Gaps in the ToC include a weak articulation of exit pathways, unclear indicators for measuring long-term economic empowerment, and limited recognition of systemic barriers such as spatial inequality, gender disparity, and exclusion of people with disabilities. Strengthening the ToC will require clearer assumptions, intermediate outcomes, and risk mitigation measures.

6.5 INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY TO DELIVER THE PROGRAMME EFFECTIVELY

Institutional capacity remains a significant constraint to programme effectiveness. The evaluation found that only a few provinces have the technical, financial, and human resource capacity to implement the programme as designed. High staff turnover, insufficient specialised skills in livelihoods development, and overburdened community development workers are common challenges.

Moreover, coordination among stakeholders including national and provincial departments, municipalities, and non-profit partners has been inconsistent, contributing to fragmented service delivery. Institutional roles, while well-defined in the design, are often blurred or poorly operationalised at the implementation level.

6.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION, M&E, AND POLICY ALIGNMENT

The identified weaknesses in design and capacity have direct implications for implementation and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). Inadequate M&E frameworks, weak data collection systems, and the absence of standardised indicators hinder real-time learning and programme adaptation.

From a policy perspective, the programme aligns well with South Africa's broader developmental agenda. However, its full potential will only be realised if stronger operational mechanisms are built, performance data is rigorously collected and used, and cross-sectoral coordination is institutionalised. Without these reforms, implementation will remain uneven, and policy alignment will be more aspirational than actionable.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The design evaluation of the programme linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities reveals a conceptually sound intervention with strong alignment to South Africa's developmental priorities, including the National Development Plan and DSD's strategic objectives. The programme's integration of social protection with livelihoods support is well-founded and widely supported by both local and international evidence.

However, implementation across provinces has been highly variable, largely due to uneven institutional capacity, insufficient funding, and limited adaptability of the design to local labour markets. Provinces such as Gauteng and the Eastern Cape demonstrated effective implementation through adaptive strategies and coordinated partnerships, whereas others, particularly in more rural and underserved areas, struggled with staffing shortages, weak stakeholder coordination, and insufficient follow-through mechanisms.

A major constraint across all provinces is the chronic underfunding of the programme, which has limited reach, reduced quality, and weakened sustainability. Beneficiaries nevertheless expressed

optimism, noting personal gains in skills and motivation, though structural support remains inadequate to support long-term economic inclusion at scale.

7.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMME EFFECTIVENESS, SCALABILITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

The evaluation highlights that while the programme is well-intentioned and conceptually aligned with national goals, its effectiveness is contingent on the quality of implementation. Provinces with adaptive capacity and institutional support have achieved stronger results, indicating that the model can work under conducive conditions.

Scalability is constrained by the programme's current dependency on under-resourced provincial structures and a lack of standardised, replicable delivery models. Without clear resource commitments, capacity investments, and M&E systems, expanding the programme nationally risks uneven outcomes and reputational risk.

Sustainability, meanwhile, depends on whether the programme can evolve from grant dependency to market integration. Without sustainable market linkages, pathways to formal employment or enterprise development, and consistent mentoring, the intervention risks falling short of its intended transformation.

7.3 READINESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

While the programme is already being implemented, its current design and institutional arrangements require **significant strengthening to support full-scale and sustainable roll-out.** The readiness for further implementation varies widely across provinces. Some provinces have foundational systems, leadership, and local buy-in in place. Others require urgent interventions in staffing, capacity building, local economic assessments, and coordination structures.

Furthermore, the programme lacks robust M&E systems and a clear implementation plan at the national level that can guide provinces consistently. Improving readiness will require both top-down leadership from DSD and bottom-up capacity development at provincial and municipal levels.

8. POLICY IMPLICATION SUMMARY

Based on the findings presented in the evaluation of the programme Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities, several policy implications emerge that are critical to strengthening South Africa's developmental response to poverty and unemployment. The evaluation underscores the urgent need for the Department of Social Development (DSD) to shift from fragmented, grant-based welfare approaches toward integrated, livelihood-oriented frameworks that prioritise economic inclusion, sustainability, and resilience. Although the current programme aligns well with national policy commitments such as the National Development Plan (NDP 2030), the Social Development Sector Framework, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), its operationalisation remains inconsistent and under-optimised due to institutional fragmentation, limited funding, and lack of interdepartmental coordination.

A key policy implication is the necessity to formally institutionalise a "graduation pathway" that assists social protection beneficiaries to break from the shackles of poverty by linking them to skills development, enterprise support, and asset transfers, and financial inclusion mechanisms. This implies that DSD policies must adopt a longer-term, developmental lens that recognises the multidimensional nature of poverty and supports a sequenced intervention model. The evaluation

highlights that the absence of such sequencing and the lack of benchmarks for graduation results in duplicated efforts and minimal long-term change. Moreover, the weak alignment of livelihood support programmes with existing economic strategies, such as those driven by the Department of Small Business Development, the Department of Agriculture, and provincial growth initiatives, dilutes potential impact. Therefore, a harmonised national policy approach is required, supported by shared indicators, joint funding mechanisms, and an integrated monitoring and evaluation framework.

The study further shows that without targeted policy mechanisms to improve institutional capacity particularly at provincial and municipal levels the potential for scale and sustainability remains limited. This includes policy adjustments to enable cross-sectoral budget allocations, incentivise local-level innovation, and embed participatory planning frameworks that engage beneficiaries as co-designers of interventions. Additionally, adopting digital tools and real-time M&E systems within national policy instruments can enable better tracking of outcomes, inform course corrections, and promote adaptive management across all spheres of government. Finally, given the demonstrated value of partnerships in enhancing programme delivery, there is a clear policy imperative to formalise collaboration models between government, civil society, and the private sector to leverage expertise, funding, and reach. As such, future policy revisions should include a deliberate mechanism for partnership governance, accountability, and knowledge sharing. In summary, the success of linking social protection beneficiaries to sustainable livelihoods hinges on bold policy choices that embrace systemic change, decentralised innovation, and long-term investment in institutional and human capability.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents structured recommendations based on the design evaluation of the program linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities. Each recommendation includes its policy implication, specific recommendation, responsible institution(s), and a suggested timeline for implementation.

9.1 IMPROVEMENTS TO PROGRAM DESIGN AND LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Policy Implication	Recommendation	Responsible Institution	Timeline
The current design lacks contextual flexibility and clear exit pathways	Revise the logical framework to include well-defined intermediate outcomes, province-specific outputs, and a structured beneficiary graduation model	DSD National, with Provincial DSD units and technical experts	6–12 months
The Theory of Change does not fully account for structural barriers	Update the Theory of Change to include assumptions about market access, social norms, and systemic inequalities (e.g., gender, disability, rural isolation)	DSD National Planning Directorate	3–6 months
Provincial planning inconsistencies undermine programme coherence	Develop standardised provincial implementation templates that allow contextual adaptation while ensuring alignment with national goals	DSD National in collaboration with the Planning and Monitoring Unit	6–9 months

9.2 ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Policy Implication	Recommendation	Responsible Institution	Timeline
Weak institutional capacity undermines programme delivery	Strengthen staffing through targeted recruitment and capacity building in livelihoods development, M&E, and enterprise development	DSD HR and Provincial Departments with support from National Treasury	6–18 months

Stakeholder fragmentation reduces implementation effectiveness	Establish interdepartmental coordination forums at provincial level (e.g., DSD, SEDA, DTIC, COGTA, and NGOs) with defined roles and shared objectives	DSD Provincial Directors, Premiers' Offices	3–6 months
Limited private sector engagement reduces market access	Formalise partnerships with business chambers, cooperatives, and buyers to link beneficiaries to markets	DSD Economic Inclusion Directorate and Department of Small Business Development	6–12 months

9.3 STRENGTHENING TARGETING, DELIVERY MECHANISMS, AND M&E

Policy Implication	**Recommendation**	**Responsible Institution**	**Timeline**
Vague targeting results in inclusion/exclusion errors	Develop a national beneficiary profiling and vulnerability assessment toolkit to standardise selection	DSD Social Policy and Information Units	6 months
Inconsistent quality of delivery across provinces	Establish a national training and certification framework for programme implementers (incl. mentorship models)	DSD Academy, SETAs, and Provincial Training Centres	9–12 months

9.4 POLICY AND OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Policy Implication	Recommendation	Responsible Institution	Timeline
The programme is not embedded in a long-term funding strategy	Advocate for multi-year funding allocations within the MTEF for livelihoods programming	DSD National Finance Unit and National Treasury	Budget cycle (0–12 months)
Youth, women, and people with disabilities remain underserved	Mainstream inclusive design by developing dedicated implementation models for youth, women-headed households, and persons with disabilities	DSD Gender, Youth & Disability Units with DBE, NYDA, and NGOs	6–12 months
National oversight lacks a framework for performance accountability	Create a national performance and accountability framework for provinces, tied to incentive mechanisms and peer review	DSD DG's Office with DPME and Premiers' Forums	9–15 months

9.5 ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A CLOUD-BASED M&E SYSTEM

Policy Implication	Recommendation	Responsible Institution	Timeline
Lack of implementation monitoring, fragmented and paper-based M&E systems hinder real-time tracking, adaptive learning, and national visibility of programme outcomes	Introduce and implement a digital M&E platform (cloud-based M&E system) that allows real-time data collection, dashboard visualisation, beneficiary tracking, and feedback integration across all provinces	DSD M&E Directorate in collaboration with SITA, DPME, and a technical cloud-service provider	Design and procurement: 0–6 months; Pilot rollout (3 provinces): 6–12 months; Full national scale-up: 12–24 months

9.6 ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GRADUATION MODEL

Policy Implication	Recommendation	Responsible Institution	Timeline
The current design of the Sustainable Livelihood Programme is fragmented and largely rooted in unsustainable, grant-based welfare approaches. This model falls short of aligning with integrated, livelihood-oriented frameworks that emphasize economic inclusion, long-term sustainability, and resilience for vulnerable populations.	It is recommended that the Department of Social Development (DSD) formally adopt the Graduation Model as the foundational approach for the Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities Programme building on the lessons from the GBL Pilot Programme	DSD M&E and Sustainable Livelihood Directorates in collaboration with SASSA, DPME.	Design and implementation: 6–36 months; Pilot rollout: (Build on the GBL Pilot Programme in the 3 provinces): 6–24 months; Full national scale-up: 12–36 months

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: RESULTS VALIDATION WORKSHOP PRESENTATION SLIDES

ANNEXURE B: FINAL SHORT REPORT

ANNEXURE C: KEY INFORMANT QUESTIONNAIRE

ANNEXURE D: BENEFICIARY QUESTIONNAIRE

ANNEXURE E: DATASETS